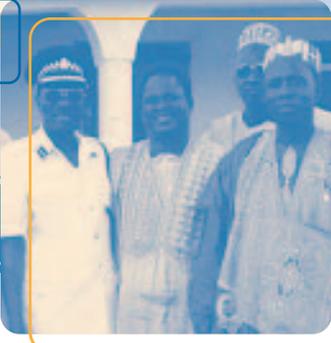


The Gambia

Community Engagement Through Environmental Awards



In 1994, The Gambia had an annual population growth rate of about 3.4 percent, one of the highest in the world. Increasing migration to the capital city, Banjul, exacerbated already serious environmental problems such as desertification, deforestation, soil erosion and degradation, mismanagement of solid waste, and groundwater pollution.

GreenCOM's work in The Gambia began in early 1994 with an environmental education needs assessment conducted under the auspices of USAID's Africa Bureau. Later that year, USAID and The Gambia's National Environment Agency (NEA) asked GreenCOM to collaborate with the NEA in designing and implementing an environmental awards program. The NEA had envisioned an awards program that would provide effective support for one section of its environmental action plan that called for increased environmental education and public awareness. Despite a coup d'état that forced the 1995 evacuation of GreenCOM personnel following the first round of awards, the second year of the awards program was successfully launched and sustained by local counterparts.



Environmental Awards Program

The five objectives for the awards program designed by GreenCOM and the NEA were:

- 1. Increase environmental awareness** among the public.
- 2. Promote and encourage public participation** in environmental activities.
- 3. Promote environment-friendly technology** for businesses.
- 4. Demonstrate government recognition** of individual and community efforts.
- 5. Reward individuals and groups** for taking positive environmental action.

The agency and GreenCOM believed that the program would have a greater chance of success if the steering committee were composed of representatives from a wide variety of governmental and nongovernmental organizations. The final committee consisted of officials from the NEA and six government ministries, representatives of two municipalities, a women's organization, a technical training institution, an NGO association, and the chamber of commerce.

The steering committee oversaw program administration at the macro level. Its tasks included choosing award categories and judging criteria, designing a promotional media campaign, and ultimately helping to select the national winners.

Micro-level administration was handled by task forces in each of The Gambia's five regional divisions. These bodies had autonomy over the awards program in their own region but coordinated with the national steering committee for the national program.

In addition to working with print and broadcast media to promote the awards program, the steering committee promoted the program through meetings with farmers, community groups, youth organizations, resource user groups, and teachers and school administrators. Those groups then spread information about the awards to their friends, families, and colleagues. The head of state officially launched The Gambia's environmental awards program at a meeting of the National Environment Management Council in the spring of 1994.

The divisional task forces followed a set of four criteria in assessing the projects entered by individuals and groups:

■ **Participation**

For a group, this meant the percentage of group members who participated in the project. Individuals were assessed for their level of commitment and motivation.

■ **Environmental Integrity**

Project implementation was required to demonstrate proper disposal of solid waste and recycling and reuse of materials when appropriate.

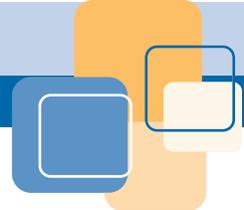
■ **Reach**

Projects were assessed on the size of area or population group they covered or the number of environmental issues they addressed.

■ **Sustainability**

Projects were judged on how likely they were to continue after the awards program ended.





Task force members selected a first place winner for each category and if there were enough quality projects, they also selected second and third place winners. The names of the top three overall winners for each division were submitted to the national steering committee, which evaluated the task forces' recommendations and chose three national winners.

Prizes, which were distributed at a ceremony attended by high-level government officials, awards program participants and administrators, and other interested citizens, consisted of tools or other equipment that would enable the winners to

continue their activities. Funds for the prizes were provided by USAID and the United Nations Development Program. Participation in the awards program was remarkably broad. More than 200 individual men and women and groups entered projects representing a diversity of ages, geographic location, and kind of organization.

Projects that won national awards were a school environmental management program started by a Muslim high school, a village that instituted a bush fire prevention system, and a women's group that implemented a village health project focused on proper waste disposal and cleanliness.



Results and Lessons Learned

Although a coup d'état prevented GreenCOM and USAID from providing further technical and financial assistance to The Gambia's environmental awards program, the NEA managed to secure funding for a second round of awards. The number of project entries for the second round increased by one-third and additional prizes were donated by Shell Oil Company. The steering committee also created a new award category for ecotourism to encourage environmental action by hotels and tourist organizations. The Gambia's environmental awards program became an annual event with prize ceremonies held each year on World Environment Day.



The success of the Gambian program resulted from a number of factors:

- Collaborative planning and implementation by the national steering committee and the divisional task forces
- Strong support from newspapers and radio broadcasters
- Involvement of NEA staff at all levels, from the director to receptionists
- Decentralized administration of regional awards by the divisional task forces
- Presentation of in-kind prizes rather than cash to ensure sustainability of the projects

In retrospect, GreenCOM and the NEA's work could have been improved with stronger regional capacity for printing program materials (to save time and money in distribution) and greater funding, especially for the divisional prize ceremonies.

Nevertheless, the Gambian awards program led to other positive results for national environmental management. First, the NEA used the promotional campaign strategies developed for the awards program in subsequent endeavors such as a media campaign on a new pesticide law that included interactive radio programs and community meetings. Second, the successful work carried out by divisional task forces persuaded the national government to begin new initiatives for decentralizing environmental management. Third, the awards program helped to build bridges between government ministries and grassroots organizations. And fourth, many of the awards program participants later requested help from extension workers to improve their projects, which meant that communities were identifying their own problems and seeking resources to solve them.

Selected Publications and Products

Allen, Irma. *The Gambia Environmental Awards Scheme: Creating Environmental Awareness Through Participation*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development (AED), 1997.

———. *The Gambia: Final Report*. Washington, DC: AED, 1995.

McDade, Keith. "Review of The Gambia Environmental Award Scheme: Creating Environmental Awareness Through Participation, 1994–2000." Academic paper, University of Michigan, 2004.



GreenCOM

GreenCOM is funded and managed by the USAID Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade Bureau; Natural Resources Management Office. Technical services for GreenCOM (Contract no. LAG-I-00-01-00005-00) are provided by the Academy for Educational Development in partnership with Chemonics International.