



TRY OYSTER WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

The Gambia



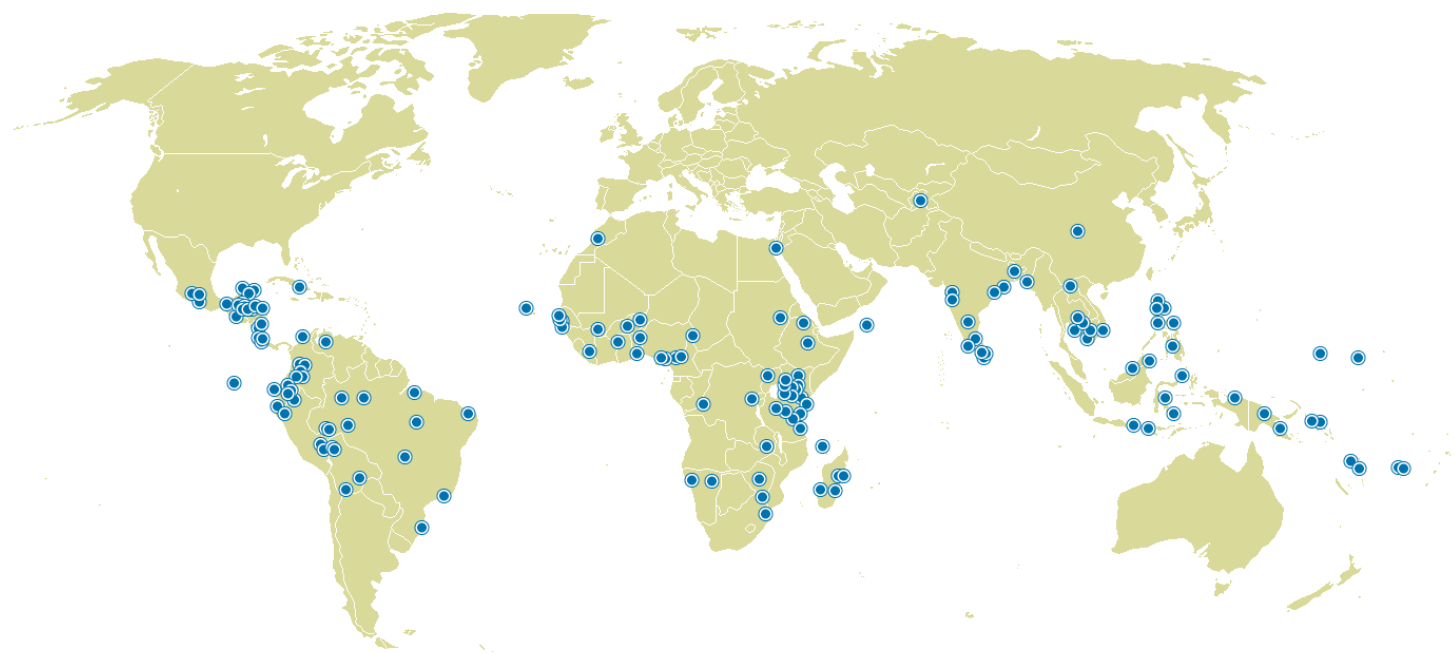
Equator Initiative Case Studies

Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Local and indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative.

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The Gambia

PROJECT SUMMARY

TRY Oyster Women's Association brings together 500 female oyster harvesters from 15 villages in the Greater Banjul area. Harvesters are grouped into cooperatives where they exchange sustainable oyster harvesting techniques and receive training in small-scale enterprise development. These cooperatives have ensured access to appropriate equipment and technologies, set higher standards for working and sanitary conditions, and helped to coordinate the processing, packaging and marketing of oysters.

The cooperatives have also mobilized to reforest local mangroves and educate the local population on the benefits of environmentally responsible resource management. One of TRY Association's biggest accomplishments to date has been its leadership in the development and implementation of the Oyster and Cackle Co-Management Plan for the Tanbi Special Management Area, synonymous with the Tanbi Wetlands National Park.

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KEY FACTS

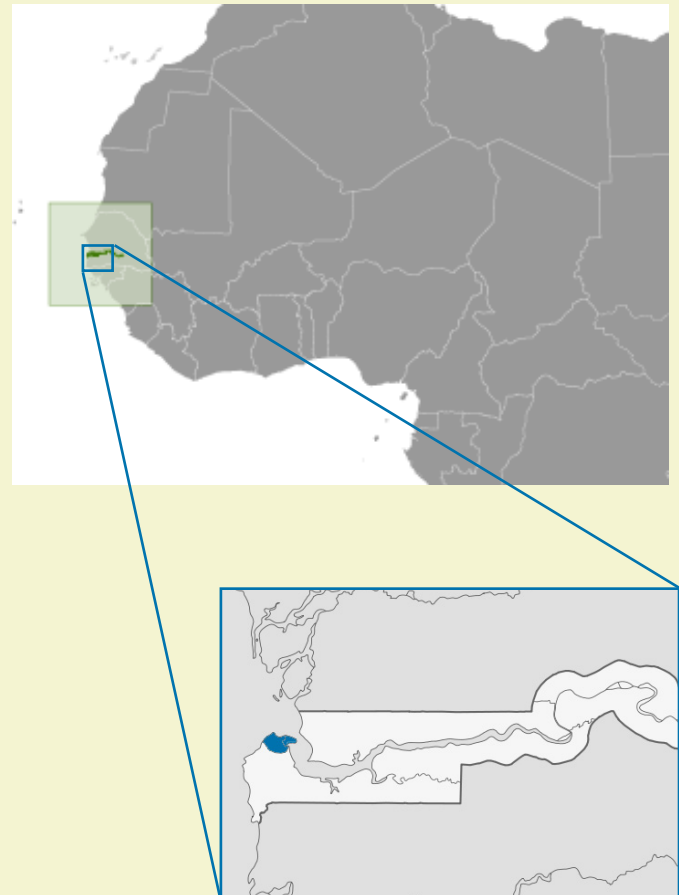
EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER: 2012

FOUNDED: 2007

LOCATION: Greater Banjul area

BENEFICIARIES: More than 500 women oyster harvesters

BIODIVERSITY: 6,300-hectare wetland reserve



Background and Context



TRY Oyster Women's Association is a community-based organization of over 500 women oyster and cockle harvesters in The Gambia. The association works to raise the standard of living and improve livelihood opportunities for local women. TRY was formed in 2007 to tackle the connected challenges of unemployment and coastal degradation. The aim is empowerment through action and education; teaching oyster harvesters how to balance sustainable harvesting with the management of delicate mangrove ecosystems. The association has experienced meteoric growth in its membership, beginning as a series of small gatherings of oyster harvesters in one community and expanding into a dynamic, connected network with organized leadership and members in 15 different communities. Efforts to improve local incomes are complemented by efforts to reduce anthropogenic impacts on the Tanbi Wetlands ecosystem, where the majority of the harvesters work.

Oyster harvesting and threats to local mangroves

Oysters are considered a delicacy in The Gambia and are a key ingredient in many popular dishes. Historically, the fresh oyster and cockle market in The Gambia is dominated by the poorest members of the most economically marginalized communities. Although demand for oysters is consistently high, women harvesters continue to make little money for what is difficult and dangerous work. Oyster collection is a field of work dominated by women. Women harvesters aged between 25 and 45 are often the sole income providers for their households and have worked as shellfish harvesters their entire lives, learning the profession from mothers and grandmothers. In western Gambia these women are mostly of the Jola tribe, while many are migrants from Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance region of Senegal. The majority harvest oysters from the Tanbi Wetlands National Park and sell them at roadside stalls or in local markets. For the past thirty years, women harvesters were a regular sight at Karmalloh on the Banjul-Serrekunda highway, where they would sell to commuters driving home from the city after work. Oyster harvesting is seasonal (March-June), however, leaving women with no alterna-

tive sources of income, financially insecure, and often facing debt in the off-season between July and February.

Oysters are traditionally collected from the roots of mangroves, using rudimentary tools such as machetes. The work is physically demanding and exposes harvesters to a high degree of risk. Many women harvesters cannot swim, making collection activities in small canoes (without lifejackets) a life-threatening proposition. The vast majority of harvesters also lack appropriate gloves and footwear; the sharp oyster beds pose a serious risk of injury. Adding to these dangers, harvesters also tend to lack adequate storage and sanitation equipment. As a consequence, they are forced to steam or grill freshly harvested oysters over open fires, remove their shells, and sell them by the roadside. Without the ability to store their catch, harvesters have tended to sell their oysters well below potential market value.

The mangrove ecosystems where the oysters grow are under persistent threat of overexploitation due to population growth, deforestation, pollution and waste dumping, and unsustainable extraction of resources. Mangrove forests constitute delicate and biologically diverse ecosystems that play a central role in transferring organic matter and energy from terrestrial to marine areas. Oyster harvesters who lack knowledge of sustainable collection methods tend to harvest too frequently, allowing too little time for regeneration. The use of coarse harvesting tools (such as machetes) also often leads to the damaging of mangrove roots. In addition, many harvesters contribute to deforestation by cutting mangrove trees for fuel wood.

Local action for the environment and sustainable livelihoods

To confront some of the many social, economic, and environmental challenges they faced, a small group of around 40 women based in one village formed an association that they called "TRY", capturing their aim of trying to improve their living conditions and become self-sufficient. The initial growth of this group was aided by Ms. Fatou Mboob, a long-time customer of the women and local community

leader, who, in 2007, became involved in helping the association to diversify its work. Using her accumulated business experience, she worked with association members to design programs for oyster and cockle cultivation, product and market development, access to forms of credit and savings, and alternative livelihoods training.

Ms. Mboob and TRY members organized an annual oyster festival to raise funds to serve as seed money for the association and for the formal registration of the group. The festival raised over 40,000 Gambian Dalasi (GMD), or approximately USD 1,200, which was put in a TRY Association bank account. She formally registered the association with the Government of The Gambia as a community-based, non-profit organization, and helped TRY members to write the association's constitution. This initial injection of business acumen has had a catalytic effect on the association's development: between 2008 and 2011, the association grew from one to fifteen communities, comprising more than 500 members.

TRY Oyster Women's Association was formed in an effort to tackle the challenges facing women oyster harvesters, the related challenge of rapidly declining mangrove forest and coastal health, and the task of educating the local population about the relationship between environmental degradation and deepening poverty. More pointedly, the association aims to improve the quality of and expand the market for harvested oysters, restore mangrove forests, and provide training and education services to TRY members in small business development, financial management, food handling and hygiene. The association is working to not only protect the areas of mangrove forest in which women work (through the promotion of more sustainable harvesting practices), but also to restore degraded areas through mangrove reforestation.

An important dimension of the association's work is increasing the market value of locally harvested oysters. By working with harvesters on hygiene, storage, and processing techniques, the association is helping to secure higher prices and create new markets for local products. Raising processing standards is being done with a view to moving beyond roadside sales to carving out a market supply chain that supplies restaurants, grocery stores, hotels and lodges. By fetching a higher premium for locally harvested oysters, the association is also reducing pressure on local mangrove forests and ecosystems. Working in conjunction with government ministries and national park, authorities, the association has also developed a sustainable use plan that governs harvesting of oysters in the mangrove forests of Tanbi Wetlands National Park.

The association has evolved into a one-stop-shop for essential social services, offering its members access to credit, education, financial advice, literacy training, and vocational skills. Alternative livelihood training (beyond oyster harvesting) is provided to the daughters of TRY members in an effort to expand and diversify the number of employment and income generation options open to them.

Governance structure

The association is formally registered and legally recognized as a community-based organization. Its governance structure consists of a Board of Directors, an Advisory Council, a Local Governing Board and an Executive Director. The Board of Directors provides general guidance and long term strategic planning, sets policy, and seeks funding and endowments. The intention is to maintain a group of individuals who are committed to the mission and have the leadership capabilities, influence and contacts to assist in fundraising, strategic planning, and small business development.

The Executive Director reports to the Board of Directors and is responsible for overall management, including development and implementation of programs, daily operations, accounting and purchases. The Board of Directors, Advisory Council and Local Governing Board assist the Executive Director in fundraising, strategy development, program growth, day-to-day operations, and financial oversight. The Executive Director is assisted by an Assistant Director and part-time bookkeeper. Currently, both of these positions are filled by volunteers, though the association is fundraising to hire paid staff for these roles as well as a coastal specialist with expertise in oyster aquaculture.

The Local Governing Board is made up of representatives from the association's 15 member communities. Officers of this body – including the President, Vice President, Secretary, Vice Secretary, Treasurer, Vice Treasurer, and community representatives – oversee the entire network of harvesters. Elections for these positions are held every two years, with some of the smaller communities joining together to elect one combined representative. The communities of Bafulto, Galoya, Kembujeh, and Kubuneh, for instance, are represented by one woman, as are the villages of Kerewan and Mandinari. General membership in the association is open to anyone from TRY's 15 member communities.

“When we started our Association, we never thought that one day we would be recognized internationally for our work. We feel very proud of our small efforts and contributions toward the protection of the environment and towards the improvement of the livelihoods of the women of The Gambia.”

Fatou Janha Mboob, Coordinator, TRY Oyster Women's Association.

Key Activities and Innovations



Creating equitable oyster supply-chains

A primary activity of the association has been working with its growing membership of oyster and cockle harvesters to improve the quality of collected products, harvesting methods, processing and storage, and market supply-chains. The objective is to diversify the market for locally harvested oyster and cockle products to ensure consistent demand and a higher premium for local women. Ensuring that women receive higher prices for their catch is intended not only as an income-generation exercise, but also to incentivize harvesting methods that do not degrade mangrove beds or overexploit a fragile ecosystem. TRY serves as a 'middle man' between women harvesters and local businesses, providing a platform for collective bargaining and the negotiation of fair prices. The association keeps a percentage of revenues to financially sustain its operation and to provide a range of social services to its members.

One challenge previously facing women harvesters was the short shelf life of their products and the effect the prospect of unsold, spoiled oysters and cockles had on their bargaining power and asking prices. To address this issue, the association is working with harvesters on value-added secondary processing techniques that will improve the shelf life of their products, including storing oysters and cockles in oil, freezing them, and smoking them. All of these techniques allow the women to sell their products for a higher premium, and, in some cases, up to three months after the end of the oyster season.

This extended life of the oyster products helps relieve financial hardship during the harvesting off-season, when other forms of gainful employment are in short supply. In addition to being sold on the street and in the markets, oysters and cockles are processed and packaged at the TRY community training centre (a small building rented by the association) and sold at supermarkets, restaurants, shops, lodges, and hotels. With continued income from oysters throughout much of the year, women harvesters are less likely to break the no-take rules that are part of the eight-month off-season

or seasonal closures, as established in the association's co-management plan.

To differentiate TRY oysters from other shellfish products sold along the highway, TRY members now wear red uniforms that help identify their brand and provide consistency in the minds of consumers. Oysters are also sold at the TRY training centre, where capacity building workshops and trainings are held for TRY members on hygiene, proper food handling, and value-added secondary processing. Due to high demand from consumers, TRY installed an oyster-smoking oven at one of its main landing sites and has plans – should market demand continue to grow – to set up smoking ovens at each of its sites. TRY recognizes, however, that the stoves require firewood, which is most often sourced from mangroves, and that this would therefore require an increase in the association's mangrove reforestation efforts. Plans are also in place to construct a Resource and Processing Centre, which would vastly increase the women's market access and the range of products they could offer.

TRY association recently conducted a market survey to assess demand from local hotels and restaurants, the composition of their customer base, customer opinions on TRY products, and the volume of daily sales. The survey gave TRY an understanding of what local consumers and businesses are looking for in terms of oyster and other seafood products in general, and where TRY's comparative advantages might enable its members to meet that demand.

Co-Management of Tanbi Wetlands National Park

One of TRY Association's biggest accomplishments to date has been its leadership in the development and implementation of the Oyster and Cockle Co-Management Plan for the Tanbi Wetlands National Park (TWNP), designated a "Special Management Area". The association worked with partners in the Government of Gambia – including the Ministry of Fisheries, Water Resources and National Assembly Matters – to draft a comprehensive natural resources management plan inclusive of TRY members and their work. The co-management

plan, approved and launched on January 17, 2012, gives TRY Association exclusive use rights to the cockle and oyster fishery in the TWNP and delegates to the association the authority and responsibility of sustainable management and conservation of the oyster and cockle resources in TWNP.

Through this legal arrangement, TRY members have exclusive access to and ownership of certain harvesting areas. Securing this legal status has been empowering for a population of women that have been historically marginalized and excluded from resource governance and decision-making systems. The co-management arrangement has TRY members working side-by-side with representatives of multiple government ministries to plan land use strategies, harvesting areas, and interventions to restore and protect the mangrove ecosystem. A key output of this plan has been the designation of open and closed harvesting periods, formally establishing the length of the off-season for TRY Association members.

Additionally, TRY members are collaborating with Department of Parks and Wildlife Management wardens to monitor and police the National Park. This activity has further validated and empowered TRY members by recognizing them as agents of positive change, deputized enforcers of community rules and regulations, holders of valued local knowledge, and a collectively active and vigilant presence in the Tanbi wetlands area.

Mangrove reforestation

In 2010, TRY received funding from the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (SGP) for mangrove reforestation and aquaculture training, for a two-year period up to 2012. This modest investment enabled the association to train its members in mangrove conservation and reforestation. Following the training, and with support from the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management, association members planted more than 20,000 mangrove seedlings (*Rhizophora racemosa*) in the communities of Fajikunda and Jeshwang, covering an area of 6.7 hectares. A similar initiative was organised in the West Coast Region, where TRY members planted over 8,500 mangrove seedlings over 2.5 hectares. In August 2012, the women of TRY participated once again in a mangrove planting exercise in the towns of Old Jeshwang and Fajikunda. A team of over 200 members planted more than 25,000 mangrove seedlings, covering 12.5 hectares of land. These ongoing efforts have helped to underpin the association's education and outreach work on the importance of local environmental health.

Education and health services

Education and vocational training are priority activities for TRY. The association provides basic literacy training, financial management workshops, and a range of educational services, focusing not only on association members but on their families as well. Since November 2010, TRY has offered a Skills Training Program for the daughters

of oyster harvesters who are no longer attending school. Many association members are either widowed or single mothers who cannot afford to keep their children in formal education. In addition, school and formal education are not seen as priorities for girls. Young women in The Gambia face a number of barriers and challenges that include teenage pregnancy, illiteracy, sexual violence and rape, and an extremely limited job market. The Skills Training Program, which is run in conjunction with U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers, endeavours to equip young women with marketable skills, so they can find gainful employment and start their own businesses. Girls attend classes four days a week at the TRY Centre and are provided with placement services to help them find employment once they graduate.

More recently, TRY has introduced a health initiative focused on the wellbeing of association members and their families. The program is founded on recognition of the importance of population health to economic stability and, at the scale of the individual, the importance of the health of harvesters to their ability to generate incomes for their families. The majority of activities thus far have focused on health education and awareness-raising, including on sexual and reproductive health, communicable diseases, malaria, and dietary health and nutrition.

Access to credit and savings services

Since 2010, the association has operated a microfinance program. The aim is to support association members with financial management skills and services, and to provide small, catalytic loans that enable members to start or improve upon small business ventures. Currently in its second round of loan disbursement, the microfinance program has been an unmitigated success. To participate, each woman must "buy-in" at the equivalent of USD 10. Each participant is then loaned USD 30 for investment into a new or existing small business enterprise. Of the 256 women involved in the first round of loan disbursements, only two did not repay their loans in full. Microcredit loans are complemented by a savings program, in which participating women are provided with secure safety boxes where they can store their money. To encourage larger savings during the second round of loan disbursements, the women who managed to save the most through these programs were offered additional, more substantial loans.

The microfinance program has provided TRY members with knowledge on how to manage their small businesses and how to save money. This ability to save and carry out financial planning has had important, positive implications for the capacity of women members to weather the nine-month harvesting off-season. It has also given women who lacked access to formal credit and savings, banks, and other financial institutions a range of services that allow them to grow their capital. Importantly, these institutions and services are sustained through the contributions and planning of TRY members themselves, leading to group empowerment and social capital accumulation.

Impacts



BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS

The vast majority of TRY members harvest oysters within the Tanbi Wetland Complex: a 6,300-hectare wetland reserve that includes estuarine and intertidal forested wetlands dominated by mangrove swamps. Designated a Ramsar site in 2007, the complex is home a variety of mangrove species, including *Rhizophora mangle*, *R. harrisoni*, *R. racemosa*, *Avicennia africana*, *Laguncularia racemosa*, and West Indian Alder (*Conocarpus erectus*). The wetlands capture incoming water and rainfall and play a vital role in stabilising the shoreline by retaining sediment and soil nutrients, replenishing groundwater, and controlling flooding. The ecosystem is home to a number of threatened or vulnerable species, including the African manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*), African Clawless otter (*Aonyx capensis*), and the Western Red Colobus (*Piliocolobus badius temminckii*). In addition, the shade from the mangrove canopy cover provides an important breeding ground for shrimp *Panaeus notialis*, which are an important part of the local food chain.

Reducing impacts on mangrove forests

Oysters harvested by TRY members grow wild in the mangroves. It has been a primary goal of the association to reduce the impact of harvesting activities on the mangrove forests and to reduce unsustainable exploitation of both timber and estuarine resources, including oysters. One way they have accomplished this is by adding value to the products that members sell and increasing the income members receive for their products. Because TRY members now receive greater income from harvesting fewer oysters, they are more receptive to responsible harvesting methods.

As one example, in 2011, women harvesters decided to extend the length of the closed season to allow the oyster beds more time to recover, reproduce, and grow to maturity. Fresh oysters were only sold from March to June, a shorter window. The result of the extended closed season, however, was a significant increase in the size of the

oysters, which brought a 30 per cent higher market price. Because of its clear environmental and economic benefits, this practice has been institutionalized in the Co-Management Plan for the Tanbi Special Management Area. As another example, TRY members have stopped cutting mangrove roots to remove oysters and, instead of using machetes, now use smaller knives to break the oysters free from the roots. Association members have also begun using baskets that have bases which allow undersized juvenile cockles to pass through, providing a built-in standard for no-take size limits. In addition to these activities, TRY's mangrove reforestation effort has seen a substantial number of tree seedlings planted over a sizable area.

The association is taking steps to explore how to reduce its reliance on wild oysters. TRY is working with a research team to train its members in aquaculture, where harvesting in a controlled, farmed manner would further reduce damage to mangrove beds. The aquaculture project involves growing oysters on strings that are supported by a lattice rack. This technique was adopted during a study tour to Senegal in which TRY members received training on oyster culture and processing techniques. Aquaculture offers a promising avenue for protecting the mangroves from damage during harvest periods, as well as for improving food security.

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

Women oyster harvesters have traditionally been among the most vulnerable, marginalized and neglected of working populations in Gambian society. Many are refugees from Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance region of Senegal – areas of political instability and ongoing, low-level conflict – and many more are the sole providers for their families. The main impetus for the formation of TRY was improving the livelihoods of these women oyster harvesters. The association has done so through a number of programs, including in the areas of raising safety standards and improving working conditions, expanding revenue streams, diversifying income-generation oppor-

tunities, and providing a platform for both collective bargaining and women's empowerment.

Improved working conditions

Historically, women harvesters have used rudimentary tools to collect oysters, lacking access to boats, protective gloves, boots, or life jackets. Oysters are also often collected under dangerous conditions, where the women are exposed to risk of injury and harm – incidents of drowning, attacks by wild animals, and rape are not uncommon. TRY has worked to mitigate the risks of oyster harvesting, making a number of changes to working conditions and implementing safety precautions. Women now have access to proper harvesting and shucking tools, where previously machetes were relied upon to serve a number of functions for which they were not intended. TRY has also facilitated access to safety equipment such as boats, life jackets and protective gloves and boots. The women also wear uniforms that identify them as members of the association, and will hopefully provide a degree of safety in numbers that could make them less prone to attacks.

Financial security

The majority of TRY members are the sole providers for their households. The seasonal nature of oyster harvesting has often meant extremely lean periods and intractable cycles of indebtedness, with loans taken to make ends meet between harvests. TRY has provided these women with a greater measure of year-round financial security. By developing more lucrative market supply-chains, improving value added secondary processing, and providing a platform for collective bargaining and marketing, TRY has ensured that its members receive fair wages and that income generation is possible year-round. Improvements in hygiene, average oyster size (due to the extension of the closed season), and storage and marketing capacity have all translated to higher market prices for their products. Effective storage and processing have been particularly important developments for extending the shelf life of the oysters – freezing, bottling, and smoking all allowing for continued revenue streams through the off-season. In addition to direct improvements in income, TRY provides women with much-needed and previously unattainable savings and credit services. A micro-finance and savings scheme is complemented by training on how to effectively manage finances and small business enterprises.

Education and training

Access to education and skills training have also been prioritized by TRY. What began as an effort to improve the basic education and literacy of its members has blossomed into a full-fledged capacity building program that extends not just to the women themselves, but to their families. Women oyster harvesters have typically been so impoverished that sending their children to school was viewed as a luxury many could not afford. The result has been a lack of social and economic mobility: a poverty trap. TRY aims to address this challenge through a range of educational programs and skills training workshops targeted at and tailored specifically for local girls.

By partnering with government organizations such as the Ministry of Gender's Women's Bureau and the Department of Community Development, TRY has been able to open up a range of vocational training options for these young women in the fields of cooking, baking, artisanal crafts, and more. The products from these trainings are marketed and sold, generating a revenue stream that is reinvested into educational programming. The intention is to provide the young women with vocational skills training, then classes on small business development and management, and then incorporate them into the savings and loan program in hopes that they will start new businesses. The women oyster harvesters also receive instruction in basic English language skills, reading and writing (with a focus on literacy), math, and accounting.

Empowering local women

Taken together, TRY activities have gone a long way towards empowering what was previously a highly marginalized and economically vulnerable segment of Gambian society. Now, as an established group of over 500 women with organized leadership, the association is a force of positive change and economic transformation in their communities. Rather than struggling individually, as they once did, women harvesters are now part of a flourishing and widely recognized local enterprise. The co-management agreement for the Tanbi Wetlands National Park puts women harvesters in regular contact with government officials and law makers, establishing them as relevant stakeholders in environment and development decision-making and planning. TRY has given the harvesters a collective voice, improved their quality of living, and furnished them with an active role in natural resource management.

POLICY IMPACTS

By organizing the women oyster harvesters into a group, and thereby giving them a collective identity and platform for representation, TRY has enabled its members to become involved in community law making. In January 2012, the Minister of Fisheries of The Gambia signed into law the Co-Management Plan for the Cockle and Oyster Fishery, declaring the Tanbi Wetlands National Park a "Special Management Area" for the purpose of community-based management in the interest of conservation, management and sustainable utilization of fisheries resources. The law gave TRY Oyster Women's Association exclusive rights to the cockles and oyster resources of certain areas within the wetlands complex.

In addition to exclusive fishing rights, TRY members are now involved in law-making processes around Tanbi Wetlands. Their knowledge of effective natural resource management techniques and the estuarine ecosystem have positioned them as valued stakeholders. TRY members have provided guidance, instruction and on-site demonstrations for high-ranking government officials. As co-managers of the Tanbi Wetlands Complex, the women of TRY are not only managing their local marine resource base, but an internationally recognized site of great ecological significance.

Sustainability and Replication



SUSTAINABILITY

Though TRY currently depends on outside donor funding, the association is actively exploring options to attain financial independence. Many of these options depend on the success of collective marketing strategies and the commercial viability of the locally harvested oyster products over the long term. TRY is attempting to create a niche market for its oysters which sets them apart from the competition and which also garners a higher premium. The association is, however, still a relatively new enterprise, with both a great deal of room for growth, as well as the potential for organizational challenges and other obstacles to expansion. As such, the association aims to grow its collective profits incrementally, focusing first on improving the incomes of its harvesters. TRY is still in the process of establishing its brand visibility, a process which the association recognizes takes time, energy and resources.

TRY has identified what it believes is a relatively untapped market: restaurants and hotels looking for authentic, high-end, exceptional quality oysters. The association has faced some hurdles, however, in terms of growing into the organization that meets this demand. A primary concern for commercial buyers – in addition to taste, aesthetically appealing packaging, and product presentation – is food safety and hygiene. TRY has made significant strides in this area by training its members in food handling and storage techniques. They are also currently partnering on a series of water quality surveys, which, thus far, have shown Coliform levels – a bacteria that is commonly used as an indicator of sanitary quality in water – to be within US standards for safe shellfish harvesting.

The association has a number of revenue streams which help with overall financial sustainability, including one-off membership fees, the sale of fresh and frozen oysters through the TRY Centre, broker fees for connecting buyers of fresh oysters, and the sale of value-added oyster and cockle products (e.g. in oil, dried, frozen and smoked) to various markets. Other potential revenue streams

that TRY has identified include the sale of alternative livelihood products (handmade crafts, soap, jewellery and food); charging a fee for microcredit services; charging fees for training, workshops and educational programmes; renting out the resource centre for meetings, educational events, social functions and celebrations, as well as for aquaculture, oyster management and sustainable entrepreneurship trainings; donor contributions from governments, organizations and individuals; and educational tours focusing on environmental stewardship and community-based ecotourism.

REPLICATION

Since 2007, TRY has expanded from a few members in a single village to 500 members from 15 villages across the Greater Banjul area. The association model has high potential for replication, both in other ecosystems and for other natural resources. TRY is in the process of applying for ownership of its own parcel of land on which it will construct a combined Resource and Processing Centre that would also serve as a National Office for the association. The ambition is for TRY to connect with other oyster harvesting communities in The Gambia and Senegal to provide comparable support and assistance, deepening the network and expanding opportunities for the sharing of best practice. The leadership of TRY have engaged in exploratory peer-to-peer site visits with other communities in Dakar to assess the viability of expansion.

PARTNERS

USAID: The majority of TRY funding comes from USAID, including from the USAID Gambian sustainable fisheries BaNafaa project. The association received a start-up grant of USD 18,000 from USAID in 2007. This initial grant was administered by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Coastal Resources Centre (CRC) of the University of Rhode Island, all coordinated through the BaNafaa project. This

arrangement has allowed TRY to foment strong relationships with WWF and CRC. Additional grants and loans have since been awarded to TRY by USAID through local Gambian agencies.

UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme: In 2010, TRY received a grant of USD 20,000 from the UNDP-implemented GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) for mangrove reforestation and aquaculture training, for a two-year period up to 2012.

UNDP The Gambia: UNDP has recently provided funding for value-added secondary processing through capacity building trainings and the provision of oyster processing equipment, including smoking ovens, freezers and vacuum packing machines.

Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism (ASSET): Within The Gambia, TRY has been working with ASSET since its initial stages. TRY is both a member and acts as a consultant on sustainable tourism practices for ASSET.

Government Departments: TRY works with multiple government departments in its co-management planning exercises, fundraising, and as consulting partners. These departments include: Parks and Wildlife, Fisheries, Forestry, Trade, and Education. TRY also works with the Ministry of Fisheries, Water Resources and National Assembly Matters, the Ministry of Gender's Women's Bureau, and the National Environmental Agency. Through the Tanbi Wetlands Co-Management Arrangement, TRY members continue to collaborate with officials from the Department of Parks and Wildlife to monitor and police the mangroves. Partnerships of this kind ensure local support for TRY, as well as provide widespread recognition.

U.S. Peace Corps: Peace Corps Volunteers have been crucial to the development of TRY as they work on the ground with TRY staff and members to implement trainings, conduct research, and develop the association.

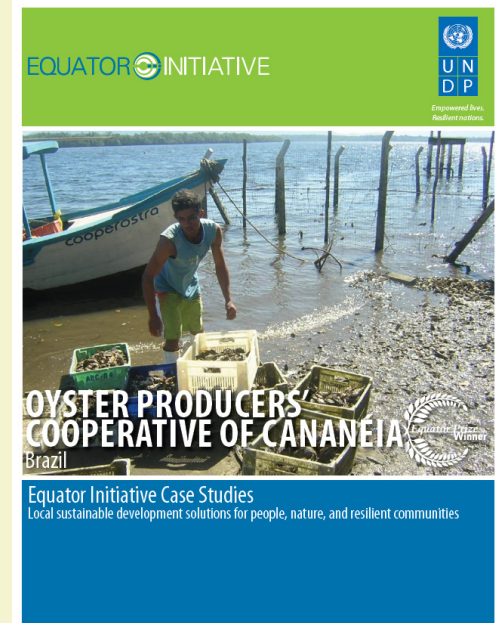
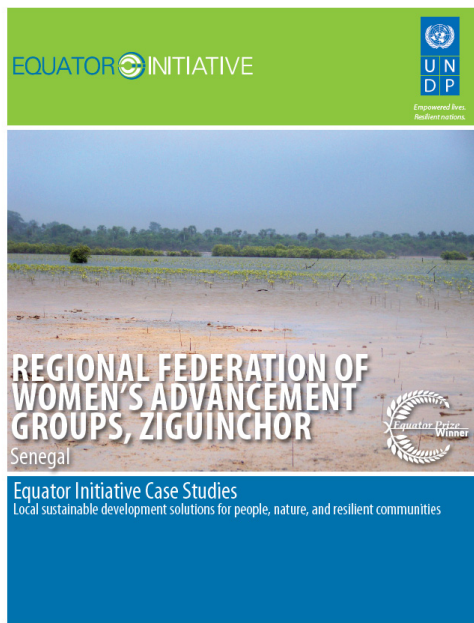
Action Aid: The organization has provided significant funding for the TRY Girls Skills Class Program and has allowed it to expand and offer improved classes and trainings to members' daughters.



FURTHER REFERENCE

- TRY Oyster Women's Association Equator Initiative profile page: http://www.equatorinitiative.org/index.php?option=com_winners&view=winner_detail&id=156&Itemid=683
- TRY Oyster Women's Association website: <http://try-oysters.com/>

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