



## Non-governmental organizations - Increasing NGO involvement in forestry: Some implications from Senegal

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### [LOCAL FARMER'S HOME GARDEN IN SENEGAL telling NGOs that trees are important](#)

**During the International Year of the Forest, 1985, FAO is making a special effort to encourage the participation of non-governmental organizations at the international, regional, national and local levels. This article demonstrates in specific terms how such organizations can play a significant role in forest activities during the Year - and well beyond.**

- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often emerge as a population's response to a lack of government goods and services. The ways an NGO operates within a given socio-economic setting are diverse, but in drought-stricken Africa many of their actions are currently motivated by one development imperative: relief from famine and achievement of food self-sufficiency.

This overriding concern has evolved in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa as an organic response to the drought and corresponding desertification. With an increasing population relying on a diminishing resource base, a number of indigenous groups are responding with anti-desertification activities. Preserving watersheds, enriching the soil, and restoring the tree cover are not entirely new areas for local NGOs in rural development programmes. In fact, reforestation, tree-planting and agroforestry techniques are increasingly perceived as part of their regular programming. However, many of the NGOs lack the technical know-how to participate in these forestry operations, which have traditionally been carried out within the jurisdiction of government forestry departments.

Government forestry departments have been moving closer to working with local groups by virtue of the community forestry projects that have been implemented in the last decade. The planting, tending and growing of trees, however, require an extended period that frequently does not coincide with the usual government plans and with already-instituted project management schemes. Owing to the increasing demands of forest management, local communities are being called upon to sustain many of these planting efforts. This explains why NGOs are working with communities to increase community wood-lots and forest farming activities.

In other words, NGOs and local groups could assist forestry extension agents in the task of reaching local communities, particularly in areas where government forestry projects are not being established. NGOs could do extension and training work, using innovative educational

techniques tailored to a community, by obtaining material and financial resources, often through independent channels. Moreover, NGOs are in a position to integrate forest management skills in their overall community development schemes and may focus on forest operations as they relate to village or home gardening, well construction and literacy programmes. NGOs are capable of forging these links because of the flexibility that enables them to work within communities - a flexibility often lacking in governments.

To test the potential of NGOs, a pilot programme was developed in Senegal. Through a government and NGO consultation on the NGO role in forestry development, there was clear evidence in favour of future project collaboration. In the process of discussing the course of action to be taken in the future, the range of NGO activities was profiled. Attention was also given to the relationship between these activities and food self-sufficiency, given the scale of the present African crisis.

## The Senegal consultation

From 20 to 27 February 1985, a meeting on NGO involvement in reforestation activities took place in Dakar, Senegal, organized by a national Senegalese NGO umbrella organization known as CONGAD (Conseil des organisations non gouvernementales d'appui au développement). Thirty-eight NGO representatives from Senegal and representatives of NGOs in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania and the Niger met for an active week of site visits, workshops and meetings.

The consultation was significantly timed. In 1984, the Government of Senegal, through the Minister of Nature Protection and the Water and Forests Service, had launched a programme of desertification control unparalleled in Senegal's history. In the context of worldwide desertification, and specifically of that in the eight critically affected countries of the Sahel, the Government saw its mandate as being to enlarge the national forestry programmes of the last decade so as to include increased institution-strengthening - particularly in the area of community-based participation in forestry.

This important initiative on the part of the Government had evolved over the last seven years in response to the massive devastation caused by drought. Such community forestry projects as Project Precoba, developed in the groundnut basin, are good examples of the Government's efforts to involve local communities in its programmes and to ensure the growth and protection of trees by providing local people with the right incentive schemes. Through "food for work" programmes, 20 rural communities are involved in soil preparation and planting operations.

These community-based projects within the national forestry programme seem to be having a significant impact, even though they are not sufficient in scale to assist the Government in reaching its planting targets. In 1983, for example, 5100 ha of trees were planted by popular efforts, as against the 4700 ha planted by the Government. Nevertheless, this is far from meeting the needs produced by population increases and national fuelwood demands which, the state has estimated, require a level of 50000 ha annually (Direction des eaux, forêts et chasses, 1984).

As a partial response to the difficulties, Senegal's Minister of the Environment hosted a major African anti-desertification conference in July 1984. Taking the lead on new strategies, the Government of Senegal featured the importance of local participation in an overall anti-desertification campaign and drew attention to the role of the non-governmental community in this effort (Government of Senegal, 1984).

This event set the stage for the NGO consultation on reforestation, held in Senegal in February 1985. Perceiving the timeliness of calling an NGO consultation, UNDP undertook an

assessment of the NGOs in Senegal at the same time as the anti-desertification meeting took place. It was concluded that a substantial number of NGOs either had the potential to be or were already involved in forestry activities (UN/NGLS Tree Project, 1985).

However, yet another factor made this consultation possible. Before 1981, many of the NGOs that existed in Senegal were locally based groups, responding to immediate and local needs. Although the Fédération des organisations non gouvernementales du Sénégal (FONGS) was at that time coordinating information among many of the rural groups, it was by nature very decentralized. Many of the NGOs - including those that came into existence in the early 1980s- started to collaborate and constituted themselves into a national "networking" group - CONGAD. As a national umbrella group consisting of 33 development NGOs, CONGAD had the mandate to improve links between its group members and between the different government agencies and other external NGOs. Being a loose federation of local and external NGOs working in Senegal, CONGAD could organize meetings to encourage information-sharing but was not itself involved in any field-level programming.

CONGAD was therefore in a position to perform the function of assembling its membership and the necessary government representatives at a consultation, and, more importantly, it could assist in establishing a national NGO forestry committee, given a mandate from its members.

Although many of CONGAD's members had been involved in forestry activities, the demands of establishing a national forestry committee needed some kind of precedent. To assist CONGAD, a Kenyan energy group known as KENGO (Kenya Energy NGOs) sent four anglophone representatives to the consultation to act in the capacity of resource persons. KENGO was established in 1981 to perform the task of providing material and technical assistance to its group members and to coordinate information and training programmes on agroforestry practices and energy conservation techniques.

## [INVESTIGATING ARID CONDITIONS local youth groups try to help](#)

### Results

The consultation in Senegal reached a consensus on the objectives of the consultation process as being to encourage more NGO coordination on forestry activities; more NGO/Government collaboration on reforestation programmes; more forestry activities at the field level; more donor support for NGO activities; and more interregional exchange among NGOs. Once agreed on by the participating NGOs and agencies, the consultation process could be institutionalized by a follow-up committee of NGOs and agency personnel.

The meeting was designed to elicit specific recommendations from the participants, so that the follow-up committee could draft specific project proposals and submit them to donor agencies. To ensure the interest of the donors in more NGO projects in the area of forestry, those donors not present for the entire meeting met with the participants on the final day for informal discussions.

Owing to the limited time available to formulate specific and manageable recommendations, the consultation had to be highly structured. Each participant was provided with the opportunity to evaluate forestry projects through organized field trips to reforestation projects. Five sites in the more arid Sahelian zone of the Senegal river basin and five in the southern central groundnut basin were assessed. After carefully recording site-specific profiles, the participants returned to Dakar for three days of intensive workshops. Two more rounds of workshops followed: the first focusing on how NGOs could most effectively assist with reforestation at the village level, and the second on how NGO projects and project support could be increased.

## COMMUNITY WOOD-LOT, PROJECT PRECOBA encouraged by the Senegalese Government

Some of the technical issues raised both in the field and at the workshops were as follows:

- the advantages of growing eucalyptus trees as against growing indigenous species;
- the problems of seed and water availability;
- the need for improved agroforestry techniques like the increased use of multi-purpose-species trees.

Equal attention was given to a variety of social problems in the field:

- the lack of literacy programmes in areas where technical assistance was being given;
- the absence of training in local languages for groups undertaking much of the gardening, planting and cooking-principally women's and youth groups;
- the failure of forestry projects to respond to the traditional agroforestry systems of pastoralists and sedentary farmers.

After identifying some of the problems, the workshop participants explored recommendations for concrete NGO action. Controversy frequently surfaced on the methods and approach. For example, on the question of compensating people for planting trees either directly or through food aid, some expressed the view that this was limiting and expendable while others saw it as a necessary incentive scheme for mobilizing rural participation, particularly among marginal farmers.

Other areas of considerable disagreement were whether grassroots efforts can begin only with the people themselves or whether outside NGOs can effectively enter a community to motivate the people to plant trees. This provoked a number of questions on the best kind of training techniques.

Another issue leading to considerable debate was whether training and education should focus on a sector of the community like women's groups or on the community as a whole. There was also discussion on women being trained as extension agents in the context of women's rights: for example, economic rights - the difficulty women have in getting the necessary financing to start a local nursery and consequently to learn some land management practices; or legal rights - the problems of starting a reforestation programme when land-tenure systems are determined by village councils, largely composed of men.

However, in spite of differences on methods, there was a consensus that NGO training must digress from the traditional project format if the training does not incorporate the needs of the beneficiaries in its design and if it does not lead to the achievement of fuelwood and food self-sufficiency. This view was held unanimously by the group and was evident from the outset.

The participants felt that to undertake more forestry projects, it was necessary to have a systematic method for cataloguing existing and successful projects. An institutionalized network of NGOs therefore needed to be established. A permanent network would link groups from rural areas with NGOs and government technicians capable of offering training or extension programmes.

Particularly instrumental in these discussions on information coordination and networking was the participation of KENGO and the Groupement des aides privées (GAP) from the Niger. Both

organizations have considerable experience of mediating between governments and NGOs. KENGO has worked with the Kenyan Ministry of Energy to carry out extension for the Government in local communities, while GAP was the consultative mechanism between the Niger Government and the private voluntary community at large.

Recommendations One of the most significant outcomes of the consultation was the success of the NGOs in identifying the range of NGO activities in the area of forestry, both within Senegal and in other parts of Africa. Bearing in mind their own limitations, they were able to set forth four manageable recommendations:

- the formation of a follow-up committee which can continue to consult with the various government departments;
- the development of a pilot project to encourage working relationships with the Government on the ground;
- the review of a training programme which will better link resource groups with local groups in a specific region of Senegal;
- the design of more exchanges between NGO African experts.

Besides being a first meeting between Government donors and NGOs in Senegal, this was a unique opportunity to observe, synthesize and recommend new alternatives in reforestation as it relates to community development. NGOs, which generally support self-reliance and food self-sufficiency, have a perspective on sustainable development and land-use management which will undoubtedly become manifest in tree-planting schemes, achieving a long-term impact on national forestry programmes in the future.

It is absolutely necessary, however, that the forest service respond to the momentum that has been created. The NGO follow-up forestry committee can continue consultations with the Government, but unless the forest service responds to their proposals with technical input, the consultations will be bottle-necked. It has become evident through this first consultation that the lack of technical know-how and project management is a serious limitation on the potential of many NGOs. Their own recognition of these shortcomings is a first step in the right direction.

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