

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Mobilizing popular tree-planting efforts

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Dear Peter,

In the west African Sahelian countries, the efforts of national forest services and large forestry development projects have done little to stem the processes of deforestation and desertification over the past decade. Over \$160 million in public assistance -- multilateral and bilateral funding -- has been provided to the eight Sahelian countries for the forestry and ecology sector between 1975 and 1983 (Weber 1982). Most of this funding has gone into government reforestation efforts, which have only been able to touch a small fraction of the need. Of all the trees planted, only an estimated 20 percent have survived their first year.

In Senegal, the government's own planting efforts have been steadily increasing, from 1409 hectares (3480.2 acres) in 1977 to 4700 hectares (11,609 acres) in 1983. The state has set a short-term objective of planting 10,000 hectares (24,710 acres) per year, hoping eventually to achieve 50,000 hectares (123,550 acres) annually. Given current rates and costs of government planting, the state cannot alone meet its own targets. Who, then, is going to plant the trees needed?

Increasingly, trees are being planted by people themselves -- as individuals, families, group co-operatives, villages, or communities. For many observers, this trend promises the most -- if not only -- hope for success. Although many of the large-scale early community forestry projects had disappointing results, more recent community reforestation efforts -- conducted on a smaller scale, by local grassroots organizations -- have been more encouraging. In Senegal, community tree-planting efforts began to surpass those of the government in 1982. In 1983, 5100 hectares (12,602 acres) of trees were planted by popular efforts (Sene 1984).

In Senegal, many popular tree-planting activities have been undertaken by a wide variety of non-governmental organizations (NGOs); youth groups, development societies, women's groups, men's groups, farmers' associations, and development training programs.

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Many of these Senegalese NGOs recently met in Dakar, for a conference on reforestation from 20 to 27 February 1985. The workshop was jointly organized by the Conseil des Organisations NonGouvernementales Appui au Développement (CONGAD) (Council of NonGovernmental Organizations in Support to Development) and the United Nations' Tree Project.

CONGAD functions as an umbrella organization, bringing together 33 different NGOs working in Senegal. CONGAD was created in 1981 to coordinate the activities of local and international NGOs working on development issues, by improving communication and links with each other, the Senegalese government, private business, international organizations, and the general public. CONGAD currently has only two full-time staff members, but has sponsored conferences on various issues.

The Tree Project was launched by the United Nations NGO Liason Office. Tree-planting is being highlighted as an activity for 1985, designated by the United Nations as International Youth Year (IYY). By planting trees, the world's youth -- defined as being 15- to 24-year-olds -- can actively participate in managing the environment they will inherit. The Tree Project was established to promote tree-planting through improved information and collaboration among non-governmental organizations, governments, and United Nations agencies. As of February 1985, more than 2500 groups were involved in the Tree Project.

The Tree Project is sponsoring a series of consultations in four regions of the world -- Haiti, India, Indonesia, and Senegal -- between now and the spring of 1986. These consultations are to strengthen coordination among NGOs, and to serve as models for similar efforts elsewhere. These activities are being undertaken in the belief that it is primarily social and institutional constraints, rather than technical ones, that have limited popular tree-planting efforts to date.

In Senegal, the consultation was conducted in two phases. First, a preliminary field trip in July 1984 ascertained the desirability of holding a conference. Information was gathered from NGOs on their tree-planting activities. The conference itself took place in late February 1985. After a preliminary day and a half of meetings, two four-day field trips to reforestation project sites were held. Twenty people headed north of Dakar, to visit projects in the more arid Sahelian zone, to the east and south of St. Louis. Another fourteen people traveled east of Dakar, to visit sites in the southern-central peanut basin, an important -- but environmentally degraded -- agricultural region. Following the field trips were an additional three days of plenary sessions and working group meetings in Dakar, attended by over sixty people.

While most participants work in Senegal, some came from Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Kenya. The non-Senegalese participants had been invited to share their own experiences, to stimulate inter-African cooperation, and to inspire similar NGO networking efforts in neighboring countries.

Four representatives from KENGO, the network of Kenyan NGOs working on renewable energy and community development, attended the Senegal conference. KENGO is organized to provide NGOs with direct material assistance, technical assistance, training, and information coordination and transfer. KENGO publishes a newsletter and has sponsored publication of a field manual on tree seed sources in Kenya, written in simple English for use by farmers, extension agents, and schoolteachers.

The Kenyan delegation provided the other participants with a model of NGO-networking that has been very successful in encouraging community tree-planting efforts. Since massive tree-planting campaigns are primarily a problem for developing countries, the South-South sharing of experiences can be productive. This does involve, however, overcoming obstacles such as distance and language barriers between African countries. As one Kenyan commented, information exchange is of limited usefulness if it only consists of Kenyans sending English-language documents to Senegal, and Senegalese sending French-language documents in return. The chance for Senegalese and Kenyans to meet on common ground, to be able to visit each others' projects, and to discuss together -- with the help of interpreters, as necessary -- their efforts is far more productive. Later this spring four CONGAD representatives will have the chance to travel to Kenya, to visit forestry projects there.

while KENGO provides an attractive model of NGO-NGO and NGO-government collaboration, the Senegalese need to develop their own NGO-networking organization that best addresses Senegalese realities. Towards this end, the conference sought to identify strengths and weaknesses of current NGO reforestation efforts in Senegal, and to propose strategies for enhancing future activities.

Information on existing NGO tree-planting activities came out of the pre-conference survey, the field visits, and the professional experience of conference participants. The questionnaire had uncovered the diversity in NGO reforestation efforts. Small grassroots organizations reported having planted between 75 and 3000 trees: some larger training programs claim to have planted thousands of trees over the past five years. survival rates of tree seedlings outplanted ranged from 14 to 95 percent. Most of the projects are integrated development efforts, with trees planted in support of other activities, such as agriculture.

For the projects visited on the site trips, certain common strengths were identified. First, a high degree of rural participation was noted, including the involvement of women and youth. Second, the socio-cultural approach of the projects, stressing social organization, extension, and training, was commended. Finally, the emphasis on agroforestry systems and local species was cited.

In both the site visits and the pre-conference survey, common project weaknesses were reviewed. Problems included lower participation rates of women than men, lack of training in functional literacy (in local languages), inadequate informational and educational materials, lack of sufficient technical training and extension, insufficient water, poor soil conditions -- especially high salinity, migration of livestock and lack of fencing to prevent animal grazing, tree diseases and lack of pesticides, insufficient transport and tools for adequate planting efforts and maintenance, inappropriate tree species chosen for particular sites, other constraints in growing local species, and financial problems.

The conference was sub-divided into five working groups to identify problems and possible solutions for particular issues -- community participation, training and extension, technical aspects, project management, and information and coordination. Out of each group came recommendations for how individual projects could be improved, as well as suggestions for a general strategy, or action plan, for improving collaboration among NGOs and between NGOs and the government. The ideas of each working group were presented and discussed in plenary sessions.

The community participation group focused on two issues. First, they stressed the need to incorporate tree-planting into other sectors of primary production, such as agriculture and livestock raising. Difficulties in obtaining total community agreement to reforestation programs often exists. For example, sedentary farmers in an area may agree to plant an area with trees and keep their own animals out: nomadic pastoralists, however, may enter the area who have no knowledge of, or interest in the project -- they are only concerned with finding forage for their animals. Thus, pastoralists need to be incorporated into reforestation programs, perhaps by enlisting their participation in planting, protecting, and exploiting forage species. In northern Senegal this constitutes not only a community-level problem, but an international one -- as many Mauritians come south with their camels.

To improve community participation in projects, the socio-economic dimensions of reforestation need to be carefully considered. To encourage people to plant trees and assume responsibility for reforestation, their immediate and medium-term

preoccupations must be addressed, and rights to use the resources produced must be guaranteed to participants. How to best mobilize the population has to be assessed with the participants themselves. Many of the discussants expressed reservations about compensating people for planting trees -- either with money, or with food, in food-for-work schemes. Many believe that such approaches to mobilizing rural participation are doomed to failure, because it is impossible to compensate everyone and thus inequitable, and furthermore, once the compensation stops, then the people stop planting or maintaining the trees, as their former incentives are gone.

While there is agreement that all community members -- youths, older people, and women -- need to be included in reforestation efforts, the community participation working group did not analyse how the participation of various social groups is currently constrained, nor how their participation could be further encouraged.

In some projects, such as that at Louga, the entire community contributes to tree-planting activities: the men plant the trees and set up fencing for protection, the women water the trees, and the children guard the trees against grazing by animals. In the integrated project at Podor, women do most of the reforestation work, as the men often migrate in search of paid employment. For the SOS International project in Fatick, some plots of trees have been planted entirely by women, others by men, others by youths. In Mekhe, a young farmers' project is having less success in involving young women in tree-planting than young men. Overall, women participate less in reforestation efforts than do men.

One constraint on women's participation is that most extension work is still targeted primarily at men. Women rural extension agents, who work for the Ministry of Social Development to assist women's groups, sometimes collaborate with men forestry agents to encourage women's groups to plant trees. This effort was launched by the former Ministry of the Feminine Condition (now the Ministry of Social Development) with the slogan, "Une femme, un arbre" (meaning, For each woman, a tree).

Few Senegalese women foresters yet exist, and none have been assigned to field positions. Although the conference participants recommended that women extension agents ("animatrices" and "formatrices") should be part of a national reforestation campaign, no one recommended that women be recruited and trained for positions as professional foresters. Yet it is commonly acknowledged that it is easier for rural women to work with professional women, in Senegal as elsewhere in Africa.

Two other constraints on women's participation in Senegal seem to be financing and land rights. Women's groups often have

difficulty in obtaining money for reforestation efforts, such as financing to put in a well to insure adequate water for a small tree nursery. In Senegal, few women have rights to land (unlike the situation in Kenya), making it difficult for women to plant trees as individuals. Sometimes a women's group can successfully lobby for rights to use a parcel of land in the community for a group reforestation project: generally, however, the women cannot act on their own, but must first win the support of the men in the community.

The two Kenyan women attending the conference were very outspoken about the need for NGO reforestation efforts to encourage women's participation. Senegalese women attending the conference stressed the need for the entire community to participate, including the women. In private, however, one Senegalese woman admitted that it was difficult to get support for women's projects, and that joint community projects often resulted in women doing much of the work and reaping few of the benefits. There are obviously important differences between Kenya and Senegal, such that much greater participation of women in reforestation activities occurs in Kenya. The Kenyan women also reminded the conference attendees that 1985 is the final year of the United Nations' Decade for Women. (They are busy organizing activities for the NGO Women's Forum to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 1985, and even had commemorative T-shirts for sale to raise funds for this event. Perhaps the general mobilization of Kenyan women in development activities is another reason for their greater participation in the forestry sector.)

The working group on training and extension stressed the need for pragmatic, on-the-ground coordination between different NGO activities, to insure that all members of the population could participate. The involvement of grassroots leaders -- whether political, traditional, or religious -- is vital. Some debate surfaced over the question of transferring projects to beneficiaries: this reflects a philosophical split as to whether popular efforts can only begin with the people themselves, or whether outside NGOs can effectively come into a community, and organize and motivate the people to plant trees.

The technical commission came up with a list of ten recommendations regarding issues such as seed selection and provision, reforestation methods, protection means, introduction of trees into agricultural systems, wood-conservation technologies (such as improved cookstoves), development of fruit and forage plantations, and encouraging forestry components in all projects. They advocated training sessions to be held in each of the different ecological regions in the country, regarding reforestation techniques and species appropriate for each zone. They also recommended the preparation of a tree-planting guide, in French and local languages, modeled on the Kenyan example.

The project management working group was particularly concerned about training and financial management. They stressed the need for good "études de milieu" (studies of the setting) by multi-disciplinary teams, who speak the appropriate local languages, prior to designing and initiating projects. Training and encouragement of literacy at all levels was recommended: in fact, the inclusion of literacy components in all reforestation efforts was advocated. For strengthening the financial management capabilities of NGOs, an inventory of available talent, such as accountants, was recommended.

The stress on functional literacy in local languages is not often associated with forestry development programs. There are perhaps two reasons for the degree to which this was emphasized at this conference.

First, most of the conference participants were working on integrated development projects as development workers, community organizers, trainers, and researchers. Consequently they are concerned with improving literacy in general as a stepping stone for other development efforts.

Second, the literacy situation in Senegal may be at a point where this is a general development priority. In some developing countries, such as Burkina Faso, literacy rates are so low that development extension efforts have to be based on audio-visual communication rather than printed media. In Kenya, with higher literacy rates, information manuals and newsletters can find a wider audience. The educational situation in Senegal falls between these other two examples, with a significant minority of the population being literate.² If forestry development efforts in Senegal are to rest on the dissemination of written information, then improving literacy will be fundamental.

The final group, on information and coordination, stressed the need to begin with existing resources, such as existing data bases. Then, as information is gathered and resources permit, a documentation center and bibliography could be developed, and newsletters and technical manuals published.

All of the working groups had similar recommendations for a general NGO strategy to follow the conference. To begin, a follow-up committee was advocated, to facilitate communication and collaboration among NGOs in the area of reforestation. This committee can help to develop better links between NGOs and the government, both on a national and on local levels. Information will need to be gathered from member NGOs on their activities, talents, and needs, to facilitate cooperation.

Once these steps have been taken, then priorities can be set on training needs, and the dissemination of technical information.

After the recommendations were presented by each working group, interested individuals volunteered to work on the follow-up committee. This committee was charged with producing the report synthesizing the conference, and with formulating an action plan.

The final working session of the conference consisted of a meeting with representatives of various donors working in Senegal -- the Ford Foundation, the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the (Canadian) International Research Development Centre (IRDC). Each representative described their current programs and funding opportunities, and outlined the types of NGO initiatives they might be interested in funding. UNDP, which had funded the conference, also offered some seed money to help launch the work of the conference's follow-up committee and also to fund a pilot project. The Ford Foundation also expressed interest in funding a continuation of efforts to improve NGO coordination in reforestation activities.

The first meeting of the follow-up committee was held a week after the conference, with fourteen in attendance. The conference recommendations were reviewed: most stressed the need for a follow-up committee, improved training, and improved access to technical information. The importance of being able to try to implement more specific recommendations in a pilot project or two was also discussed.

The immediacy of action needed was emphasized. The government forestry service is currently organizing a Seminar for the Elaboration of a National Strategy for Reforestation, to be held in St. Louis, Senegal, from April 20th to 25th. This seminar would be an ideal forum in which to begin to strengthen NGO-government collaboration. Consequently, the conference report needs to be finished as quickly as possible, to insure distribution in advance of this upcoming seminar. Timing is also crucial for improving NGO reforestation efforts for the upcoming rainy season -- in June and July -- when the next tree planting efforts will take place.

Three members volunteered to pull together the conference report in the coming week. The entire follow-up committee will meet again in two weeks' time to review the report and to decide how to proceed.

It is still too early to tell if this NGO conference will serve as a catalyst for mobilizing NGO collaboration and improving popular reforestation efforts. The workshop was only one of a series of cumulative efforts of non-governmental organizations working in this area. If some type of coordinating body can be set up, to collect and disseminate information, to encourage closer cooperation with technical agents, both within and outside of the government, and to assist in seeking funding to overcome some of the NGOs' material constraints, then the larger objective of involving the Senegalese population in massive tree-planting efforts may be assisted.

Sincerely,

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NOTES:

1. While I do not consider the groups "youths", "older people", and "women" to be mutually exclusive, this terminology is commonly employed in francophone Western Africa. Often the terms "youth" and "older people" are taken to represent two groups of men, socially distinct in their rights and responsibilities, and separate from "women". Other times, however, it seems that young people include young women.

2. La Situation des Enfants dans le Monde 1985 (UNICEF, New York) furnishes the following statistics:

	Per capita income (1982)	Adult literacy rate (1980) *		Primary school ** enrollment(1980-82)	
		Men	Women	Boys	Girls
Burkina Faso	\$ 210	18	5	28	16
Senegal	\$ 490	31	14	58	38
Kenya	\$ 390	61	38	114	94
United States	\$ 13160	99	99	(not available)	

*Adult literacy rate: Percentage of the population aged 15 and above that can read and write.

**Primary school enrollment: The crude rate of enrollment is the total number of children enrolled in primary school -- whether or not they are the appropriate school age -- expressed as a percentage of the total number of children of the age group corresponding to primary level education.

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