



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE OCEANS

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SESSION SIX: CROSS-SECTORAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Photo credit: Nick Hall

TRY Oyster Women's Association The Gambia

1) What is the focus of this project?

The vision of the TRY Oyster Women's Association is to promote self-reliance, coastal management and environmentally friendly livelihoods for local women. Its particular mission is to give a voice to one of the most marginalized groups in The Gambian society – female oyster harvesters – and to aid them in their quest towards achieving sustainable livelihoods.

TRY implemented the shellfish fishery management component of the Gambia-Senegal Sustainable Fisheries Project (USAID/BaNafaa) in The Gambia. The BaNafaa project engaged all of the 15 women's oyster harvesting communities that are members of TRY, including nine in the Tanbi Wetlands National Park, a RAMSAR site at the mouth of the Gambia River near Banjul, the capital: Wencho, Kamalo, Jeshwang, Ibo Town, Faji Kunda, Abuko, Lamin, Kerewan Darank, and Mandinary. The project also engaged communities in Kartong on the southern border of The Gambia in the Allahein River estuary shared with Senegal.

In 2009, TRY embarked on a participatory, eco-system-based co-management planning process for the sustainable management of the oyster and cockle fishery. The process resulted in a gazetted Oyster and Cockle Co-Management Plan for the Tanbi Wetlands National Park Special Management Area. Under this plan, TRY is granted exclusive use rights to the oyster and cockle fishery in this area. Four national government agencies are signatory to the plan along with TRY. This is the first time in Sub-Saharan Africa that a women's group has been awarded user rights in a fishery by a national government. The plan is based on developing the capacity of stakeholders, principally the women oyster harvesters, in a participatory manner, and addressing the socio-economic and environmental issues most important to them.

2) Which organizations and other partners are involved?

TRY Oyster Women's Association was founded in 2007 as a non-profit community based organization because, in spite of oysters being a delicacy in high demand in The Gambia, the socially and economically marginalized women who harvest oysters worked in isolation and were struggling harder and harder to make a living and provide for their families. In addition, the majority of them are the heads or primary breadwinners in their households. Since its founding, TRY has grown from a single community of 40 members to 15 communities of more than 500 members.

The BaNafaa project was funded by USAID/West Africa and managed by The University of Rhode Island, Coastal Resources Center, in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries of The Gambia. The WWF West Africa Marine Program was also a partner, and other collaborators included the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management, the Department of Forestry, and the National Environment Agency. TRY implemented the component of the project aimed at the capacity building of women shellfish harvesters.

3) What activities or tools have proven successful in building capacity?

TRY's strategy of meeting the multiple and integrated development needs of women oyster harvesters has been critical to its success. Fisheries livelihoods, alternative livelihoods, health, literacy, financial capacity, children's education and livelihood options, and public awareness and acknowledgement of the value of women oyster harvester's work and mangrove conservation were all taken into account. Ensuring the ownership of the fisheries management plan development process by the resource users (TRY women oyster harvesters) themselves was also essential. The engagement of both TRY and government at central and decentralized levels in the process created a climate of mutual trust, understanding and enthusiasm for the benefits of a rights-based, participatory approach.

TRY's capacity building approach is based on the following elements:

- Organization of isolated oyster harvesting communities and building trust and solidarity.
- Participatory action research, technical studies, exchange visits and training on shellfish management and value chain improvements with full involvement of oyster harvesters and stakeholders from government at all levels.
- Establishment of TRY Community Management Committees and their active participation.
- Institutional strengthening of TRY as an umbrella Association, including financial and administrative management capacity, business plan development, and establishment of an office/training center.
- Leadership training for TRY members and government agencies supporting TRY's efforts.
- Oyster festivals (public outreach and fundraising events covered widely by the media).
- Literacy and financial literacy training, and training in small business management, for TRY members and the establishment of a Micro-Credit savings and loan program.
- Hands-on training in alternative livelihoods, such as soap making.
- Health training and access to health services.
- Vocational and life skills training for the out-of-school daughters of TRY members.
- Positioning TRY communities as local leaders in environmental stewardship of mangrove wetlands through mangrove planting community events organized by TRY.

4) What challenges have been experienced, specifically related to maintaining a focus on capacity building and/or replicating the project in other areas?

Developing the capacity of both civil society and government stakeholder institutions charged with sustainably managing The Gambia's shellfish resources is a long term process. Securing sustained support for this initiative, especially for a fishery that is not a major revenue earner for the country, is a challenge in a least developed country with limited resources, and particularly for a small local civil society organization such as TRY. Regarding replication, this is facilitated by the fact that the legal basis for rights-based fisheries co-management is enshrined in The Gambia's revised Fisheries Act of 2007 and associated regulations. Not many developing countries have such an explicit legal framework for the ownership of resource management processes by resource users.

5) What are the next steps for the project?

Priority next steps include:

- Continue to implement the Co-Management Plan and replicate it in coastal communities outside the Tanbi Wetlands
- Replicate the integrated package developed by TRY in additional communities in The Gambia.

- Pursue a transboundary joint management plan in the Allahein River estuary shared by The Gambia and Senegal.
- Continue to develop oyster and cockle fishery value chain improvements and alternative livelihood opportunities by building the capacity of women and vulnerable girls in oyster harvesting communities.
- Replicate mangrove conservation and rehabilitation activities.

<https://www.facebook.com/TRYoysters/>



The Gambia



The Tanbi Wetlands National Park in The Gambia, a 6300 hectare Ramsar site.