

Chapter 14

The Gambia Environmental Awards Scheme— Creating Environmental Awareness Through Participation

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In 1995, the National Environment Agency in The Gambia launched an Environmental Award Scheme. In a brief period, with limited financial resources, and in a climate of political uncertainty, the awards competition captured the imagination of the country. Eight awards categories engaged a wide range of groups at both regional and national levels.

The competition created an organizational infrastructure throughout the country that is being used in follow-up environmental planning and projects. The meetings, media coverage, posters, and other dissemination methods that were an integral part of the awards scheme became the springboard for broader discussions on environmental problems and solutions, involving many more people than those who formally entered the competition. All this was accomplished with extremely limited financial resources and—after a July 1994 coup d'état—in an atmosphere of political uncertainty.

This case study describes how the awards scheme was organized and why it succeeded. It shares these lessons with readers interested in a general overview of the program, and also provides details for those who wish to conduct their own awards program. Awards programs, in general, are excellent tools for generating awareness, sparking imagination, and building support. They are usually used in conjunction with other strategies for building awareness and education. Awards programs are most powerful when used in conjunction with teacher in-service programs, media campaigns, small-grant programs, or other communication or education efforts.

THE GAMBIAN ENVIRONMENT AND GAMBIAN POLICY

The Gambia stretches along the River Gambia in West Africa. Natural and human influences have created serious environmental problems. Desertification, deforestation, erosion, and soil degradation are among the issues that affect daily life and future prospects for thousands of people in all parts of the country.

The Gambia had a population growth rate of about 3.4 percent in 1994, one of the highest in the world. Most of its one million inhabitants are employed in the agricultural sector, although migration to the coastal city of Banjul is increasing at an alarmingly fast rate. This, in turn, has exacerbated environmental and health concerns related to solid-waste disposal, groundwater pollution, and the deterioration of infrastructure.

To address these and other environmental concerns, the Gambia Environmental Action Plan (GEAP), the country's national environmental strategy drafted in 1992, sets national priorities in the areas of natural resources, environmental health, and energy. Further, the GEAP identifies three cross-sectoral programs necessary to achieve these environmental objectives: 1) institutional and legislative framework development, 2) improved environmental-information services, and 3) environmental education and public awareness. The GEAP states: "Well-intentioned programs for the protection of the environment and sustainable development of natural resources have failed to avert accelerated environmental degradation and natural-resource depletion. A lack of public awareness of environmental issues remains a major constraint to the success of these programs."

Contests are frequently used by public and private institutions in many countries to interest citizens in some current concern.

NATIONAL AWARD SCHEME

To begin to address this shortcoming in public awareness, the National Environment Agency (NEA) developed a social-mobilization effort focusing on a National Environmental Award Scheme in 1994 and 1995. The NEA is an agency within the office of the Head of State with a 25-person staff and good credibility with the public. Competitions took place on divisional (regional) and national levels in eight categories, including those relevant to schools, businesses, and voluntary organizations. More than 200 individuals and groups entered. Many times that number of people were exposed to the scheme's messages of environmental awareness and action through media coverage, community meetings, the awards ceremonies, and other aspects of the project.

Contests are frequently used by public and private institutions in many countries to interest citizens in some current concern. Factors important to this award scheme's success were mobilizing participants, decentralizing the scheme, financial feasibility, communication, and time.

Mobilization

Participation by a wide range of individuals and groups was encouraged by developing a broad variety of competition categories and by building a media strategy for each step of the process. The award scheme became a major national event.

Decentralization

Planning, implementing, communicating, and decision making took place at the local, regional, and national levels. District Environmental Task Forces were formed to carry out the scheme in The Gambia's geographic divisions. They worked under the direction of the National Steering Committee, but with a great deal of autonomy.

Financial Feasibility

The small budget was decreased even further in July 1994, when a coup d'état resulted in reduced

donor funding for government initiatives. NEA spent approximately \$5,000 on the scheme, primarily for publicity, fuel costs for the outreach vehicle, some of the prizes, and a portion of the assessment trips in the Divisions. Throughout the process, Gambian public and private organizations donated gasoline and other materials, lent vehicles and other equipment, and otherwise enabled the scheme to go forward with a minimum of funds. If these groups and individuals had not already agreed to support the program through the mobilization and decentralization described above, they probably would not have contributed their own limited resources to the Award Scheme's success.

Communication and Publicity

Throughout the whole scheme, NEA publicized each step of the process through the media, to the general public. At the same time, NEA communicated with the task forces, and they, in turn, with the communities. This two-way street encouraged active distribution of relevant information.

Time

The Awards Scheme took place over a period of a year, thus there was sufficient time to create awareness, sensitize the public, mobilize resources, and build support.

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AT WORK

The success of many programs and efforts often lies in the degree to which the public accepts the ideas, are excited by the opportunities, and are supportive of the goals. Social mobilization is a way of achieving this support. It is a very broad approach that gives ownership to the community as a whole and retains little "control."

Author Neill McKee (1992) succinctly summarizes the strategies of social mobilization as five approaches to mobilize human and financial resources, as follows:

- ◆ *Political mobilization* wins political and policy commitment for a goal; the targets are national decision makers
- ◆ *Government mobilization* informs and enlists the cooperation and help of government organizations which can provide direct or indirect support
- ◆ *Community mobilization* informs and gains the commitment of local political, religious, social, and traditional leaders, NGOs, women's groups, and others
- ◆ *Corporate mobilization* secures the support of national or international companies in promoting appropriate goals
- ◆ *Beneficiary mobilization* informs and motivates the program beneficiaries through training, establishment of groups, etc

By most accounts, social-mobilization programs attempt to build national consensus. To do so, programs carry out a national education campaign through all possible channels, gearing up quickly and spreading the word. There is an assumption that by energizing more people to pay attention to a problem, good things will happen. Critics claim that accelerated programs are unsustainable approaches to long-term problems. Social mobilizers respond that these campaigns are merely the peaks in a continuous process of working toward the goal; that publicizing one event or program can have a positive impact on other programs; and that involving the community in the energy of this process will have far-reaching benefits that are not easily gained through other avenues. The National Environmental Awards Scheme is an example of social mobilization. The ways in which it used each of the five strategies listed above is told in the following pages.

Setting Objectives

The National Environment Agency established five objectives for the Awards Scheme:

- ◆ Increase environmental awareness among the public
- ◆ Promote and encourage public participation in environmental activities
- ◆ Promote environmentally friendly technology among relevant businesses and groups
- ◆ Demonstrate government recognition of individual and community efforts
- ◆ Reward individuals and groups taking positive environmental action

To achieve these objectives, NEA identified potential partners, established a coordinating mechanism to link these partners, and built support among target audiences. NEA wanted to carry out the scheme with a minimum of expenditure (using available resources and infrastructure) and maximum participation from the community at large.

The NEA Executive Director formed an Environmental Awards Steering Committee with representatives from organizations that ranged from The Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (TANGO) to the Ministries of Education, Interior, and Health. A total of 14 individuals served on the committee. NEA served as the facilitator and secretariat. The committee members included seven ministry representatives, and one representative each from the municipalities, women's organizations, NGOs, the technical training institute, and the chamber of commerce.

The Steering Committee had many tasks during its tenure. It first modified and approved the plan for the whole process, including the eight awards categories. It also discussed the choice of a logo and the entry forms for the competition designed by the NEA. Once the Divisional Task Forces were constituted, the Steering Committee defined their role, guiding their activities and monitoring their progress. The Committee was largely responsible for the media campaign, helping to design and implement it. The Committee also participated in the development of the judging system and discussed the types of prizes to be awarded. Some members of the Steering Committee took an active role visiting projects as part of a sub-committee, which reviewed all the top entries in each Division for the selection of the national winners.

Decentralizing the Scheme: The Divisional Task Forces

The NEA next approached the Commissioners, the heads of government of the country's regional divisions, to request that they serve as focal points for the Awards Scheme in their areas. All five agreed to appoint Environmental Task Forces to operate the program. While the task forces used the logo, entry forms, and other materials developed centrally, they had autonomy and decision-making power in determining how the scheme would unroll in their divisions. Although some variations existed among the Divisions, the task forces generally included the following members:

- ◆ Divisional Commissioner
- ◆ Assistant Divisional Commissioner
- ◆ Natural Resources Officer
- ◆ Divisional Health Team Officer
- ◆ Divisional Agricultural Coordinator
- ◆ Divisional Education Officer
- ◆ Divisional Forestry Superintendent
- ◆ Community Development Officer
- ◆ Field Officer of NGOs, such as Save the Children, Action Aid, and the Child Support and Rural Development Agency (CYSARDA)
- ◆ Divisional Councilors (including Chiefs)

THE COMPETITION: SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Eight categories of competition were established to encourage participation from every element of Gambian society—young and old, women and men, rural and urban, industry and microenterprises, government and NGOs, groups and individuals. Thus, the following types of activities qualified: school clean-ups, dramatists' performances, entrepreneurs' inventions, and neighborhoods "clean" income-generating projects, and others. (See Table 14.1 for a list of the award categories, their target groups, and possible activities.)

Broad criteria guided what types of projects were eligible within the eight categories:

- ◆ Environmental rehabilitation activities

- ◆ Activities that enhance the environment through sound and/or innovative natural-resource management, education, or energy use
- ◆ Achievements of individuals or groups that have campaigned, championed, or advocated for environmental causes

The major reason for holding eight competitions simultaneously was to maximize the number of people who could enter. The categories were chosen to focus attention on environmental priorities, which needed greater public participation, e.g., sanitation, sustainable agriculture, use of appropriate technology, reforestation, land rehabilitation, and sustainable development. A competition for women was provided to create an incentive for women's groups (typically formed to create income-generating projects) to become environmentally sensitive. Ultimately, these groups might integrate environmental strategies with profitable projects.

Another important consideration was to promote activities that people would not only want to do, but also would be able to do given their existing resources, such as time and equipment.

The individual competitions were broad in scope to allow innovation and more equitable participation. At one point, more specific activities for schools were discussed, but the Committee believed the schools with greater resources might out-compete those with fewer materials and money, and chose to keep the competition accessible to all.

Finally, the competitions were designed to generate activities in three broad, priority areas:

- ◆ Clean and beautiful surroundings
- ◆ Appropriate technology and sustainable development, and
- ◆ Clean and safe industry and enterprise.

Eight award categories, their target groups, and possible activities:

LAUNCHING THE AWARDS SCHEME

The Head of State officially launched the Scheme in April 1994, at a meeting of the National Environment Management Council. At the same time,

Table 14.1 Eight Categories for Gambian Environmental Awards Scheme

Category	Eligible Participants	Eligible Activities
1. Clean Schools, Clean Surroundings	Schools and other educational institutions	Clean-ups on school grounds or the surrounding community
2. Clean Ward	Groups, associations, the public at large	Clean-ups within the ward or surrounding community
3. Women and Environment	Women's groups and associations	Environmentally sustainable projects, e.g., tree planting or cooperative vegetable gardens
4. Community Sustainable Development	Individuals, groups, and associations	Environmentally sound innovations that improve the quality of life
5. Appropriate Technology	Individuals	Environmentally friendly technology that facilitates work
6. Clean Business and/or Industry	Companies and industries	Clean technology, appropriate waste disposal, clean premises
7. Clean Enterprise	Businessmen and businesswomen	Clean technology, appropriate waste disposal, clean and safe premises
8. Advocacy and Promotion	Individuals not employed in the environment sector	Projects that promote environmental issues locally, regionally, or nationally

NEA introduced a logo, entry forms, and posters in Banjul and in the Divisions.

The NEA Executive Director and Environmental Education Officer visited all Division Commissioners to enlist their participation and assistance and to plan how to publicize the Scheme regionally. These visits proved fruitful. In each case, the Commissioner decided to form and chair a task force to implement the Scheme in his division.

NEA also embarked on two major publicity activities at the national level: a multi-media outreach program and a media campaign. NEA worked with the Agriculture Communication Unit on the outreach program. Using the Communication Unit's vehicle and a portable generator, a team visited 35 villages and held meetings, displayed posters, and played films and cassette tapes with environmental themes. More than 6,000 people attended the various meetings, more than 25 percent of whom were women and about 10 percent of whom were youth. These meetings provided general information on environmental topics and then introduced the Awards Scheme. The team reported lively question-and-answer sessions, many

with community members who had never before had a discussion about the environment with a government official.

As part of a media campaign, NEA regularly provided articles to the newspapers. In addition, the agency, with the assistance of a local consultant, developed a series of interactive radio programs broadcast through Radio One FM, a popular private radio station. A team from NEA, including the Executive Director, answered questions phoned in by listeners in a format that proved highly successful.

Each Divisional Environmental Task Force planned the publicity in its own Division. This meant that each plan responded to local audiences and local media channels. Below are some examples:

Promoting to Farmers

The Upper River Division Task Force held meetings for farmers about the impact of agriculture, livestock, and forestry on natural resources and about the Scheme. In addition to interest in the competition, the meetings resulted in specific vil-

lage requests for follow-up meetings on environmental protection.

Working through Community Leaders

The MacCarthy Island Division Commissioner invited community leaders to a special meeting to discuss the Scheme. Guests included religious leaders, local officials, and representatives of youth and women's groups. The Commissioner explained the Scheme and asked these key individuals to support the Scheme through their channels.

Appealing to User Groups

The Western Division invited NEA to set up an exhibit at the National Livestock Show to display logos, posters, and other information. The NEA staff answered questions on the Scheme and distributed entry forms.

Focusing on School Administrators

In the North Bank Division, the Commissioner convened a meeting for primary and middle school headmasters to introduce them to the scheme and encourage them to initiate activities in their schools.

Multiplying Efforts through Teachers

In Greater Banjul, a meeting was held with teachers about the Awards Scheme, where the discussion turned to the role that teachers play in helping students acquire the concepts, skills, and attitudes needed to interact wisely with the environment. Teachers also asked about the role of the NEA.

Word spread beyond the people actually attending the meetings, listening to the radio, or otherwise participating in publicity activities. For example, students in several schools organized clubs and initiated school-wide activities. Indeed, at the end of April, when a NEA team made follow-up visits to all five divisions, they found that most traditional and religious leaders, *alkalos* (mayors),

women's groups, youth groups, and others knew about the Awards Scheme and its objectives.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment consisted of two steps: verification to ensure that what was reported on the entry form actually took place; and judging, to determine which activities merited prizes.

Designing an Assessment Strategy

NEA developed a verification procedure and judging criteria for the Steering Committee. The Committee decided that the Divisional Task Forces should judge the entries, using common criteria (see Box 14.2), rather than forwarding the entries to national decision-makers. NEA produced uniform judging forms and met with each task force to train for the assessment process and begin making plans for prize presentations.

Each meeting followed a similar pattern:

- ◆ Review of the progress of the Scheme
- ◆ Discussion of how to carry out field visits to verify and judge each entry
- ◆ Distribution of judging forms and training on how to use them
- ◆ Schedule the assessment
- ◆ Discussion of the prize-giving
- ◆ Discussion of a general time frame

Each Divisional Task Force then carried out its assessment using its own resources. Again, perhaps because the task forces had ownership in the process, and were given real decision-making authority, they were willing to spend their own money on travel and other expenses.

Each Division carried out the assessment slightly differently. The MacCarthy Island Task Force divided up the entries among the group. For example, the Education Officer was primarily responsible for visiting schools, interviewing the participants, observing the impact of the environmental activities on the school, and completing the judging form. In the Western Division, the entire task force created a grid to judge each entry as a group. In the

BOX 14.1

Four Major Criteria

- ◆ **Degree of participation:** for a group, the percentage that participated. For an individual, the level of commitment and motivation exhibited.
- ◆ **Cleanliness:** did appropriate solid waste disposal, reuse, recycling take place?
- ◆ **Magnitude:** did it cover a large area or population, or deal with several environmental issues?
- ◆ **Sustainability:** has this, or will this, become an ongoing activity?

Greater Banjul Area, an assessment team spent an average of four hours visiting each entry. Interestingly, while the committee members visiting schools reported some difficulty in differentiating among the many school clean-up activities, they had no hesitation in selecting the winners, which went far and beyond clean-up and beautification activities.

Each Division selected first-place winners in each category and, if there were sufficient high-quality entries, second and third places. The names of the top three overall winners (regardless of category) were then submitted to the National Steering Committee as candidates for the national prizes. A subcommittee was constituted to visit each of the finalists' projects to observe the activity, interview participants, and seek opinions from others in the community about the impact of the activity. The National Steering Committee reviewed the subcommittee's findings and selected the three national winners.

The Steering Committee decided that the prizes should be appropriate tools or other equipment to allow the winners to continue with their work—prizes included wheelbarrows, watering cans, gardening tools, and the like. The

winners also received certificates, and each entrant received a letter of appreciation for having participated. Funds for prizes (\$25,000) were provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the United Nations Development Programme.

THE WINNERS

In total, there were 210 entries. Of these, 94 were prizewinners that received certificates and tangible, useful prizes; the rest received letters of appreciation for their participation.

Each Division submitted their three top entries, regardless of category to the national competition. From these, the National Environmental Awards Steering Committee selected three national winners through actual visits to each of these projects. The prizes were determined through consultation with the recipients to ensure the prize would be valuable to them. The First prize winner was given a borehole (well). Second prize was \$5,000 to be spent according to a participatory rural appraisal study. Third prize was fencing materials requested by the recipients. In addition, each of them was nominated for UNEP's Global 500 Award.

The National Winners

First Prize

Tahir Ahmaddiyya Muslim High School—A Model of Environmental Management

The students in this Lower River Division school have turned their school into a model of environmental management. They planted drought-tolerant trees, plants, and an orchard; collected rain water for use during the dry season; made compost and used organic fertilizers in the gardens; and established a waste-disposal system with recycling measures. In addition, they established an Environment Club, which produces drama on environmental issues for neighboring schools and communities. This has been so successful that other schools in the area are copying the idea. The school is relatively small, with 450 students.

The students in this Lower River Division school have turned their school into a model of environmental management.

Second Prize

Touba Taffsir Village Community— Preventing Bush Fires

This Jahanka farming village in Upper River Division has been collectively managing their environment (a large forest, livestock grazing area, and an orchard) around their village for the last 18 years, primarily by preventing bush fires. At the end of each rainy season, the village Imam (Muslim leader) and the elders of the village mobilize the community in bush fire control measures, including fire belts and fire tracing. If by accident there is a fire, the entire village is mobilized to control it. The village and surrounding area are in outstanding condition. The government and others in the Gambian civil society are now trying to integrate this approach into other natural-resources-management programs.

Third Prize

Somita Kambeg Kafo—Community Sanitation, Health, and Environment Improvements

This kafo (group) consists of about 200 women in Somita Village in Western Division, who are successfully carrying out an environmental-health program that involves regular cleaning of the village and proper waste management. The kafo also established an environmentally friendly garden, where compost is used and water is conserved. Through songs and drama, the women in the kafo teach others in the community about sanitation and the environment, while providing entertainment.

Additional Entries

Following are examples of entries in each category. Every category did not draw equally from every region of the country. As Table 14.2 indicates, some categories attracted more entries from rural areas, and other categories from urban areas.

Clean School and Clean Surroundings: Bakau Newtown Primary School

More than 1,000 students, teachers, and parents worked together to maintain a school garden and

Table 14.2 Categories of Entries by Region

Category	Rural	Urban
Women in Environment	high	low
Sustained Development	high	low
Clean/Safe Business	low	high
Appropriate Technology	low	high

compost pile, plant fruit trees and flowers, promote an inter-classroom clean-up competition, and clean the area surrounding the school. Families contributed money to purchase plaster and paint for the classrooms and additional trees and plants.

Enhanced Ward: Serrakunda East Kafo

Serrakunda is a peri-urban area with a very high population density in the Greater Banjul area. There are many street vendors and limited street-cleaning services. The Serrakunda East Kafo consists of a group of people, mostly women, who have organized themselves to systematically clean and protect an area surrounding their homes. They provide and maintain refuse bins, sweep the compounds, supervise the proper disposal of human waste, and plant trees and other plants to keep the area clean and attractive.

Women and Environment: Women's Cooperative Crop Production

A women's association in Jamwelle Village mobilized 70 people to work together on a year-round gardening, tree planting, and a sheep and poultry project. All these activities were complementary. For example, the poultry ate leaves from planted leucaenia trees, chicken manure was used to fertilize the vegetable garden, and both the vegetables and the poultry are used to improve the diet of the community.

Community Sustainable Development: The Sea Defense Project

Banjul's Muslim community reduced coastal erosion around the community's cemetery. Rallied

More than 1,000 students, teachers, and parents worked together to maintain a school garden and compost pile, and plant fruit trees and flowers.

by a committee led by the Imam, thousands of Muslims filled in a cliff face with boulders and wire reinforcement. Community members donated money to purchase materials and volunteered their time. Men, women, and children worked side by side over a period of seven weeks depositing roughly 1944 cubic meters of boulders. The magnitude of the initiative was so great that the government agreed to maintain the cliffs.

Appropriate Technology: New Horizons Technologies

Another project related to coastal erosion took a very different approach. Sand mining to make construction blocks has depleted many beaches. New Horizons Technologies, a family-owned company, began experimenting with making blocks out of laterite dust and cement. The company has purchased two presses and is manufacturing and promoting the blocks.

Clean, Safe Business/Industry: Shell Marketing Gambia Ltd.

This unusual entry came from one of Gambia's few large companies. The project consisted of building a new airplane fuel depot at Yundum airport to increase the storage capacity. The facility, which was in the last stages of construction, is impressive because of the many human and environmental protection measures that were incorporated in its design. Among these are: (1) a drainage system for the collection of all possible leakage and spillage which could occur during operations, (2) warning equipment, (3) emergency shutdown devices, (4) an effective communication system, (5) a fire-fighting system, (6) staff training for safety. The sub-committee of the National Environmental Awards Steering Committee which visited these premises had no idea that such modern environmental-protection measures were operating within the country. The Award Scheme helped to publicize this worthy endeavor which can serve as a model for other industries and businesses.

Clean Enterprise: Awa Camara

This woman is a market vendor who sells vegetables in a large, congested market. Awa ensures that her stall has a container (usually a used cardboard box) for disposal of old vegetable leaves and other such waste. She also has a plastic bucket, which she used to fetch water from the faucet to wash her vegetables. She then discards the water in the nearest drain. As a result, her stall is clean, dry, and attractive.

Advocacy and Promotion: Njogu Touray

Njogu Touray is a well-known Gambian artist, whose concern about environmental protection grew out of his appreciation for the beauty of nature. Increasingly, his vivid, bold paintings have focused on pointing out environmental degradation caused through human activity. He also became concerned about lead paint and other environmentally degrading materials used by artists and, thus, has spent the last five years experimenting with natural resins, instead of plastic sprays, and using natural pigments for his paintings. He is hoping to produce a booklet on natural art materials of The Gambia for one of the next Award Schemes.

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER: THE PRIZE CEREMONIES

The Steering Committee awarded in-kind prizes, not cash, to regional and national winners as visible incentives to others to participate in the future. Prizes such as wheelbarrows, rubbish bins, tools, sports equipment, and other items will help contestants continue their activities. NEA purchased these items, as well as certificates, plaques, and trophies.

Each Division organized and conducted a large, public celebration to award the prizes to winners, with people often traveling long distances to take part. A team from the NEA, including one or two members from the National Steering Committee, delivered the prizes to the Divisions and participated in the awards ceremonies. (See Box 14.2 for a typical ceremony agenda.) The NEA Media Offi-

Banjul's Muslim community reduced coastal erosion around the community's cemetery.

cer telephoned a report to radio and newspapers in Banjul at the end of each ceremony. However, the agency could not provide funds for the ceremonies themselves.

These ceremonies provided a way for different groups to come together to support a common cause. For example, the event in the Western Division brought together all the Division's chiefs for the first time since the District Commissioner had taken office.

The participants included regional authorities, traditional and religious leaders, prizewinners, friends, school children, and music and drumming groups. The regional leaders were involved in presenting the prizes and making the presentations. There was much rejoicing, dancing, and drumming, and the prizes were well appreciated. As the truck loaded with the prizes went along the road, or stopped to wait at a ferry crossing, people would approach it, cheer, and clap.

The National Awards Ceremony took place jointly with the opening of a workshop to launch the National Environmental Education Strategy. The Minister of Agriculture served as master of ceremonies, and the Minister of Education read a message on behalf of the Head of State. Two other cabinet Ministers also attended. The country representatives of both USAID and UNDP made presentations. Most of the Divisional Commissioners were present, and so were many dignitaries and members of the business community and NGOs. At this event, the prizes for the Greater Banjul winners and for the three national winners were presented.

A broad cross-section of people engaged both in formal and non-formal environmental education, including the members of the National Environmental Awards Steering Committee, remained at the site for a two-day workshop to review and approve the proposed National Environmental Education Strategy.

WRAPPING IT UP: LESSONS LEARNED

As noted earlier, several factors contributed meaningfully to the success of the National Environ-

BOX 14.2

Lower River Division Awards Ceremony

- ◆ Arrival of Guests and Winners
- ◆ Introduction by Task Force Chairman
- ◆ Welcome by District Commissioner
- ◆ Remarks by USAID Representative
- ◆ Keynote by NEA Executive Director
- ◆ Presentation of Prizes
- ◆ Vote of Thanks by a Chief
- ◆ Drumming and Dancing
- ◆ Departure

mental Awards Scheme: widespread mobilization, decentralization of decision making and authority, feasibility in terms of expectations and resources, open communication, and sufficient time.

Additional strong points include the following:

- ◆ *The planning and steering of the Scheme was done collaboratively.* Through the National Steering Committee, representatives from government (the Ministries of Education, Health, Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Interior) and non-governmental organizations helped plan, steer, and monitor the Scheme.
- ◆ *There was strong support from the public media.* The newspapers and radio reported the process. A series of interactive radio programs provided information and maintained public interest during the implementation phase of the Scheme.
- ◆ *There was full involvement of the National Environment Agency.* From the Director to the typists, the entire staff had a stake in the success of the Scheme. All had different roles to play; each performed his or her role with a high level of commitment and enthusiasm.
- ◆ *NEA played a facilitating and coordinating role.* The Agency has good credibility, and the various Ministries, NGOs, and Division authorities fully accepted NEA's role as the facilitator and coordinator of the Scheme.

Each Division organized and conducted a large, public celebration to award the prizes to winners, with people often traveling long distances to take part.

- ◆ *Divisional Task Forces had the responsibility for implementing the Award Scheme regionally.* These Task Forces, headed by the Divisional Commissioner, were composed of government extension officers, regional representatives of NGOs, and traditional leaders. Because these people live and work in the regions, they knew the specific environmental problems and were in positions to influence others.
- ◆ *There was strong cooperation and support from government, donor agencies, and the community.* The members of the Divisional Task Forces, in particular, gave of their time, voluntarily, adding arduous tasks to an already full schedule. In addition, they shared other limited resources. NEA, as noted, supported the process, and USAID and UNDP funded purchases of prizes.
- ◆ *Winners received in-kind prizes.* Providing wheelbarrows, tools, equipment, fencing, and even a well for the top prizewinner was better than giving cash prizes. It resulted in the distribution of vital tools and equipment to groups that could use them, and it provided visual incentive to others to enter future competitions.

A Few Difficulties

There were several challenges in the development of this particular awards scheme. Though not all would be present in other situations, other concerns will need to be overcome.

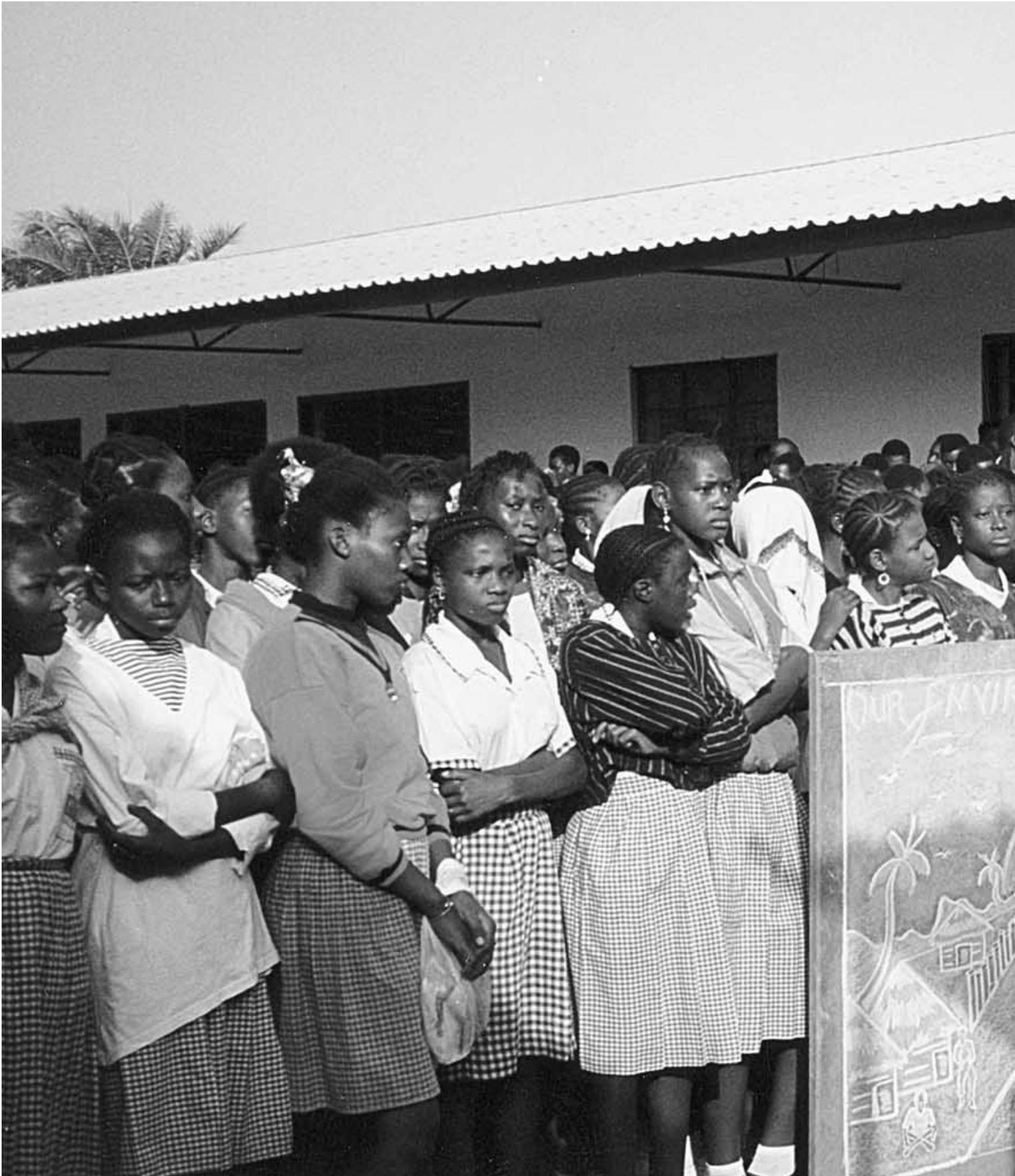
- ◆ *Coup d'état:* Without a doubt, the greatest problem encountered was the coup d'état which took place about four months into the development of the awards program. An attempted counter-coup took place immediately after. This transition caused great political uncertainty and, therefore, a delay of several months as some donor-funded projects closed. Funds and equipment that were to come through USAID's GreenCOM Project were no longer available. In addition, the

Divisional Commissioners (the heads of the Divisional Task Forces) were replaced. It was thus necessary to repeat the process of consultations with the Commissioners to gain their support and commitment to continue to lead their Task Force.

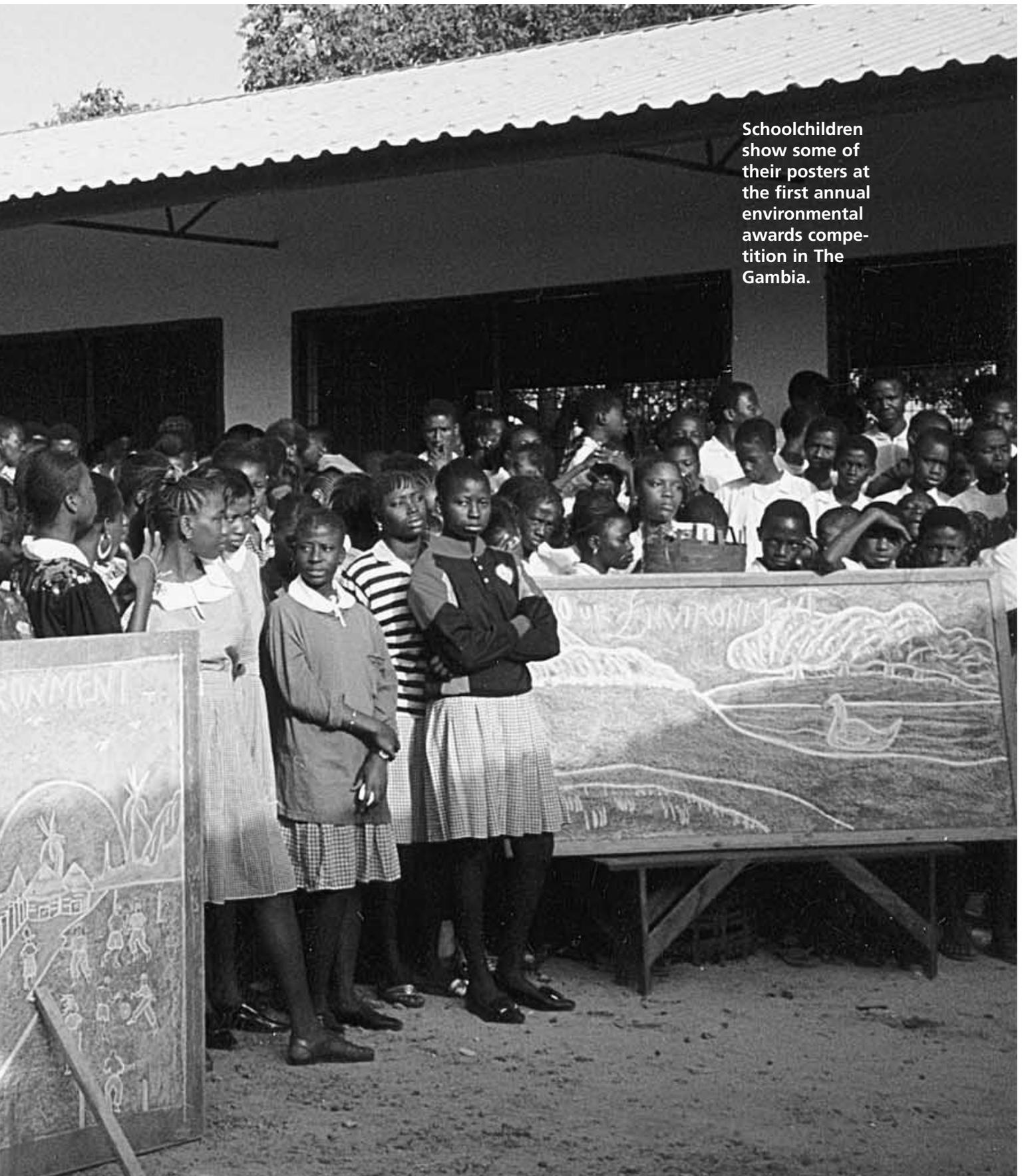
- ◆ *Transportation:* Although The Gambia is a small country, transportation is difficult. The roads are very poor in places, and ferry crossings are inevitable. Crossing small rivers and creeks was arduous at best, and sometimes dangerous, particularly when carrying prizes to the recipients.
- ◆ *Limited regional facilities:* The Divisional Headquarters had very limited facilities. Thus, entry forms, certificates, assessment forms, etc. had to be produced in Banjul at the National Environment Agency and taken to the Divisions. Every opportunity was taken to "catch" people who were going "up-country" and use them as messengers.
- ◆ *Limited financial resources:* Although the aim was to implement the campaign through existing infrastructure and resources, funds to assist with transportation and pay for more radio time would have increased publicity. The Divisions placed a great deal of importance on the prize-giving ceremonies, but no funds were available through the secretariat. In spite of this, the Task Forces went ahead, utilizing existing resources and events, and organized large ceremonies with full representation of the people and dignitaries in each region. These ceremonies became important support-building occasions, which in the future should be included in the budget.

Spin-offs and Extensions

- ◆ Several additional programs and projects have resulted from the Awards Scheme.
- ◆ An infrastructure (the Environmental Task Forces) was created at the regional level, which is now being used for the decentralization of environmental management.



Schoolchildren show some of their posters at the first annual environmental awards competition in The Gambia.





At the podium, USAID and The Gambian officials launch the awards scheme in April 1995 (above). Members of The Gambian National Environmental Agency's Award Scheme Task Force, Lower River Division, were proud to participate (right).



Without a doubt, the greatest problem encountered was the coup d'état.

- ◆ The Awards Scheme created an opportunity for staff from NEA and other Ministries to be closely involved with “grassroots” environmental concerns and endeavors. This resulted in stronger links and goodwill for NEA and other institutions in the Steering Committee.
- ◆ Many of the participants in the Divisions actually requested visits from extension agents to enlist help with their projects. This provided opportunities for extension officers to meet the expressed needs, rather than the more typical case of planning workshops around topics they think will be useful to residents.
- ◆ The lessons learned from the Awards Scheme are being applied to other social-mobilization activities, such as the Participatory Rural Appraisals being carried out to develop regional and local action plans.

NEXT STEPS

Perhaps the greatest impact of the scheme is what will happen to future environmental activities. Will the individuals and groups who entered the scheme sustain their projects? Will they be joined by others? Or will interest decline? To date, several events have occurred that bode well:

- ◆ NEA secured funding and successfully completed the second Environmental Awards Scheme. Over 300 entries were received (a third more than in the first Scheme). At this printing, the third Awards Scheme has been launched with great enthusiasm.
- ◆ Shell Oil Company, a winner in the first competition, contributed to the prizes in the second awards scheme.
- ◆ An additional category is being created for ecotourism to encourage environmental activities among hotels and tourist organizations.
- ◆ The National Environmental Award Scheme is now a yearly event, culminating on World Environment Day. It is an accepted strategy to encourage environmental awareness and participation.
- ◆ NEA staff all agree that the scheme is becoming easier to implement because the infras-

structure is in place and the facilitators have learned from past experience.

- ◆ NEA has used the publicity-campaign strategies developed for the scheme in subsequent endeavors. For example, in informing importers and others in the agricultural sector about a newly passed pesticide-registration law, NEA embarked on a media campaign that included interactive radio programs and community meetings.
- ◆ The National Awards Steering Committee and the Divisional Task Forces, which were formed to guide and facilitate the Awards Scheme, did not end after the first prize giving. Instead, they began implementing the National Environmental Education Strategy and have agreed to continue to facilitate the Environmental Award Scheme on a yearly basis at the regional level. The National Steering Committee was given a few new members and converted into the National Environmental Education Steering Committee. The Divisional Task Forces work with NEA and, after training some of its members in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques, assist in designing local environmental action plans. (One of the first PRAs carried out was in Tabu Taffsir Community, one of the national winners, to help it determine what assistance it needed as its prize.)

The National Environmental Awards Scheme in The Gambia is not a perfect model. Like all successful programs, it worked well in the context in which it was planned and implemented. For example, the country is small, and although transportation is scarce, a few media vehicles can cover much of it. Leadership, flexibility, and a commitment to a better environment, however—commodities which exist in countries large and small—can create the conditions for an awards scheme to engage people in environmental improvement.

References

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