



Promoting **agroecology** and **eco-restoration** in the divisions of the South-Central River and North banks of The Gambia

Low agricultural productivity, environmental degradation, climate change and a general lack of cooperation weaken smallholder farmers and fuels a growing desire to migrate. However, due to high rates of illiteracy among rural populations, access to formal employment, typically concentrated in and around urban areas, is challenging. As a result, the majority of these populations are compelled to remain in rural areas and continue to engage in agriculture, despite the numerous challenges facing the sector.

General presentation of the project



General objective

To contribute to job creation and food security for women and youth through agroecology and resilience building, in order to mitigate the effects of irregular migration¹.



Specific objective

To strengthen the adaptive capacities of women and youth in sustainable agriculture and climate change through agroecology, resilience practices and eco-restoration.



Intervention strategy

This project builds on and scales up the previous Agroecology and Resilience project, implemented by ActionAid in The Gambia and Senegal, *"Agriculture for economic growth and food and nutrition security to mitigate migration flows"*. The project promotes climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture. It trains farmers in demonstration centres using the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach and peer-to-peer learning. Other initiatives focused on agroecology, food security, and eco-restoration are also promoted. The target groups are primarily women and young people. The project is based on a participatory disaster vulnerability assessment conducted at the community level by local stakeholders. The project adopts a multi-sectoral approach to improve knowledge sharing and collaboration at both community and national levels through the establishment of an agroecology and resilience working group.



Expected results

- R1. Resilience capacities of women and young people are strengthened through agroecology and eco-restoration.
- R2. Ecosystem improvement and environmental restoration are achieved through erosion control and agroforestry.
- R3. Improved learning material and knowledge sharing from practical experiences are disseminated through the production of case studies, media programs (radio and social networks) and farmer exchange visits.
- R4. Collaboration and networking of state and non-state actors in agroecology and eco-restoration are strengthened.



Partners

ActionAid – The Gambia and its Gambian partner, the Njawara Agricultural Training Centre.



Timescale

36 months (2018–2021).

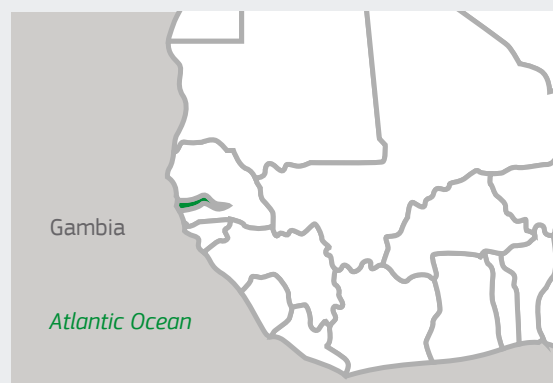


Budget

EUR 824,615 funded by the EU.

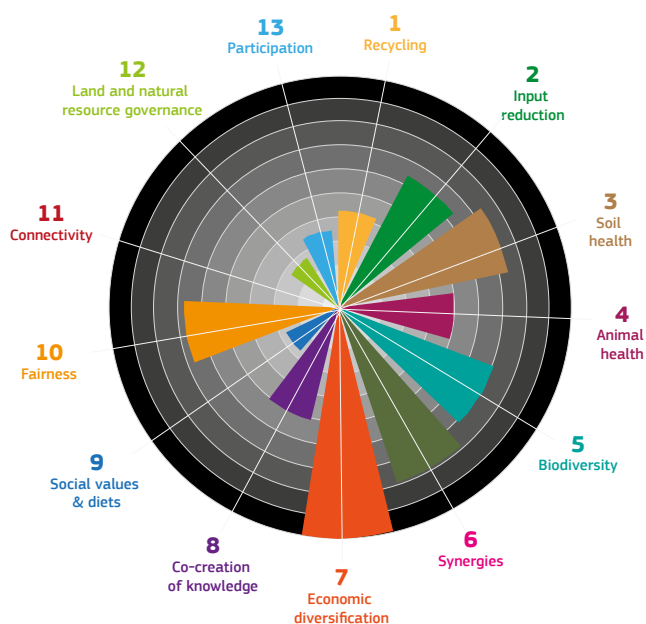


Intervention area



¹ Taken from the concept note for the 11th EDF, referenced: EuropeAid/156210/DD/ACT/GM and dated 15 January 2016.

Agroecological classification of the project according to the 13 principles of the HLPE



1 Recycling

The principle of recycling nutrients, biomass, and water at the farm level is not explicitly mentioned as a priority, but it is fully integrated into the spirit of the project. Promoting the use of manure and compost to improve soil fertility is an integral part of the training provided on sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. Efforts have been made to mitigate the effects of climate change at farm level and numerous capacity-building activities have been carried out in this regard. Although the promotion of bio fertilisers is not specifically mentioned, it fully aligns with the practices encouraged by the project. However, no information is available on the recycling of waste water, agricultural residues or wood waste.

2 Input reduction

The techniques of sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture are based on the principle of reducing chemicals in order to strengthen the autonomy of producers. The project promotes and distributes improved stoves to reduce wood consumption, encourages sustainable water management practices, and limits seed losses through the establishment of seed banks. Given the characteristics of the area concerned, the project documents do not specifically address the reduction of pesticide, synthetic fertiliser, or veterinary drugs. However, these guidelines are part of the main pillars of the approach to sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. The project apparently makes little commitment to waste reduction.

3 Soil health

The project partially addresses the principle of soil health by seeking to naturally regulate and maintain the balance of the ecological functions of soils. It clearly promotes reduced tillage practices, such as conservation ploughing and zero tillage, along with slash-and-mulch methods (as an alternative to slash-and-burn), which contribute to mitigating the effects of climate change at the farm level—one of the project's specific objectives. The project encourages water conservation techniques, erosion control, cover cropping, and organic farming. Numerous capacity-building activities have been deployed through the organisation of training sessions, and demonstration farms have been established. Moreover, the project promotes the establishment of orchards and community nurseries to support perennial crop production.

4 Animal health

The consideration of animal health and welfare is integrated into the project, particularly through techniques such as the construction of water points. These techniques are taught during training sessions and experienced in demonstration farms related to sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. However, the project does not explicitly focus on improving pollination nor does not specifically mention the promotion of pollinator domestication.



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5 Biodiversity

The project actively supports the strengthening of biodiversity, which is considered an essential component of sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. It promotes varietal seed diversity by encouraging the establishment of community seed banks and favouring the use of traditional seeds over hybrids. In addition, the project aims to preserve the diversity of indigenous livestock breeds. Moreover, the project aims to preserve the diversity of indigenous animal species. The planting of thousands of native tree species also contributes to diversifying production and increasing spatial crop diversity in the area. Additionally, mangrove restoration has improved the availability of fish and other aquatic foods. Training on sustainable forest management has promoted functional agro-biodiversity. Although the promotion of crop rotation systems and support for natural pollinators are consistent with the project's objectives, they are not specifically mentioned.

supported the planting of thousands of trees to contribute to carbon sequestration. In its eco-restoration component, the project offers training and implements measures aimed at strengthening the resilience of community agroecosystems in the face of extreme weather events, such as tree planting and the construction of dikes and gabions to combat soil erosion.

6 Synergies

The project integrates an approach that promotes the synergy of biological components to optimise ecosystem services both at the farm and landscape levels. Sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture encourages the use of compost and manure to improve soil fertility, thereby reducing dependence on chemical inputs while maintaining or increasing yields. It also promotes the diversification of cropping systems on the same plot, including agroforestry practices and other crop combinations. These techniques directly support the project's objective of supporting the adaptation of vulnerable farmers to climate change. In addition, the project has

7 Economic diversification

The project supports economic diversification by encouraging diversification of livelihoods. It promotes the establishment of cooperative savings and credit systems, as well as the provision of agricultural inputs. Technical training sessions are organised, covering a wide range of production systems such as cereal cultivation, market gardening, small ruminant husbandry, and poultry farming. This approach fosters diverse and integrated farming systems, thereby strengthening the resilience of community livelihoods.

8 Co-creation of knowledge

The project partially integrates the principle of co-creation by promoting knowledge sharing on the farm. In particular, it supports farmers' exchange visits in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, thus enabling a horizontal sharing of experiences for the effective adoption of practices related to sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. In addition, three demonstration farms have been established to facilitate the sharing of knowledge. Videos showcasing success stories have been produced and shared. Finally, the vulnerability analysis was conducted in a participatory and multi-stakeholder manner, with broad involvement of women producers.



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9 Social values & diets

The project places limited emphasis on social values and dietary diversity. Although awareness-raising sessions aim to strengthen the food and nutrition security of smallholder farmers, there is no clear focus on promoting diverse and culturally appropriate diets. It is possible that these outreach activities help to enhance local, nutritious, and diversified food systems, but this remains an assumption.

10 Fairness

The project is committed to promote fairness by prioritising its interventions with women and vulnerable youth, who are facing the degradation of living conditions in rural areas and the risk of irregular migration. Its objective is to strengthen their food self-sufficiency by implementing various actions such as skills enhancement, reducing dependence on chemical inputs and ecosystem restoration². In parallel, the project aims to increase their financial independence through job creation and facilitating access to credit. Moreover, it supports the strengthening of formal networks of women and youth and facilitates their collaboration with other civil society organisations. Training on sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture systematically integrates the concepts of gender equity and women's rights.

11 Connectivity

The project does not focus on the principle of connectivity related to the circular and solidarity economy. It does not seek to establish linkages between producers and consumers, nor to prioritise local markets and short supply chains. Instead, its main focus lies in the integration of good practices, production tools, and organisational systems that support sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. However, the project does not actively work to connect producers with other actors across the relevant value chains.

12 Land and natural resource governance

The project supports some mechanisms for responsible resource governance. To this end, it organised three policy forums, at both national and regional levels, focusing on climate change adaptation. These forums aimed to promote sustainable crop production and productivity, as well as the responsible management of natural resources. These initiatives may contribute to shaping future policy development in the sector.

13 Participation

The project is committed to participation by sharing knowledge gained through field experiences in support of policy development. Two regional and two national forums on agroecology were organised, accompanied by the scaling-up of agroecological practices at national level. Moreover, the project supported the establishment of a national platform bringing together state and non-state actors to encourage improved exchange and sharing of agroecological practices.

SUCCESS FACTORS/ CHALLENGES

- + The project promotes climate-resilient sustainable agriculture (CRSA), including through visits to demonstration farms, farmer-to-farmer exchanges and the dissemination of videos showcasing success stories. These actions enhance peer-to-peer learning and encourage the adoption of good practices.
- + Women and young people vulnerable to deteriorating rural living conditions and food insecurity were the main targets of the project. The objective was to strengthen their food self-sufficiency and economic autonomy, in order to restore equity and dignity within marginalised communities and improve their living conditions.
- The project places limited emphasis on value addition in agricultural production. Yet, this could have created employment opportunities, especially for young people not interested in farming, and increased wealth within the targeted communities.



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² According to 83% of respondents in the project's final evaluation (ActionAid, October 2021)