



Sandeles

2014-Gamtouri-072
COMCEC Funded Programme
Eco-Village Design
June 2015

Strengthening Community Resilience Through Ecotourism



EDE Spring 2015 - Programme Delivery Report

A group of people, mostly men, are standing in a circle in a large, brightly lit hall. They are dressed in casual or semi-formal attire. In the center of the circle, a person is kneeling or sitting on the floor, possibly performing a ritual or a dance. The hall has a high ceiling and large pillars.

A group of people are performing a traditional dance in a circular clearing under a thatched roof. The dancers are wearing traditional attire, including yellow and black clothing. The audience is seated around the perimeter of the clearing, watching the performance. The setting appears to be a traditional village or community gathering place.

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This is the second EDE and it was supported by the graduates of the 2014 programme that was funded by the Bosch Foundation. All of them came from Kartong and are members of the Kartong Eco-Village Network (KEN) which is the community that has been identified as the first for village engagement within the People's Coast. They took on roles of facilitation, organisation, child care and logistics which has helped them to further develop the facilitation skills they gained last year.

This group was enhanced by the arrival of an International Faculty from Zimbabwe, Egypt, Canada and USA, who were there for varying periods through the programme and played an important role in delivery. Jillian Hovey was with us throughout the both the EDE and the Permaculture Design Certificate that followed and wove a connection through all of the dimensions with many practical ideas that have really taken Sandele to a new place in terms of holistic application of permaculture and good land practice. Daniel Greenberg made spectacular contributions to the Worldview and Climate Change as well as bringing good connections with Gaia Education and Earth Deeds. Mongy El Mohammed added enormously and helped the facilitation team to further 'Africanise' the programme and participants to appreciate the strengths of Africa alongside building skills and understanding of conflict transformation. The team were joined by Mugove Walter Kyika for the final week and it was a privilege to have this African giant of permaculture as he enthralled all who came into contact with him.

COMCEC funded the participation of delegates from two other COMCEC countries which meant that 6 people from Senegal and 2 from Guinea Bissau were able to join the programme. These countries share the wider bio-region and their participation added a deeper richness and set the scene for further joint initiatives in the future. They became such a fundamental part of the group, that it was seen as essential that they be given the opportunity to attend the follow on Permaculture Design Course that happened just after the EDE. This had not been the original intention, and there was no funding for this to happen but Sandele did not consider it right for them to be excluded after the contribution they had made and the commitment they had shown.

COMCEC funding covered 21 participants for 3 weeks with an expectation that a small number of local participants would be funded by the project owners. An EDE needs 4 weeks of intensive attendance in order to be certified so the budget was stretched in order to accommodate this. In the event, 35 participants were included. Sandele and the Project Owners gave freely of their time, resources and expertise in order to fulfil this added requirement.

As with the previous year, great attention was paid to ensuring that there was a high calibre of committed and able participants selected to attend (see separate Selection Report). Although this required a high input of resources and effort, it paid off handsomely. It was an honour to have John Gomez, the world's first Alkalo (village head) attend the programme and he has committed to work with the other Alkalies in the People's Coast to take the concepts forward. Everyone who attended was able to graduate and the participants were readily able to form an active community which supported their learning that has endured after the course and beyond.

The EDE curriculum is delivered in Four Dimensions, Worldview/Cultural, Social, Economic and Ecological concepts are covered and it is a training of trainers programme. In addition to formal learning, there is an emphasis on capturing hearts and minds with reflective opportunities and practical phases where participants have the opportunity to roll up their sleeves and practice leadership skills alongside experiential activities.

The days were long, beginning with morning practice and a choice of meditation, yoga and a guided beach walk. Theoretical learning tended to happen in the morning with practical experiences and group work in the afternoon. The programme revolved around the Islamic prayer times in order to allow the Muslim participants to honour their rituals. Kabilo (family/home groups) meetings happened most days and allowed time for reflection, community building within the group and absorption of the inputs. Evenings tended to be slower times with films and more gentle inputs which were less demanding. Fridays were free days allowing the Muslims their special day and there was a later start on Sundays to allow the Christians to attend Church.

Opening the course began with the women and the men having a short gathering which led into a ritual where the female participants were welcomed by the men into the space that was to be their home for the following weeks. Introductions to each other, course content, norms and values as well as orientation to the bio-region, the concept of eco-village, Gaia Education and Sandele happened over the first two days.

The Worldview Dimension began with Be The Change/Awakening the Dreamer Symposium that was developed by the Pachamama Alliance and set the scene for understanding the impact of current western ideology on the environment, the economy, our spiritual values and our understanding of social justice. It helped to underline the pervasive effects of a worldview that sees human activity from a perspective of separateness. It is a quick way of helping participants into the harrowing effects of our current behaviour on the planet and each other. However, it quickly assists participants to understand what is possible now and what part they may take in making a contribution towards a more socially just, environmentally sustainable and spiritually fulfilled human presence on Earth. This paved the way to a deeper understanding of personal and planetary health.

The Facilitation Team were very keen to ensure that every opportunity to 'Africanise' the EDE curriculum was maximised and particular attention was paid to bring in the values of the African Global Eco-Village. A treasure hunt was a major activity that helped participants to appreciate the importance of Africa in global history, the richness of this continent and bring out many events that are not normally told in western media.

The importance of story was emphasised and this led to the concept of the Hero's Journey and the timeline stories of individual's lives. This in turn, culminated in each participant presenting their own "I have a dream" speech in front of the group.

An introduction to eco-systems, climate change and reconnecting with nature made a good introduction to The People's Coast along with the challenges and potential negative impacts of uncontrolled tourism. Tying this in with the concept of a whole systems

approach helped participants to understand the importance of moving on from adopted positions to understanding needs and eventually onto an understanding of shared values where all are able to see that conflict resolution is more than possible.

In the Social Dimension, conflict transformation, power dynamics and developing a culture of peace were covered along with communication and decision making skills. Participants were practicing their presentation skills heavily during this phase of the programme. Dragon Dreaming was presented and project groups began to emerge.

Understanding the built environment, dealing with 'waste' and understanding of community based tourism ushered in the third week. This flowed into a stimulating blend of the economic and ecological dimensions where an understanding of the negative impacts of the global economy on local communities and the strategies and principles for building strong local economies. A full day action packed open-space of practical demonstrations of skills and potential products was enjoyed by all and the whole course was rounded off by in-depth work leading to presentations by all of the project groups.

The graduation was a well attended event with dignitaries from all of the villages, representatives of the Ministry and Tourism Board along with participant's family members. The participants presented a drama which captured many of the concepts they had learned. They each made a public personal commitment statement and the project groups all presented their visions and objectives. A presentation on the principles of The People's Coast was shown and certificates were presented. It was rounded off with some of the beautiful songs that the participants had shared during their time together. The whole event was televised and broadcast twice on the nation-wide Gambia Radio and Television Network.

Our thanks go to the Government of The Gambia through the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the Gambia Tourism Board for creating the opportunity with special recognition to Benjamin Roberts, Abdullie Hydara and Fatou Beyai Raji; to COMCEC, the project funders, none of this would have been possible without you; to the Area Councillors Lamin Jamba Jammeh and Karamo Bojang along with our invaluable Elder Amadou Sambou; to the communities and their entry points for making the selection process smooth and producing high standard candidates; to our able facilitators, Daniel Greenberg, Jillian Hovey, Mohammed El Mongy Mugove Walter Kyika, Gilbert Jassey and Simon Gibba who created a rich and meaningful programme despite the challenges; to Jane, Bobbie, Pablo and Joanna whose background coordination was essential; to the staff and members of the Sandele team who not only worked at full steam, but freed up numbers of their colleagues to attend the programme; to the Gaia Education Trust for their support with the certification of the programme; to the participants who worked so hard and were brave enough engage with the process and stepping into new territory in terms of thinking and experience. Last but certainly not least we are eternally grateful to the dedicated members of the Kartong Eco-Village Network who rose to meet every experience and obstacle with grace and enthusiasm. Apologies to whoever has not been mentioned who played a part in the success of this programme.