

REPORT ON THE

FINAL EVALUATION

OF FORUT-GAMBIA

EVALUATION TEAM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FORUT-Gambia was a subsidiary of FORUT-Norway in The Gambia since 1990. Its operational area is in the North Bank Division (NBD) of the country managed by a head office in Bakau and decentralized field office in Kerewan, the administrative headquarters of the division. FORUT-Gambia had five programming areas namely: Environmental protection/Agriculture, Health and Sanitation, Local resource mobilization, Institutional Capacity Building and Support to IOGT. It's Mission Statement is *“Participate in improving the conditions of the poor in the project area, make them aware of their rights and responsibilities, and promote solidarity and Temperance and participatory development for self-reliance and sustainability with emphasis on women and children”*.

This final evaluation was commissioned by FORUT-Norway to assess its partnership with FORUT-Gambia as a way of documenting lessons learnt on its development approach, methodology, capacity and competence for wider organizational learning.

The evaluation was very participatory that involved the staff, communities and other partners. The following are the key findings and recommendations:

Findings:

- The number of trained, qualified and experience staff did not correspond with the complex management required for an evolving organization such as FORUT-Gambia. Among the staff there were more “Doers” than “Thinkers”
- Some of the programmes were either small in scope or lack the necessary technical support for them to make any meaningful positive impact in some of the communities These has been observed in projects like the communal woodlots, the sheep fattening projects and the support to the village fishing projects. All these projects were too small to bring about any significant change in the lives of the people. For instance in Darusalam there was little evidence to show that the Village Development Committee (VDC) is functional and meeting its mandate in-terms of coordinating and supporting village development initiatives. This is also true of the Balingho Fishing project where the storage facility built by FORUT-Gambia for the fishmongers was being misunderstood by the community to be a fish processing plant.. This clarification was only made during the evaluation after the community had waited for a long time expecting FORUT-Gambia to deliver the outstanding cooling equipment in order to make the plant operational. Little or no evidences on the ground to indicate that the projects supported were integrated. In communities where there were more than one project being supported, the linkages between those projects and how they could contribute to improving the general well-being of the community were not well understood by the people. A typical example was

in Tambana where four projects (woodlot, health post, VISACA and Salt mining) existed almost as stand alone projects . If these projects were properly integrated, the profits of the VISACA project would have been used to support the operations of the health post when the Ministry did not continue supporting the health program. The management of the consumer shops did not benefit from the adult literacy classes for enhanced record keeping nor the record keeping skills used in the running of the VISACAs was used by the women when it comes to sheep fattening project managed by the same women.

- FORUT-Gambia has had impressive achievements in building the capacity of local people to actively participate in the implementation and management of the programmes.
- The most outstanding achievement made by FORUT-Gambia has been the support for the establishment and management of Village Savings and Credit Associations (VISACAs) with the object of increasing income levels of communities to improve their standard of living. This project has been the most successful.
- The participation of women had been very high and remarkable. This undoubtedly contributed towards the promotion of the agency of women by strengthening their confidence and know-how to be more assertive as leaders in communities where traditionally the males have dominant roles.
- There was little evidence on the ground apart from the nursery school in Dobo and the training of school children in nursery management of projects designed deliberately to target children.
- One of the limiting factors for registering greater impact had to do with the wide geographical coverage that resulted to overstretching FORUT-Gambia both in terms of personnel and financial resources.
- There had been close collaboration with and hiring of the services of personnel of existing Government line departments with which Memoranda of Understanding were signed. This helped FORUT-Gambia to be able to link up its activities with the Government's development policy priority areas in the region..
- The challenge that faced FORUT-Gambia and FORUT-Norway with regards to the localization strategy was the inadequate understanding of the modalities of this strategy especially by FORUT-Gambia.
- FORUT-Norway had provided remarkable support to the organization both financially and technically. FORUT-Norway up to 2004 has been the sole funder of FORUT-Gambia providing guaranteed funding for both administrative and programme activities.
- The strained relationship between FORUT-Gambia and IOGT had resulted to a total halt of IOGT activities in the Kerewan area.
- The annual audit reports did not indicate any adverse findings of financial impropriety since the changes were made in 1998 particularly in the leadership of the Finance Department.

- **Recommendations**

- ✚ That FORUT-Norway considers the development of a phase-out strategy that is gradual in nature and less painful for both the affected partner organization and communities.
- ✚ That FORUT-Norway's excellent Policy Document, which articulates its mission, principles and core values to govern its partnership with organizations, in the fight against poverty, should form the basis for assessment and strengthening of the partnership.
- ✚ That FORUT-Norway from the start of its partnership should encourage partner organizations to develop the appropriate skills and knowledge to tap diversified funding sources.
- ✚ The relationship between IOGT as a temperance movement with separate staff and operations from the main partner organization should always be defined clarifying lines of authority and communications to avoid any uneasy relationship between the two as was the experience between IOGT and FORUT-Gambia. FORUT-Norway should encourage if not insist that the two organizations have in place clear lines of authority and communications within the framework of a partnership, which enhances the pursuit of making positive changes in the lives of the communities. The more the two organizations work together the more they would scale-up the impact of their work in making a difference for the better in the communities
- ✚ FORUT-Norway in future should guide partner organizations to map out accessible and manageable areas of operation for greater programming impact.
- ✚ FORUT-Norway should always insist with their funding support that the partner organization should hire the right competencies at all levels of the organization. The right balance between the "Doers and the Thinkers" must exist for improved and innovative programming. The interpretation and implementation, of the rich FORUT-Norway policy document, could only be done by a competent staff.
- ✚ FORUT-Norway should continue to encourage and promote women and children's active participation as agents of change as part of their global core value for all partner organizations they fund.
- ✚ FORUT-Norway as a global organization should consider making contingency plans for phased out funding for partner organizations in countries where NORAD stops its funding obligations. This is to avoid the abrupt discontinuation of funding as done with FORUT-Gambia.
- ✚ FORUT-Norway should develop clear mechanisms to support partner organizations' do "sustainability audit" of all development programmes they implement with the communities.
- ✚ The focus on mobilizing local resources as a guiding principle should be promoted by FORUT-Norway for all partner communities as a strategy to strengthen the sense of ownership, a prerequisite for sustainable development.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

FORUT-Gambia's main operational area has been in the North Bank Division (NBD) of The Gambia that lies on the northwest bordering Senegal to the north and River Gambia on the south. The current population of the NBD is estimated at 211, 000 (Housing Census projected figure for 2003).

The NBD is ranked as the least developed division of the country. The 2000 National Human Development Report (NHDR) has placed life expectancy at birth to 43.3 years. Infant mortality rate as at 1993 was at 85 per 1000 and an adult literacy rate of 15%. The combined educational enrolment ratio of the NBD is 37%.

Groundnuts cultivation remains to be the main source of income of the area. An increase in population coupled with traditional cultivation methods for groundnuts have in the last 20-30 years contributed to deforestation, and made the cultivated land more exposed to drought and lowered the water table. The low water table made it more expensive and difficult to access safe and reliable water supply in the villages. The main challenge in this area is its fragile eco-system and its degrading environment, which do not support crop production using the traditional agricultural practices, and these provide few opportunities for increased income for the farm families. Food scarcity is a chronic problem.

Until the construction of the Farafenni main hospital recently, this Division had no major health centers leaving the people to suffer from preventable health diseases. Malaria continues to be the number one killer disease especially for the children under five years of age

1.2 Methodology

The process was done in two stages involving Literature Review and Fieldwork.

1.2.1 Literature Review:

This took the form of studying files that include reports, Forut-Norway's Policy Document, strategic plans, mission statement, trek reports, annual budgets (Variance reports), review reports and Management meeting reports. This was done under the leadership of the Team Leader with two evaluators who have a good understanding of the local context and deep insight into the NGO development arena in the Gambia.

1.2.2 Field Work:

This was done using participatory tools that informally encouraged dialogue between the evaluators and the partner communities. This made the people to narrate their success stories. A simple framework of what went well, what did not go well and what could have been done differently for greater impact was part of the evaluation tools. Testimonies of people were documented as the basis of the changes experienced according to the perspective of the partner communities. A sample of 13 partner communities out of the 24 partner villages was visited as part of the fieldwork. A sample of former FORUT-Gambia staff members was interviewed to document and analyze staff perspective. The two FORUT – Gambia staff who participated in the field study helped to set the stage for the evaluators.

Visits to NGOs and Government departments in the North Bank Division were carried out to document and analyze the working relationship they had with FORUT Gambia.

1.3 Reporting:

An outline of a report was developed and shared as the basis for writing the draft report. A key section of this report captured Lessons learnt that were deduced from the key findings of the evaluation giving concrete examples where feasible. The draft Report was shared for comments with FORUT-Norway. The Final Report was edited by the Team Leader and submitted to FORUT-Norway.

1.4 Terms of Reference

1.4.1 Introduction:

Official funding of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) through FORUT-Norway to FORUT-Gambia, which began in 1989 to embark on community development projects in the North Bank Division was phased out in 2004. Its main development partner being FORUT-Norway finalized all its formal obligations for all activities and to staff of FORUT-Gambia on July 1st 2004. This final external evaluation is part of the requirements of (NORAD) as the main funder of the local community development project to document lessons learned from 1997-2004.

1.4.2 Evaluation Objectives:

The experience of FORUT-Gambia and the partner communities documented and analyzed to bring out critical lessons learnt for wider organizational learning in FORUT-Norway to inform its development approach, methodology, capacity and competence.

The main Terms of Reference of this evaluation are as follows:

1. Critically analyze the development approaches, systems and procedures used during the period and establish how these reflected the mission of FORUT Gambia as a local community development project.
2. Assess the organizational structure and systems and how these supported the work done by FORUT-Gambia.
3. Document the level of support (material, financial, technical and moral support) provided by FORUT Norway to determine the extent to which FORUT Gambia was assisted as an organization to achieve its mission.
4. Document and analyze the perspective of the partner communities to establish the kind of changes experienced through their partnership with FORUT-Gambia.
5. Assess the impact of FORUT-Gambia's supported projects on the situation of women in the partner communities by doing a gender audit of the supported community development projects.
6. Document and analyze the strategic choices made by FORUT-Gambia and how such choices have contributed to the sustainability or otherwise of the projects supported in the communities.
7. Document the lessons learnt that are critical to the success or limitation of its work with the partner communities.

1.5 Scope of Study

This study covers the period 1997 to 2004. A sample of 13 villages/communities out of a total of twenty –four (24) villages/communities where FORUT-Gambia has a presence in was randomly selected where the evaluation team visited and spoke to beneficiaries during the five days fieldwork.

The study also looked at the level of impact of FORUT-Gambia's intervention in the lives of the communities, the lessons learnt and the level of sustainability of the intervention activities as outlined by the above-stated Terms of Reference.

1.6 Limitations

One of the limitations encountered during this evaluation process had to do with a psychological issue that confronted the evaluation team as regards to the abrupt withdrawal of funding of FORUT-Norway to FORUT-Gambia. In all the communities

visited there was evidence and a sign of depression among the people on the sudden discontinued funding of FORUT-Gambia that has limited them from continuing the implementation of on-going and planned activities. The evaluation team had to carefully manage the discussions in the villages so as not to create the impression that funding possibilities are around the corner from FORUT Norway.

CHAPTER TWO: FINDINGS

2.1 Programmes:

Since 1997 FORUT-Gambia has organized its programming activities around the following: Environmental and Natural Resources Management, Local resource mobilization, Health and Sanitation, Local Institutional Capacity building, Support to IOGT-Gambia. These programmes have been designed to address the poverty in the communities in this region with special focus on the rapidly degrading environment. In view of the level of poverty in these communities, these programmes have been found to be very relevant in addressing the poor conditions of life in the communities.

The greatest challenge however that faced FORUT-Gambia in the implementation of these programmes was the limited capacity of the staff to effectively manage an evolving organization for efficient execution of the above-mentioned programmes. The right balance between “Doers” and “Thinkers” among the staff did not exist to bring about quality and innovative programming as the organization intervened in a dynamic changing operating environment like the North bank Division. It is the opinion of the evaluators that the quality of leadership and staff of FORUT-Gambia were not qualified enough to interpret and implement professionally the development policy of FORUT-Norway.

The evaluation team found that most of the programmes were either small in scope or lack the necessary technical support for them to make any meaningful positive impact in the lives of the communities. This has been articulated in one of the communities when after ten years of partnership with FORUT-Gambia they found the woodlot project very useful but very small in scope to have made a significant change in their environment as expected. Also the health programme suffered a similar fate, as most of the support given which in most cases has been the construction of health infrastructure, which did not effectively address their health needs as planned because of the lack of essential drugs and personnel. While FORUT-Gambia’s claim of doing their part of the agreement with the Ministry of Health, which is expected to provide the personnel and drugs, is plausible, the usual inability of the Ministry to honour their obligation in these communities had only dirtied the good intention of bringing health to the people by FORUT-Gambia. The

ram fattening and the fishmongers' projects were also too small to make a difference. The salt mining project in Tambana ran early into difficulties and did not meet its objectives according to the villagers. This project was well conceived as a felt need of the community, but did not succeed as expected due to the kind of inappropriate technical support which ignored local knowledge. It must however be said that FORUT-Gambia did recognize the shortcomings of the salt mining projects in both Tambana, Karantaba and the Jinnack areas thus leading to the preparation of these communities to take over the projects as part of the recommendations of the 1998 evaluation. Unfortunately the communities could not continue with these projects, as they did not have the needed resources and technical know-how thus all the salt mining projects have been abandoned. There was little evidence on the ground to show that projects implemented were integrated at the community level. The approach adopted by FORUT –Gambia has been more of input delivery rather than being impact oriented. This approach was possible because there was no well-developed consistent development model followed by FORUT –Gambia.

However, FORUT-Gambia has had impressive achievements in building the capacity of local people to actively participate in the implementation and management of the programmes. Institutional capacity building as a crosscutting strategy has been used in various ways ranging from training to networking of management committees responsible for the various programmes at community level. This has been part of the solid foundation laid down by the organization in preparing the communities to own and lead the development process. The success registered by FORUT-Gambia in supporting the establishment of the Saama Mirah Kafo as a solidarity group with a focus on the environment is highly commendable. This group draws membership from the border villages of Lower and Central Baddibu in The Gambia and the villages on the other side of northern Senegal. Some of the key activities of members of this group continued to be in the area of environmental protection such as the fight against bush fires, deforestation and environmental regeneration in the form of woodlots and vegetable gardens. With this group FORUT-Gambia adopted a new strategy of supporting individual woodlots as opposed to the communal woodlots. This group has contributed immensely towards strengthening the understanding and peaceful co-existence between the peoples living on both sides of the border. However, the inability of FORUT-Gambia to continue support to this group due to lack of funds had impacted negatively on the functionality of the group as some of the activities planned would not be implemented.

The most outstanding achievement made by FORUT-Gambia has been the support for the establishments and management of Village Savings and Credit Associations (VISACAs) with the object of increasing income levels of communities to improve their standard of living. From 2000 to date, FORUT-Gambia has supported the establishment of a total of eight VISACAs, the last five being funded by the Rural Finance and Community Initiative Project (RFCIP) with an estimated total membership of 5, 323 as at December 2004. The communities have rightly expressed their appreciation of being able to do banking at their own level through the mobilization of savings and access to credit with affordable interest rates. Such an achievement is a cause for celebration in a Division where 95% of the people are unbanked. These VISACAs have created an opportunity for

the people to avoid exorbitant interest rates from the local moneylenders with its accompanying humiliation and embarrassment in case of default. The success of the VISACAs attracted the support of other partners such as the RFCIP and National Association of Cooperative Credit Unions of The Gambia (NACCUG) to help finance through FORUT-Gambia the activities of the eight VISACAs. The growth and development of the VISACAs continued to be the main preoccupation of FORUT-Gambia and partner Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) particularly after the phase out of funding by FORUT-Norway. The strategy to form an apex organization of the eight VISACAs with headquarters in Njaba Kunda is a clear manifestation of the vision of the local communities to strengthen their representational and collective bargaining power. This could be seen as laying a solid foundation for the development of civil society organizations in the communities.

This achievement is very important, as it is inline with the guiding principle of mobilizing local resources to strengthen people's confidence in their own power and capabilities.

In all the above development activities, the participation of women had been very high and remarkable. This was very well pronounced in the Kerewan VISACA and Vegetable garden projects where women demonstrated dynamic leadership qualities in managing these activities. The Ram fattening, the Petty trading and Fish mongering projects were also among the activities where the women have taken successful leadership roles. This undoubtedly contributed towards the promotion of the agency of women by strengthening their confidence and know-how to be more assertive as leaders in communities where traditionally the males have dominant roles. Supporting women as agents of change could be described as a new phenomenon in these communities.

Apart from the nursery school established in Dobo, there has not been any programming activity deliberately targeting Children or promoting the agency of children and youths in the communities.

One of the limiting factors for registering greater impact had to do with the wide geographical coverage that resulted to overstretching FORUT-Gambia both in terms of personnel and financial resources. Covering the entire North Bank Division with difficult terrain exhausted the organizational resources without making any meaningful impact in most of the numerous communities that FORUT-Gambia tried to cover.

FORUT-Gambia over the years did not only concentrate in building the capacity of partner communities, but extended this activity to its staff. Some members of staff were exposed to short-term professional training in order to upgrade their skills in community and rural development work.

2.2 Support Systems

The administrative model of FORUT-Gambia that had been put in place after the 1998 evaluation was organized around two offices. The Bakau office known as the headquarters supported the field office based in Kerewan. The field office charged with the day-to-day supervision of projects reported to the headquarters, which also had a representational role in the urban area. However, it has been observed that the number of trained, qualified and experience staff did not correspond with the complex management required for an evolving organization such as FORUT-Gambia. Out of a staff complement of fifteen, only a few of them could be considered as professional community development technicians. It could be argued that FORUT-Gambia had no excuse for not hiring the right competencies to effectively provide the required technical expertise in view of the organization's competitive remuneration package it had been offering staff over the years.

The quality of support systems designed and provided in the organization did not adequately provide the kind of support needed to guide the implementation of the complex programmes chosen by the organization. It should be noted however that since the recruitment of the new Finance Manager, in 1998, considerable improvements have been registered in the overall financial management of the organization as amply revealed by the findings of the annual audit reports. However it was found that the annual audits done were mostly desktop auditing and was not in-dept and it was learnt that auditors did not visit project sites to validate their findings. This might have contributed among other things to kind of "scanty" management letters written by the auditors.

What has been achieved in terms of technical backstopping of programme initiatives could be attributed to the close collaboration and hiring of the services of personnel of existing Government line departments with which Memoranda of Understanding were signed. This helped FORUT-Gambia to be able to link up its activities with the Government's priority areas.

Although FORUT-Norway had finalized all formal financial obligations to FORUT-Gambia for the completion of all planned activities up to July 2004, the evaluation team found out that some activities were yet to be completed due to lack of follow-up by the staff. This could be explained by the untimely departure of staff when they were paid their terminal benefits leaving behind a skeleton staff who could not do the expected kind of follow-up and or did not have the financial means to ensure that the inputs delivered were used to complete the projects as planned.

One of the greatest supports, which FORUT-Gambia received, was the guaranteed funding from FORUT-Norway over the years. Whilst this is understandable to be a good thing, it puts a limit on what FORUT-Gambia relying on a single funder could have possibly done with the communities. To do more than what have been done over the years FORUT-Gambia should have been encouraged more to seek for other alternative funding sources. The acquisition of such funds as grants exposes the organization to other funding sources and to the kind of financial discipline required to meet the requirements

of other donors. It also allows the organization to fulfill most of its strategic objectives set with the communities and not to cut their planned activities in accordance with the funds provided by FORUT Norway. This was found to be the case with FORUT –Gambia.

2.3 Relations between FORUT-GAMBIA and FORUT NORWAY

Since inception of FORUT-Gambia, FORUT-Norway had provided remarkable support to the organization both financially and technically. FORUT-Norway up to 2004 has been the sole funder of FORUT-Gambia providing guaranteed funding for both administrative and programme activities. This guaranteed funding over the years without being balanced by the need to seek for diversified funding made FORUT-Gambia a “lazy” organization. Through the support of FORUT-Norway, FORUT -Gambia benefited from a series of internal and external reviews of its overall performance in the realization of its mission. These reviews have greatly improved the management of FORUT-Gambia during the period.

The staff expressed their satisfaction about how FORUT-Norway supported them especially during difficult moments. Also the frequent visits of personnel from FORUT-Norway to The Gambia have been a source of technical and moral support to the local staff. However the local staff expressed concern over the lack of technical feedback from such visits as expected in the form of trip reports commenting on the general performance in the communities. The occasional memos from such trips and the in-country debriefings after the visits were not considered enough by the staff. However after reviewing the kind of communications between FORUT-Norway and FORUT Gambia directed towards improving program quality, the evaluation team found it difficult to accept the validity of such assertion by the staff. It is suspected that most of these communications were not either understood by the leadership or not widely shared with the staff.

The strategy to localize FORUT-Gambia has been under discussions since 1997. The challenge that faced both organizations with regards to the localization strategy was the inadequate understanding of the modalities of this strategy especially by FORUT-Gambia. In principle, the staff embraced the idea of localization with the understanding and expectation that this process would be gradual and accompanied with a scale down in funding over a number of years. This was why the abrupt decision in 2003 by FORUT-Norway to stop funding the organization in 2004 took FORUT-Gambia by surprise. Such a short notice could not allow FORUT-Gambia to prepare itself for the new role of seeking funding from other sources. The “isolation policy” (claimed by FORUT-Gambia) imposed by FORUT-Norway by not allowing the organization to seek funding from other sources unless approved had a lot to do with the unprepared ness of the agency to contact and cultivate other donors. Having said this it should be appreciated that FORUT-Norway was being cautious due to the unfortunate experience with pre 1997 Management’s mismanagement of funds to have a say in determining the extent to which any funds accessed would contribute to the organizational growth and development of FORUT-Gambia both in-terms of its programmes and profile and not to be seen as being unfavourable to the idea of seeking funding from other sources. Accepting of funding

from RFCIP for the development of the VISACAs by FORUT-Gambia and some funding from the Gambia Family Planning Association are all testimonies of FORUT-Norway's position on the so-called "isolation policy". By extension, the communities felt that FORUT-Norway did not fairly treat FORUT-Gambia with such short notice of discontinued funding as this denied them the opportunity to complete the ongoing and planned activities. Both the staff and the communities felt stranded with the withdrawal of their sole source of funding.

The placement of what FORUT-Norway called a traveling consultant with the mandate to support the capacity building of FORUT-Gambia did not make any significant difference in preparing the organization for localization. The staff interviewed had a very low opinion of what the consultant did during his nine months of stay with them. In fact most of them did not understand his mission to FORUT-Gambia.

According to information gathered, there has been some attempt by FORUT-Gambia before 1997 to set up a "seal account" in the form of a deposit account as part of their contingency plan in the event that FORUT-Norway stopped funding. This account was short-lived as the then National Director used up the funds. This "backdoor" arrangement in the opinion of the evaluators could not be described as a wise move professionally as it was not a transparent way of building up reserves for contingency. Such a plan should be known to and benefit from the input of FORUT-Norway and this was not the case.

In spite of the fact that FORUT-Norway fulfilled all its financial obligations to FORUT-Gambia up to 2004, the number of staff who left the organization nearly crippled it. However, some of the staff who stayed including the National Director have demonstrated their resolve to make the localized FORUT-Gambia continue to work with the communities by maintaining a skeleton staff in Bakau and Kerewan offices. This resolve was also evident in the 2006-2010 Strategic Plan developed and being submitted to the donors for possible funding. At the time of the evaluation, only a single donor was supporting FORUT-Gambia in the establishment and management of VISACAs. The current staff works for the organization on a voluntary basis. For how long the staff will continue to work on voluntary basis especially when and if they fail to attract substantial donor support could be any body's guess.

2.4 Relations between FORUT-GAMBIA and partner communities

From inception, FORUT-Gambia's relationship with the communities evolved around participatory methods of engagement. The 1997 leadership, which was known for its numerous unfulfilled promises and commitments largely, undermined the organization's image and reputation in the communities at the time. Since 1998, FORUT-Gambia has put into practice the recommendations of the 1998 evaluation that were aimed at improving their image and relationship with the communities. With the change in leadership in 1998, efforts directed in repairing this damage paid dividend as FORUT-Gambia now is being regarded as a respectable and credible organization. All the communities visited during this evaluation, expressed satisfaction with the type of

relationship and commitment demonstrated by FORUT-Gambia under the current leadership. This was why all the communities expressed disappointment over the news of the discontinued funding from FORUT-Norway. Even though some of the projects could not be completed due to the lack of funding the communities' confidence in FORUT-Gambia remained undented. Communities also commended FORUT-Gambia by attributing some of the projects funded by government in their communities were as a result of the projects initiated in the communities by the organization. An example of such projects was the Nursery School in Dobo that eventually led to the establishment of a Lower Basic School by government.

The successes registered in the area of building capacity through series of training, workshops, networking visits over the years resulted into an existence of empowered communities capable of managing and owning projects. This is amply demonstrated in the strong local management found in all the VISACAs visited.

However, it has been noted that the over-responsiveness of FORUT-Gambia to the challenges that face the communities in some instances led the organization to support the initiation of projects that they have little or no competencies to guide their effective implementation. This could in the long run undermine the good reputation of FORUT-Gambia. What the organization failed to recognize was that in spite of their good intentions they could not do it all. There was little evidence on the ground that they effectively played a catalytic role in the communities by helping them to make the appropriate linkages for some of the challenges in the communities especially for the ones they felt they had no in-house competence to handle.

2.5 Relations between FORUT-GAMBIA and IOGT

As stated in the 1998 evaluation report the relationship between FORUT-Gambia and IOGT had been rather uneasy largely due to personality differences rather than ideological differences. Personnel responsible for the operation of IOGT were somewhat resentful of the management oversight role that FORUT-Gambia took up to ensure more accountability for the subvention that was being provided to IOGT through them. This was largely due to the undefined lines of authority, communication, and the roles of the two organizations as partners. Up to the time of the evaluation there had been little or no improvement in the relationship between the two organizations. The formation of RAID-Gambia as a break away group, from the Temperance Movement, and the independence of IOGT from FORUT-Gambia, were the last straws that brought about the current halt of IOGT activities in the communities in which FORUT-Gambia works. Staff in FORUT-Gambia has since 2004 had no idea about the regular subvention being received by the IOGT organization.

2.6 FORUT-GAMBIA Relationship with other development actors

Since 1990 FORUT-Gambia has been registered and recognized as an international NGO by The Gambia Government. Its membership of the national NGO consortium (TANGO) has increased its visibility in the NGO community. Over the years the organization sat on the governing board of TANGO. This provided the opportunity for staff of FORUT-Gambia to represent TANGO on different missions including negotiations with Government. On many occasions it has participated as part of civil society in the development of national plans for poverty eradication efforts such as the development of national Strategy for Poverty Alleviation 1 (SPA 1) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) developed by the Gambia Government with significant input from the NGO community.

FORUT-Gambia over the years enjoyed cordial working relationship with relevant key government line departments such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Education and Health and has worked closely with the local government decentralized structures as a leading member of Divisional Coordinating Committee in the North Bank Division set up to coordinate development efforts in the Division. This has provided the organization the opportunity to influence the development of pro-poor policies at various level of Government. FORUT- Gambia's support to build a well established maternity ward for the Kerewan clinic has largely influenced the Health Ministries decision to upgrade it as a major Health Centre in the division and with the initial construction of the nursery school by FORUT-Gambia in Dobo, this community now has a fully established Primary school completely funded by the Ministry of Education. These could be cited as some of the examples of how FORUT- Gambia has influenced the outcome of setting development priorities of the local authorities in the area. At the divisional level FORUT-Gambia is a clear leader in the network setup by NGOs and civil societies. This high profile that FORUT-Gambia enjoys both at the national and divisional level will seriously be undermined if they do not get their new strategic plan funded.

CHAPTER THREE: LESSONS LEARNED

Several lessons could be learnt from the review of FORUT-Gambia as it strived to achieve its Mission of *“Participating in improving the conditions of the poor by making them aware of their rights and responsibilities, promoting solidarity, temperance, participatory development for self-reliance and sustainability with special focus on women and children”*. This whole process has been supported by FORUT-Norway which considered FORUT-Gambia as its subsidiary but treated it more like a partner organization over the years. These are as follows:

1. The quality of the professional growth of an organization largely depends on the capacity of its staff particularly the leadership. FORUT-Gambia could only grow as far as the leadership could allow.
2. The vast geographical coverage, which did not correspond to both human and financial resources at the disposal of the agency, resulted in diluting the anticipated impact of the programme interventions.
3. The small size of projects in some of the communities could not result into any significant impact.
4. An evolving organization like FORUT-Gambia should have attracted corresponding qualified professionals if the leadership over these years were responsive to this need.
5. FORUT-Gambia’s willingness to partner with other actors such as RFCIP paid dividend as evident in the partnership in the implementation of the VISACAs.
6. Deliberately targeting women in most of the projects supported resulted not only in their empowerment but also by extension spread the benefits of those projects to the other sectors of society including children. This significantly changed the profile of women in these communities, as they became key decision makers.
7. The focus on the capacity building strategy by FORUT-Gambia contributed in building the confidence and capability of the communities in leading the development process at their own level. The quality of local analysis of challenges that face the communities has greatly improved.
8. The guaranteed funding from FORUT-Norway over the years served as a disincentive for FORUT-Gambia to make any efforts at diversifying funding source.
9. The misinterpretation by FORUT-Gambia’s staff of the so-called FORUT-Norway’s isolation policy with regards to not allowing FORUT-Gambia from seeking funding from other donors without the approval of Norway did not prepare but rather undermined the organization’s ability to design alternative funding strategies.
10. The discontinuation of FORUT-Gambia’s “Seal Account” (Fixed Deposit Account) by the then leadership (1997) though not considered by the evaluators as a transparent way of creating contingency funds, undermined the prospect of having any fund that it could tap to see

them through for a period they transitioned into a local NGO. Setting up of a seal account by FORUT- Gambia without the knowledge of FORUT-Norway is indeed a pointer of how tricky a partnership relation could be and the need for periodic external reviews (auditors external to the country) with the hope of ensuring enhanced compliance in the management of funds.

11. The abrupt decision to “jump out” (though not the wish and plan of FORUT-Norway) from providing guaranteed funding has to a large extent derailed the unprepared FORUT-Gambia as an organization as evident in their inability to honour some of their commitments to their partner communities. The need to prepare all partner organizations by FORUT-Norway for this kind of eventuality is a matter of reality. This is in recognition of the extent to which FORUT–Norway can influence the decision/funding policy of NORAD.
12. The frequent visits of staff from FORUT-Norway served as a big motivating factor to The Gambia staff both morally and professionally.
13. The periodic reviews and evaluations and the follow-up to ensure the implementation of the recommendations greatly benefited the performance of FORUT-Gambia as an organization.
14. The recent shift in strategy from Communal woodlots to individual woodlots brought about a renewed sense of ownership for the successful implementation of these projects in the communities as part of the effort to improve the rapidly degrading environment in the North Bank region.
15. Whilst the “Localization” strategy may be described as appropriate, the failure to adequately prepare the organization for this new status effectively undermined the proper transformation of FORUT-Gambia as a local NGO.
16. The openness of FORUT-Gambia in discussing with partner communities the decision of FORUT-Norway not to continue financial support made the communities renew their confidence in FORUT-Gambia as a transparent organization.
17. The remarkable success of the VISACAs brought about a new security challenge to ensure the proper safety of the funds at the level of the VISACAs.
18. As evident in the VISACAs once people put in their own financial resources into a project, their sense of ownership and participation immensely increase.
19. The number of crisis resulting from personality conflicts within the organization has consumed valuable time and resources that could have been put into better use.
20. The absence of a local advisory Board consisting of local experts in the respective sectors that FORUT –Gambia was supporting in the communities was a missed opportunity that could have provided the organisation on the ground needed guidance to make their projects more focused and integrated.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 CONCLUSION

Over the years FORUT-Gambia has managed to build for itself a high profile in the NGO community in The Gambia. It's presence in its operational area clearly made a positive difference as one of the leading NGOs in the division. Most of the communities considered the organization as a source of hope in the fight against rural poverty. Its development approach being organized around the regeneration of the environment as the entry point in most communities in an area which is fastly turning into a desert, made it stand out as one of the best among the NGOs in the division. The organization's emphasis on capacity building of partner communities as an attempt to bring about sustainable development has been appreciated in all quarters. Their deliberate targeting of women as leaders in their own communities has visibly raised the decision making profile of women in the partner communities. Women's leadership role in the management of the VISACAs could be argued as the bedrock for the success of this project.

The nature and extent of poverty and above all the near absence of reliable and credible NGOs coupled with the inadequate Government presence and support in the whole of the North Bank Division has left FORUT-Gambia with little choice other than to overstretch it to reach as many communities as possible with its meagre resources. This unfortunately had a dilution effect on the impact it made over the years.

FORUT-Norway's provision of guaranteed funding over the years made it possible for FORUT-Gambia to pursue community development activities in a division, which has very few effective NGOs fully operational. The kind of space created by FORUT-Norway has allowed FORUT-Gambia the freedom to make decisions closer to where the action is. This kind of support though registered positive results but appeared to serve as a disincentive for FORUT-Gambia to be aware or interested in other existing funding possibilities for NGOs in the country. The result has been little or nothing is known about FORUT-Gambia and what it was achieving with the communities within the donor circles. The localized FORUT- Gambia has to start all over again to present itself and its track record to the donors if it is to access funding.

The discussions about Localization of FORUT-Gambia since 2001, unfortunately was not accompanied with solid strategies for the effective management of the transformation process. FORUT-Gambia was nurturing the hope that the process will be a gradual graduation with a phased funding package as opposed to sudden decision to stop funding by FORUT-Norway. This has resulted to resignation of most of the staff leaving FORUT-Gambia with a skeleton staff to continue. According to the current National Director, who is determined to see the continuity of FORUT-Gambia as a local NGO "FORUT-Gambia is here to stay". This optimism undoubtedly will only become a reality if FORUT-Gambia can secure the required funding to continue its commitments.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the main purpose of this evaluation, which is to document the lessons learnt on the capacity, and competence and the approaches and methods of FORUT-Norway as it supported FORUT-Gambia to accomplish its mission, the following recommendations are being made:

1. All field visits to FORUT-Gambia would have had maximum impact on programme quality if the visitors' observations and comments have been documented in the form of reports as feedback and reference for FORUT-Gambia.
2. FORUT-Norway considers the development of a phase-out strategy that is gradual in nature and less painful for both the affected partner organization and communities. Though it was clear that the abrupt decision to stop funding for FORUT-Gambia was never the intention of FORUT-Norway (as this was NORAD imposition), the need to prepare the minds of partner organization for such eventualities will always be a reality.
3. FORUT-Norway should continue to encourage and promote women and children's active participation as agents of change as part of their global core value for all partner organizations they fund
4. The strategy for the Localization of a partner organization must be defined and understood by both parties in terms of their respective roles and responsibilities. This must be accompanied with solid plans, which include training for the development of appropriate systems and strategies for the proper management of the transition.
5. The creation of space by FORUT-Norway for FORUT-Gambia to make decisions to determine programme choices and the area of operation must be balanced with appropriate technical input from FORUT-Norway as a stakeholder in the whole process.
6. FORUT-Norway from the start of its partnership should encourage partner organizations to develop the appropriate skills and knowledge to access diversified funding sources.
7. FORUT-Norway should always insist with their funding support that the partner organization should hire the right competencies at all levels of the organization. Reliance on a sole funder like NORAD appears to put a development ceiling on what could possibly have been done with the communities. The need to have complementary funds enables the organization to do more with the communities.
8. After the discontinued funding from NORAD, FORUT-Norway should reconsider other funding possibilities to accompany the transformation of FORUT-Gambia into a local NGO for a period of three years. During and after which period FORUT-Norway should support FORUT-Gambia by initiating contacts with potential donors.
9. One of the viable solutions to be considered by FORUT-Norway to rescue FORUT –Gambia is to merge existing IOGT organisation with FORUT- Gambia as a way of integrating the development activities and the Temperance activities for more impact. If this solution is to be considered it is recommended that the

- present leadership of both organizations be changed as part of the required radical surgery to improve the leadership of FORUT –Gambia as a local organization.
10. FORUT-Norway as a global force, for making positive difference in the lives of the poor, should ensure that the global Policy Document that defines its partnership relationship with partner organizations is properly understood by the leadership and staff of these organisations. The implementation of such a policy document should be contextualized by the partner organizations and should serve FORUT-Norway as a frame to support and assess the overall performance of its partner organizations.
 11. The relationship between IOGT as a temperance movement with separate staff and operations from FORUT-Gambia should have been defined clarifying lines of authority and communications to avoid any uneasy relationship between the two. FORUT-Norway should encourage if not insist that the two organizations have in place clear lines of authority and communications within the framework of a partnership, which enhances the pursuit of making positive changes in the lives of the communities. The more two organizations work together the more they would scale-up the impact of their work in making a difference for the better in the communities.
 12. The amount of space created by FORUT-Norway for either its subsidiaries or partner organizations to provide them with the kind of freedom to make choices and decisions closer to where the actions are is very laudable but should be balanced with demand for transparency, responsibility and accountability from the recipient organizations. This is a legitimate role that FORUT Norway should never shy away from. Every freedom goes with its responsibilities.
 13. That FORUT- Norway considers the possibility of encouraging their partner organizations to form local advisory Boards with strong local perspectives and competences to provide necessary support and guidance for quality program implementation on the ground.
 14. That FORUT-Norway considers the use of External auditors with broader terms of reference (covering financial and programming issues) on periodic basis to supplement the findings of locally registered auditors used annually by partner organizations. Considering the cost implications for this proposal, it could be done after every three years to help FORUT –Norway to better understand the overall management and performance of the partner organization.

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