Empowering Women Vegetable Producers in The Gambia

In The Gambia, women represent key actors of horticultural production by managing the cultivation of vegetables in community gardens. However, because they lack access to irrigation technologies, many female farmers typically spend a good portion of their day fetching water from deep wells to manually irrigate their small vegetable plots.

In an effort to modernize the way vegetable gardening is done by women in The Gambia and to improve their livelihoods, efforts were undertaken to promote irrigation based on solar energy pumping and a drip system. The technology packages for solar pumping and drip systems are commonly too complicated to implement, operate, and maintain, and thus capacity building is usually required.

As part of the Gambia Commercial Agriculture and Value Chain Management Project (GCAV)—P125024, beginning in 2014, female farmers were targeted to receive assistance with systems combining solar pumping with drip irrigation. Over the five years the project was undertaken, vegetable gardens were fully equipped with boreholes and galvanized overhead tanks, using solar-powered water pumps to draw water from aquifers, and also with labor- and water-saving drip irrigation systems.

In addition, automatic fertigation and pesticide management systems were installed, along with appropriate perimeter fencing to protect the crops. When the project ended in 2019, the initiative had resulted in fully equipping 21 women-community vegetable gardens of 5 hectares (ha) each (105 ha in total) and had provided a blueprint for expansion into other areas.
The project also included activities aimed at securing land property rights for female farmers through land certification and facilitating the official transfer of ownership, including leasing titles, from heads of villages and districts to the women.

Furthermore, the project helped develop contract farming to connect women to markets (through an agreement with the largest exporter of crops in The Gambia), thereby increasing their income and improving their livelihoods. For example, it is estimated that D 230,000 (US$4,650) is earned from cultivating on 2.5 ha every two months. It is also noteworthy that the Director of Horticulture Department who helped lead the improvement of vegetable gardens as part of the project was later appointed as the Minister of Agriculture in 2019.