

Programme Area Summary

Country: The Gambia

Programme Area: Sustainable Rural Livelihoods 2004 - 2009

What is the aim of the programme area?

To ensure that disadvantaged people in rural communities in The Gambia will gain more income or food security from their current activities.

Why is VSO working in this particular programme area and region?

VSO The Gambia (VSO TG) started working with grassroots organisations in 1998. Since then it has learned that there is a need to work closely with viable partners who have good track records and are committed to addressing the needs of disadvantaged people in rural communities. Learning from previous development undertakings has shown that in order to have an impact on the lives of women, the elderly, youths and the disabled, it is important to build the capacity of local non-governmental and community based organisations (NGOs and CBOs) so that they will be equipped to offer effective and efficient services to these communities.

VSO TG is not currently well placed to work independently at the community level, hence it will work in any geographical area where it can identify viable local partners who have needs that VSO is able to support.

Key beneficiaries and partners

Disadvantaged people in the context of the Gambia are women, the elderly, youths and disabled. Women form the majority of those that are not literate – who do not have access to land and are traditionally stereotyped as “second best”. The elderly tend to be neglected by projects and programmes whilst rural youths are disadvantaged when compared to urban youths. There are few higher learning institutions or job opportunities that result in high rural-to-urban drift. People with disabilities are not seen as productive members of their communities.

Almost all the partners identified by VSO TG are already working towards addressing food security and income generation. This fits in well with VSO’s global livelihoods framework.

Partnership agreements have been developed with the organisations listed below.

- Agency for Development of Women and Children (*ADWAC*), a local NGO in the North Bank Division, works with communities to increase food security and environmental conservation
- Wuli and Sandu Development Agency (*WASDA*), a community-based organisation in the Upper River Division, promotes women’s use of appropriate farm implements that have been traditionally used by men
- *Village Aid The Gambia*, now called Agency for Village Support (*AVISU*), an NGO working with communities on environment & natural resource management, institutional capacity building, literacy, enterprise development and credit
- National Women Farmers Association (*NAWFA*) is the apex body of 74 sesame growers associations (*SGAs*) throughout the country.
- Njawara Agricultural Training Centre (*NATC*), an NGO established by the Njawara community (North Bank Region) for the purpose of training farmers in sustainable agro-forestry techniques to improve farm production and profitability while promoting sustainable natural resource management

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- Juffureh / Albreda Youth Society (*JAYS*) works with communities in the areas of agriculture, eco-tourism, health, income generation, skill development, natural resource and the environment
- Youth Action For Self Sufficiency and Education (*YAFSSE*) works with youths and women to achieve food security by promoting you and women leadership and participation, networking, alliance building in order to achieve self reliance.
- Organisation for Participatory Learning and Action (*OPLA*), a community based organisation based on the North Bank Region working to facilitate learning, sharing and continuing evolution of REFLECT (Re-generated Freirian Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) practice in The Gambia
- *FORUT*, a local NGO also based on the North Bank Region, working with communities on issues of food security especially focusing on agricultural and environmental protection activities

Key objectives of the programme and the crosscutting themes

1. Agriculture and natural resources management: to improve the organisational and management capacity of partners to function effectively and provide support to their affiliated groups to increase food production through the promotion of appropriate, sustainable farming and processing techniques and technology
2. Small business enterprises: to work with partners to empower disadvantaged groups through skills development, capacity building and diversification of skills
3. Markets: to improve the technical capacity of partners to support farmer groups and small businesses to penetrate the market place and to meet the demand of these markets

There are programmatic working links between this Programme Area Plan and the two other programmes. For instance, the Education programme also works in rural areas, particularly in the Central River Division. The Disability programme is keen to enable the disabled Peoples Organisations to strengthen their rural networks, which can be done via locally operating CBOs.

Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

Potential skills that are needed include:

- organisational capacity builders with project management skills;
- management advisors;
- enterprise development advisors;
- marketing advisors;
- fundraising/donor relations advisors;
- agricultural engineers;
- general agriculturists.

Workshops, training and conferences

Activities have been very limited to partnership development workshops, reviews and quarterly meetings with volunteers. The Programme Area Review process has started and one of the key outcomes will be to revise the PAP in order to outline our activities and strategies, which are not very well captured in the current PAP.

Support to national volunteering

This is an area that VSO TG as a PO is interested in exploring.

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Research

Research done so far has been in the area of partner identification and review of implementation.

Partner exchange visits/study tours

Funding for study tours, exchanges, will be needed for most placements, partners and volunteers. These will be outlined in the revised PAP.

Providing grants and / or equipment for partners

Potential funders in The Gambia include the US Embassy, DfID, EC and ActionAid. Many of the organisations working at the grassroots level lack adequate funding. VSO Gambia will work with partner organisations to seek funding for the overall PAP as well as for small projects.

Other partnership activities

As highlighted above these will be incorporated in the revised PAP.

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

VSO TG's work in this programme area has positively contributed to the lives of people in rural communities. The volunteers bring added value to the work that its partners are already involved in. The bulk of work in the past two years has been within the framework of an EC-funded project. The programme office still has to gain more experience to replicate a lot of the good work it has done with other partners.