

The Gambia All Schools Tree Nursery Competition: Promoting Conservation in The Gambia Through Grassroots Environmental Education

Paulete, Francisca
The Gambia 2003-2005
Michigan Technological University – Forestry

Awareness of the problem of deforestation and what people can do to combat it is low in The Gambia. As recently as the mid-1940s measurements show that the country's forest cover was as high as 81%. Today only about 41.6% (4710 sq.km.) of The Gambia is forested. The forest cover continues to be reduced by overpopulation through cultivation, heavy grazing and fires.

This report documents and analyzes the Gambia All Schools Tree Nursery Competition, a practical environmental education program used to counter environmental problems in The Gambia. Seventy-five schools in two of The Gambia's six districts developed forest nurseries under the guidance of the Department of Forestry, the Regional Education Directorate, and Peace Corps/The Gambia. It analyzes the methods taken in implementing grassroots environmental education in The Gambia and discusses improvements and changes to the methods implemented.

The competition was originally designed in the 2003 – 2004 school year by Peace Corps Volunteers with cooperation from the Department of Forestry and Regional Education Directorate in the Upper River Division. The project was designed to have all schools compete against all other schools in the division to construct and maintain the best tree nursery. Schools were given only a manual (produced by Peace Corps Volunteers) to begin and complete the project. The project was expanded in the 2004 – 2005 school year to include the Central River Division.

Data for this report was collected during the evaluation trek for the competition using a rapid appraisal approach. The data were then broken into four groups of information: physical aspects (shade, fencing, proximity to water source, use of natural viipesticides, use of fertilizer, number of species), school demographics (grade levels, location, size), types of outside help (workshop, Peace Corps Volunteer or forester assistance), and outcomes (health, survival).

The more technical elements of the competition (shade, fencing, proximity to water source, pesticides, fertilizers, number of species, and the regular and weighted sums) are significant to health and survival of the nursery. Quite obviously, if these elements fail, the trees will fail to grow; a nursery cannot grow if these elements are absent.

However, the extent to which they work or the motivation behind them getting done are heavily reliant on stakeholder support on both the large project level and on the smaller individual school level. Both levels can be seen in this project. There was greater participation on the project level in the Central River Division, where stakeholders took a more active role. Schools with strong support of the communities and teachers produced bigger and better nurseries.