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Strengthening Women and Youth Through Postharvest and Agro-Processing Training

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The village of Jenoi in the Gambia's Lower River Region hosted an intensive capacity-building programme from 11–14 November 2025, aimed at empowering women and youth in vegetable and fruit postharvest management and agro-processing. Conducted under Work Package 2 of the *Enhanced Vegetable Production and Processing for Rural Women and Youth* project, the training emphasized the crucial role of postharvest technologies in reducing losses, improving food quality, and creating income-generating opportunities. In a region where horticulture is a key livelihood activity, strengthening skills in postharvest handling, processing, and value addition is essential for enhancing food security, reducing waste, and fostering long-term economic development.

Postharvest losses in the Gambia remain high due to poor handling, limited processing capacity, and inadequate storage. Women and youth form the backbone of local vegetable production and marketing; and are particularly affected by these challenges. This training responded to these gaps by equipping participants with skills needed to reduce losses and increase the value of their produce through improved handling and processing techniques.

Outcomes of the training

A major outcome of the training was improved knowledge and practical understanding of postharvest handling techniques among participants. The training also emphasized food safety, hygiene, and product quality standards, which are increasingly crucial for accessing both rural and urban markets. Farmers were introduced to Good Handling Practices (GHP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), and basic cleaning and sanitation requirements. Farmers gained a clearer understanding of proper maturity indices, cold-chain management, hygiene practices, sorting, grading, drying, fermenting, and packaging of vegetables and fruits. Participants also developed skills in producing value-added products such as tomato sauce, chili paste, dried onions, and cabbage pickles, which can be sold in local markets for higher returns.

Another important outcome was the enhanced collaboration between farmers, extension officers, and development partners. By bringing these actors together, the training strengthened agricultural support networks in the Lower River Region. Extension officers gained deeper insights into the challenges faced by local producers and acquired new teaching materials including posters, manuals, and processing guides to use in future community outreach. This interaction promoted long-term sustainability, as trained officers will continue mentoring farmers after the project's completion, ensuring continuity of skills and reinforcement of good practices.

Benefits to Women and Youth

The training provided women and youth with practical tools to transform perishable produce into stable, marketable products, offering important income buffers against fluctuating fresh-produce prices. Through the introduction of value addition, participants gained the ability to diversify their livelihood activities and reduce vulnerability to market gluts and seasonal shortages.

Participants also benefited from training in food safety, hygiene, and product quality standards. This knowledge strengthened their ability to produce goods suitable for informal and emerging formal markets. Many youth participants reported feeling newly empowered to establish micro-enterprises in dried vegetable snacks, bottled sauces, and powdered spices. In addition to technical skills, the training also built confidence, leadership, and problem-solving abilities, helping women and youth overcome barriers such as limited access to tools, restricted mobility, and lack of prior training opportunities.

Sustainability

The programme highlighted the importance of supporting farmer groups to establish village-level processing units that can serve as hubs for continued production. Such units will allow farmers to collectively access processing equipment, adhere to consistent quality standards, and scale production beyond household levels.

Another priority area for sustainability is improving access to basic equipment and packaging materials. Starter kits including knives, trays, jars, and drying racks will enable trained participants to immediately apply the skills learned. Furthermore, access to targeted financial support, such as grants or micro-loans, will be critical for establishing micro-enterprises and procuring necessary equipment.

Strengthening market linkages with cooperatives, aggregators, and local retailers will help sustain demand for processed products. Refresher trainings every six months are recommended to reinforce good practices, troubleshoot challenges, introduce new technologies, and maintain momentum among women and youth groups eager to apply their new skills.

The capacity-building activities conducted in Jenoi represent a significant investment in rural livelihoods and the transformation of local agrifood systems. By equipping women and youth with critical postharvest and processing skills, the programme directly contributes to reduced food loss, increased household income, improved nutrition, and strengthened rural entrepreneurship. As participants begin applying these techniques within their communities, the long-term impact is expected to extend beyond individual households—supporting the growth of small processing enterprises and enhancing the resilience of the horticulture sector across the Lower River Region and The Gambia as a whole.

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