

The Gambia National Sandwatch Workshop 2011



INTRODUCTION

With funding from UNESCO under the Participation Programme 2010-2011 biennium, the Gambia UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) conducted its first National training workshop on Sandwatch, climate Change and Environmental Awareness for UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) school coordinators and students for schools in the greater Banjul area. Ten (10) ASPnet schools attended and each school was represented by 2 teachers and 3 students (5 Participants). Fifty (50) participants from the Associated Schools were trained during the workshop.

The workshop was the first activity under the ASPnet UNESCO funded project “Promoting initiatives in support of United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in UNESCO Associated Schools in The Gambia”.

It was attended by 10 Associated Schools (50 participants) including the two new ASPnet schools, SBEC International High School and Bakoteh Annex Lower Basic School. With these new entrants The Gambia is now home to a network of 22 UNESCO Associated Schools nationwide from Region 1 to Region 6.

The project is multifaceted and aims to build the capacity of teachers and students from twenty-two (22) Associated Schools (regions 1 -6) in The Gambia so that they can sensitize their communities about climate change, environmental awareness, coastal protection and Education for Sustainable Development.

This workshop will be followed by a similar one for the other ASPnet Schools upcountry to be held at Mansakonko in June 2011 as well as a school-based waste management through the provision / production of waste bins (inscribed with UNESCO and ASPnet logos) for ASPnet schools to promote a healthy school environment. A Green School Environment Project: Planting of fruit trees in school environments and provision of gardening materials to provide shelter, food will conclude the project.

Attendance:

The opening ceremony was attended by; The Director, Regional Education Directorate, Region 1, representing the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, the Executive Director, National Environment Agency, the Secretary General Malia National Commission for UNESCO, Secretary General Gambia National Commission for UNESCO, Secretary General Gambia Teachers Union, head School of Education, Gambia College, Senior Education officers, School Principals, the National ASPnet Executives and the print and electronic media among others.

As part of collaborations between the Gambia National Commission for UNESCO and the Mali National Commission for UNESCO, the Secretary General of the Mali National Commission (Prof. Youssouf Dambelli) attended as a special guest. The occasion was used to sign an agreement between the Mali and The Gambia NATCOMs by the two Secretary Generals.

Sandwatch:

It started in the Caribbean in 1999 and has become an international activity involving islands as well as countries in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa and more recently in five West

African countries, namely Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands.

It is thus an educational process through which school students and community members learn and work together to scientifically monitor their beach environment so as to critically evaluate the problems and conflicts and then develop and implement sustainable activities to address these issues.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the training workshop are:

1. To assist teachers and students with the help of local communities in applying their information and local knowledge to the wise management and enhancement of their beaches.
2. To reduce the level of pollution in adjoining seas, oceans, creeks and rivers.
3. To share information on Sandwatch methods of monitoring and analyzing data gathered on the beach environment.
4. To involve schools, teachers and students in the scientific observation, measurement and analysis of beaches using an inter-disciplinary approach, language, arts, biology, geography, history, creative arts etc.

OUTCOMES:

The ASPnet Coordinators and students would have acquired the following by the end of the workshop:

- i. Learn and work together to critically evaluate the problems and conflicts facing their beach environment;
- ii. Acquired technical competence in developing sustainable approaches to the problems and conflicts of the beaches
- iii. Changing their own lifestyles and habit and to be in the position to sensitize the youth and adults for them to be aware of the fragile nature of the marine and coastal environment and the need to use it wisely.

DAY 1: OPENING CEREMONY



The Opening ceremony session started with the Chairperson, Mrs Adelle Sock (left), the Assistant National Coordinator asking the gathering to take a minute silence to offer individual prayers. She then introduced the members of the High table after the prayers.

On the high table were: Prof Youssef Dambell, the Secretary General of the UNESCO National Commission of Mali; Mrs SukaiBojang, the Secretary General, UNESCO National Commission of The Gambia, Mr. Momodou B. Sarr, NEA Executive Director, Mrs. Anna John Ceesay, Regional Director of Region 1 and Mr Yahya Al-MataarJobe the National Coordinator of ASPnet.



In his Welcoming remarks, Mr. Yahya Al-MatarrJobe (left), the National Coordinator of ASPnet, welcomed all the invitees to the workshop. He welcomed in a special way the presence of Mr. Youssef Dambell, the Secretary General of UNESCO NatCom of Mali and the two new entrants into the Gambia ASPnet School family, that is SBEC International School and Bakoteh Lower Basic School. The National Coordinator revealed the themes of the project and explained that this could be achieved through the Sandwatch project. He emphasized the importance of organizing a National Workshop of this nature for ASPnet schools, providing waste bins for waste management and planting of trees to check erosion, provide shelter and food to ensure the sustainability of the project. He reiterated that the project is multi-faceted to protect the environment of the coastal region.

Mr. Jobe prayed that the National Environment Agency and the Gambia Tourism Authority will actively participate in the programme through monitoring. He finally thanked the invited guests and the participants to the opening ceremony for responding to the invitation.



In a statement made by Mrs. Anna John Ceesay (left), the Regional Director of Region 1 Education Directorate, she said as host Director, her statement will be based on climate change and sustainable development as these have become global challenges which have attracted world attention. She stated that there is increasing extremities in weather patterns such as global warming, heavy rains, floods and tsunamis which have decreased the habitats of some species and the diminishing of chances of ecosystems adapting to the environment. She reiterated that these have become possible as a result of undesirable environmental practices. She said these are the greatest threats affecting sustainable development. She said climate change and sustainable development are interrelated and therefore need to be addressed concurrently to prevent poor health, decrease agricultural activities and poverty.

She believed that these issues need to find their way in the Lower Basic, Upper Basic and Senior Secondary Schools curriculum to enlighten students as they can be effective agents of change. She challenged the invited schools which are the most active Associated Schools to use the skills and knowledge acquired to go back to their schools and communities to share the knowledge and experience acquired with them.



Mr. Momodou B. Sarr (left), the Executive Director of National Environment Agency in his opening address congratulated UNESCO ASPnet for organizing this workshop on the Sandwatch project. Mr. Sarr stated that The Gambia is one of the most vulnerable countries in Africa to climate change and as such all efforts to highlight the importance of climate change issues on lives and livelihood of the people is very commendable. He explained that the coastal and marine environment of The Gambia is an extremely productive ecosystem of significant marine biological diversity and that all the significant contributors of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) such as tourism, fisheries and services are within the coastal zone.

It is therefore a major concern where several scientific assessments have concluded that The Gambia is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change in Africa. He explained the climate scenarios anticipated to affect the entire West African sub region including The Gambia and what their anticipated adverse effect will be on The Gambia economy. Mr. Sarr went further to highlight the strategies The Gambia has developed to mitigate the country's contributions to greenhouse gas emission into the atmosphere as a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention to combat climate change and the Kyoto Protocol.

He affirmed that the NEA through the GEF – sponsored project, Adaptation to Coastal and Climate Change (ACCC), has supported some of the activities of Sandwatch in The Gambia. Mr. Sarr emphasized that youths have a very pivotal role to play in the management of our coastal areas and therefore strongly urged the youth participants to support the work of Sandwatch and ASPnet to protect the coastal environment.

OFFICIAL LAUNCHING OF THE SANDWATCH PROJECT IN THE GAMBIA The Secretary General of The Gambia UNESCO NATCOM, Mrs. SukaiBojang was given the singular honour to officially launch the Sandwatch project at the commencement of the Implementation of 2010 – 2011 Participation Programme.

In her launching statement, she described the Association School Project Network as an incubator or 'laboratory of ideas' and as such UNESCO has been providing funding for its activities under the participation programme every biennium. She therefore urged participants and members of the ASPnet to pay particular attention to world or global concerns. Mrs. Bojang reiterated that, since 1999, marine and coastal environment issues have come to be the front runner of UNESCO programme with the launching of the Sandwatch project. She said that the Sandwatch project is an educational process which provides a new vision of education, one that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future. She also expressed her gratitude on the respect The Gambia's ASPnet schools has gained at the UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, France, as a result of its accomplishments in many international initiatives. She said with the embarkation of the

Sandwatch project, she can see a landmark relationship due to the collaboration that has existed between UNESCO NATCOM, the National Environment Agency (NEA) and the Adaptation to Coastal and Climate Change project (ACCC) in The Gambia.

Mrs. Bojang finally thanked her colleague Professor Youssef Dambell, Secretary –General of the Malian NATCOM for UNESCO for gracing the launching of the Sandwatch project in The Gambia. After the speech, she formally declared the workshop open and also formally launched the Sandwatch project.