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Perception of the Forest as a “Green Bank” Evolved among Rural Population in the Test Zone of Dankou, Sénégal

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Abstract

Degradation of wooden resources is one of the major causes for desertification and its following increase in poverty among the rural population in Sénégal. The household energy project in Sénégal, carried out by the GTZ, aims at the conception and completion of sustainable management for domestic energy resources. Apart from providing alternative energy supplies this is achieved also by operating the 3500 ha forest test zone of Dankou in the province of Kaolack. This is executed in a participative manner together with the indigenous population of 16 villages in order to secure sustainability.

This study assessed the evolution of perception by the participating villagers over the past six years, including their judgement of both the sense and progress of the project, and their ideas, requirements, and visions for the short-term and long-term direction of the project. The method of an ethnographical analysis was applied to investigate the relationship between the rural population and the forest. The enquiry focused on key groups within the population: elderly, women, special knowledge carriers, and village representatives. The enquiry shows that initial scepticism turned once the first results of the participative cooperation started to emerge. After six years of forest management, enough naturally dead wood is extractable to satisfy the needs of the local population and beyond. Moreover, the participants witnessed additional long-term benefits of forest restoration, such as: an increase in the number of vitamin bearing fruits, medicinal plants, and animal life. The emerging products not only contribute crucially to the nutrition but are also capable of being commercialised within a system of micro-enterprises. Active contribution as well as resulting revenues enhance the population's perception of the forest as a “green bank”. The participant's expertise and knowledge is producing new ideas and visions that already did and further will influence future actions of the PSACD.

Keywords: Green bank, energy resources exploitation, ethnographical analysis, forest degradation, micro-enterprises, participative management, sustainable development