

LEARNING THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AND
ORGANIZING TO CRAFT STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS FOR URBAN
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE GAMBIA

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Democratic decision-making inclusive of all possible stakeholders in defining issues, goals, agendas, and implementation of programs is perhaps the key to promoting sustainable agricultural development in Sub-Saharan Africa. In The Gambia, as elsewhere in the developing world, farmers singularly have been, for far too long, assigned a nominal role, largely as passive recipients, in the higher order processes of decision-making for national agricultural policies and practices. Yet the creation of responsive innovations that could contribute to a reversal of the persistent low productivity of agriculture in most of Africa just might be contingent upon farmers having greater influence and voice in the planning and implementation of development interventions. The traditional hierarchical relationship among farmers, central governments, international aid agencies, and agricultural researchers and extensionists should be replaced by a more democratic practice in which stakeholders engage in genuine partnership relationships based on the principles of mutual accountability, respect, trust, and power sharing, and in which individual knowledge and expertise are valued.

This dissertation recounts a participatory action research project I initiated in The Gambia to understand and advance democratic partnerships among private and public stakeholders involved in urban agriculture in the Greater Banjul region of The Gambia. As action research, it was conducted in partnership with a community of inquirers consisting of farmers, researchers, extensionists, central government

policymakers, and international aid agencies. The approach also blended direct action organizing of farmers to strengthen organizational and entrepreneurial capacities. In this dissertation I make the case that absent this foundational phase, farmers cannot develop the agency required for them to function as genuine partners in agricultural development processes. The inquiry catalyzed the emergence of a culture of farmer-led organizations in the urban agriculture sector of The Gambia. I had multiple roles in this study. The role of chronicler of the research process is the most important to completing this dissertation. This work represents a collective experience, recounted through the many voices of the research partners and participants.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author is a native of The Gambia, where she also began her agricultural development career in 1978. Following her undergraduate studies at the University of Florida she returned home to work with both small-holder and large-holder farmers to promote a market orientation to horticulture production. In ensuing years, in collaboration with farmers and other professional colleagues, Isatou also was actively engaged in organizing farmers to build politically savvy producer organizations that would give them a voice in decision making for agricultural development. Isatou entered Cornell University in 1998, earning a master's degree in International Agricultural and Rural Development and, subsequently, a doctorate in Extension Education. With the conclusion of her higher academic pursuits, and finally able to name her vocation, *educational organizer*, Isatou hopes to return to development practice and to continue nurturing democratic relationships among agricultural development stakeholders.

For family, friends, and professional colleagues, with much love and appreciation

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1. REFLECTIONS ON A PROBLEMATIC SITUATION

1.1 Multiple Nuances of Skewed Stakeholder Relationships

From the Farmers' Angle. Farmer Jobe (not his real name) and I were discussing the current state of agriculture, mainstay of The Gambia's economy and foundation of its socio-cultural and political environment. We walked through his farm, in the village of Tangana in the North Bank Division, stopping at intervals to inspect sheaves of recently harvested sesame and groundnuts drying on the bare ground. As typical of the Sahel region of West Africa in November, the midday temperature soared in the high 90's Fahrenheit. "Let them come to the field and discuss with farmers instead of sitting in the capital, Banjul, planning alone," he rebuked, hitting at the crux of the problematic situation of relationships among agricultural development stakeholders addressed in my dissertation. He spoke in his native Wolof, the language of an ethnic group by the same name found in The Gambia and the neighbouring country of Senegal. Jobe was reprimanding the Gambia government, blaming the decline in production of groundnut, the country's primary agricultural export, on the failure of the largely state-controlled marketing system, which excluded farmers' perspectives.

Our conversation returned to the actual purpose of my visit to Tangana. I asked his thoughts on the role of farmers in a commodity-based training program supported by a non-governmental organization and which I was there to study. Farmer Jobe was even more condemning. His response, translated verbatim from the Wolof, is presented below in its entirety.

There is a saying in Wolof, *lam saff ka ko moja ko xam*: [Note. Literally translates into: the flavour is known only to the one who tasted. Often taken to mean the one who has undergone an experience knows best how it feels; in order words, knowledge is experiential]. We share a border with Senegal. Do you know why the farmer trained in Senegal learns better than the one trained

in Gambia? Here in Gambia the trainer goes and learns about farming in a book. He then comes to teach the person who has been squatting and farming all his life, with the attitude that the farmer knows nothing. Well, the farmer will go along with you even though he knows your advice won't work but since you are teaching him, well, we listen and say yes to everything he says. Here, let me tell you a story, I'll give you an example of what I mean. We once had a trainer from agriculture. He cleared an area in the village and planned to grow early millet. My father advised him he was planting too late; early millet had a time. My father told him he won't harvest a single grain. The vegetation would be healthy but no grains would form because he had planted late. Well, it happened exactly as my father had warned: no grains, nothing. The trainer thought insects had eaten the grains and so he sprayed the millet. But that was not the problem. He had simply planted too late. That's when and how he learned about the planting time for early millet. What I want to show by this story is that Gambian trainers should understand that they have knowledge but we also have knowledge that we can share with them. This is where Senegal is different. There it looks like the farmers are training the agriculture officers. They allow the farmers to lead, allow them to follow their own practice and they suggest improvements where necessary. They encourage the farmers to try new ways alongside their traditional practice. This is done with respect and the farmer learns of a different way of doing things, perhaps a better way. It's different with Gambian trainers. They come and force you to accept their ways. When things fail, they reprimand you for not doing as told. Yet he never visited you when you were following his instructions. He doesn't come on time; he doesn't come to see what isn't working. And when you inform him of what's wrong he just promises to send a report and that's probably the last you hear of him. So next time he comes to train you it's not likely you'll follow his instructions; you just listen and say yes to everything he says. I'll tell you whenever you call people to a training program; sure we will come . . . for the benachin [a popular Gambian dish] . . . that's the only reason because what we are being taught we probably know it better. The thing is if our knowledge is discounted, this devalues their knowledge. What they should do is to combine their knowledge and our knowledge and treat us with respect. Lack of communication and respect between farmers and trainers is a major problem. There must be respect and empathy between them. You see if I want to lift you up, I will only succeed if I stoop down to heave you from the bottom. But the way I see it those who want to lift us up stand tall above us, looking down on us. How is it possible for them to lift us up? If you want to lift people up you must be below them, lift from the bottom; otherwise you won't succeed. If you stand above them you will go up but those down will remain down. Take for example projects that come into the country. The goal is to uplift people. But anytime you stand above and look down on people you wish to lift up, it'd be impossible to do so. [Development] Projects have failed to improve the welfare of people [farmers] because of this attitude of standing above the people. Well, those doing the lifting will improve themselves but we will forever remain on

the bottom. Trainers should reduce their desires and pride and work with the people. This is something you people should talk about.

This script is replete with the history and *raison d'être* of the participatory action research (PAR) I initiated in The Gambia in 2002. It represents the canvas upon which this entire dissertation about relationships is recounted. In a nuanced and generous way, Farmer Jobe captures the problematic situation the inquiry sought to address in his vivid imagery of the “. . . they stand tall above us, looking down on us . . .” relationship existing between farmers and “trainers.” As will emerge presently, the relationship across “trainers” themselves is fairly analogous. Additionally, he insinuates the purpose of the study, which was essentially to bring about a state that would enable the understanding “that they have knowledge but we also have knowledge that we can share with them.” Moreover, he suggests some of the changes sought that might facilitate the desired condition, that is, “trainers should reduce their desires and pride and work with the people.” Where Farmer Jobe stopped short was in offering answers, or at least clues, to the main puzzle posed by the study: the “how to” question of reorienting the posture of “standing tall above” to one of “standing in line” with the people.

But first, who were trainers, the other protagonists in the saga above that Farmer Jobe was referring to? When I asked, he clarified that he meant agricultural researchers and extension agents. I presume those particular actors bore the brunt of his indictment because of their primary role as the frontline human instruments charged with translating agricultural development policies in the field and, therefore, are more visible and familiar to farmers. In all fairness to them, however, through this function they merely act as proxies for what may be considered another diverse set of trainers who normally remain in the background, invisible to farmers. The first would comprise government policymakers, responsible for articulating plans that Farmer

Jobe's class of trainers (researchers and extension agents) implement at the field level through projects he deemed as failures vis-à-vis their purpose.

The other invisible category consists of international donor agencies and non-governmental organizations providing financial support for the implementation of agricultural development projects. So, based on the connections between the trainers identified by Jobe and the invisible stakeholders they represent, it would be fitting to apply the term trainer globally to mean government policymakers of the institutions with which researchers and extension agents are affiliated, as well as to the other agency actors, all of whom are engaged in the agricultural development venture. In the following chapters, all these "trainers" reappear along with farmers as key actors in the inquiry about how to improve relationships among agricultural development stakeholders.

Returning to Jobe's narrative, one finds his comparison of trainers in Senegal and in The Gambia regarding their respective interactions with farmers compelling. For, while that rural farmer may not have read the literature, he was in league with a global body of development scholars (Biggs, 1990; Castillo, 1997; Chambers, 1997; Cook & Kothari, 2001; Crawford, 2003; Krishna, 2003; Pretty, 1998, Tandon, 1990; Thrupp, 1996) who have been engaged in continuous reflection and debate over appropriate forms of engagement among actors that would favour more effective agricultural development, especially in [so-called] developing countries. The scholars' main concerns echo that of the farmer (the practitioner), namely, the tendency to negate farmers' critical role, relegating them to the status of passive recipients or end-users validating predetermined agricultural development policies and programmatic interventions made by stakeholders of the trainer category (Chambers, 1997; Cook & Kothari, 2001; Collion & Rondot, 1998; Swanson, 1997).

More remarkably, perhaps, is that Jobe's assessment of the farmer-trainer relationship in the two countries insightfully differentiates two conceptual frameworks from which development scholars evaluate the substance and quality of interactions between and among agricultural development stakeholders. Each contender offers a different structural process that, in turn, reinforces a particular form of relationship among stakeholders.

The case in The Gambia, as Jobe described above, would align with the more prevalent, but increasingly discredited, transfer of technology (TOT) approach. This model is characterized by vertical or top-down modes of interaction vividly conveyed in Farmer Jobe's statement: ". . . they come and force you to accept their ways." On the other hand, the situation in Senegal more closely resembles the widely advocated alternative partnership model, defined by comparatively more horizontal relational arrangements that Jobe depicts as: ". . . they encourage the farmers to try new ways alongside their traditional practice." Reasons behind censure of the transfer of technology approach, interest in the alternative partnership model, and inherent difficulties in making a potential transformation will become evident throughout the chapters of this dissertation.

With special reference to The Gambia, the vertical, top-down posturing between farmers and trainers, reinforced by the guiding paradigm of transfer of technology, is reflected in the manner in which national agricultural development policies and programs are formulated and implemented. By and large, the higher-level processes of decision making and planning are centralized at the upper echelons of policymaking, and are often based on isolating problems to fit or push ready-made agendas or solutions (CORAF, ODI & CIRAD, 1999). In the agenda-setting process, farmers, the critical stakeholders likely experiencing actual problematic situations, are generally marginalized. Rather than being engaged upfront, farmers tend to be

relegated to subservient positions in the identification and prioritisation of problems, in mobilizing and allocating resources, and in the implementation and evaluation of agricultural development interventions. As if to corroborate Farmer Jobe's viewpoint, another farmer who was a partner in the action research left no doubts about the local situation: "We farmers, we are slaves of agriculture, they dictate to us what to do." In other words, farmers lack, or are denied, the voice and influence they deserve in defining the direction of agricultural development. Possible explanations are provided later in the chapter as to why this has been the case.

Jobe's statement that farmers have remained at the bottom because of such skewed relationships is more than metaphorical; his suggestion to talk about change not without merit. Undoubtedly, leaving farmers at the bottom might be considered reckless for a country like The Gambia where agriculture engages over 75% of the population, contributes over 40% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), generates almost 75% of total domestic export earnings (from groundnuts, cotton, fish products, and horticultural crops), accounts for two-thirds of total household income, and provides food and nutritional security for the country's population of 1.4 million (Baldeh, 1998; Ceesay, 1996). It is conceivable to attribute the decline experienced in the overall performance of agriculture in recent years, despite considerable levels of investments (DOSTIE, 2002), to persistent exclusion of the different but crucial and often practical knowledge farmers could bring to analysis of the myriad problems experienced in the sector. This omission has resulted in, *inter alia*, impractical or ineffectual innovations, inefficient use of scarce resources, and mediocre outcomes of agricultural development interventions. The need for a change in the status quo is quite evident.

The above synopsis of the consequences of the distorted relationship between farmers and trainers applies globally. But especially in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the perpetual grim statistics of low agricultural productivity, reduced

profitability, increasing poverty, and structural food deficits have been attributed to such exclusionary decision making processes (FARA, 2003). The gravity of the situation has occasioned calls for radical qualitative transformations in the roles farmers play in the agricultural development process. The consensus is for a new institutional architecture that would facilitate new relational arrangements.

Through the Trainers' Lens. Paradoxically, however, the problem of a skewed relationship between farmers and trainers, so vividly pictured in Farmer Jobe's narrative, was not unusual among trainers themselves. A similar hierarchical pattern appeared to condition relationships across international donor agencies, government policymakers, agricultural researchers, and extension agents. The following narrative from a trainer would be representative of the overall situation in The Gambia. This example is in particular reference to the researcher-extension agent relationship, which, as will be shown in Chapter Three, is socially and intellectually adversarial.

Well, we have some jealousies between research and extension. From my own experience, yes, our colleagues would see us as well paid because grades are not the same. They see you as principal research officer or research superintendent and when they compare it with that of the principal extension officer there is a big gap. And maybe they also see themselves as not getting the type of training researchers are getting. You find that it is the researchers mostly going for training at the international research institution level. But in those same institutions there are training programs for extension officers so that they also go to learn some of the research methodologies. If we have extension attending such training on how to conduct adaptive trials then . . . it becomes more effective . . . we could work better. There should not be a big and small brother relationship. That is one of the problems in the past, they see [research] as having more money, being paid more and probably some in [research] believing they are better educated in terms of their qualification. And of course where there is money there is power. And also when you sit together in forums you find the researchers dominate. Knowledge is power. But they should be equal in all aspects. After all, we are all targeting the same person—the farmer.

Interestingly, difficulties inherent in the relationship across different categories of trainers, and how those influence their respective relationship with farmers, have a

tendency to take a backseat in scholarly discussions about the nature of stakeholder interactions and impact on agricultural performance. And yet, as heard from the trainer above, the singular target of trainer activity is the farmer. This study tried to fill the gap.

In sum, the trainer's account corroborates Farmer Jobe's by clearly articulating a palpable and powerful theme underlining the farmer's narrative: knowledge. From both accounts, it would appear that differences in types of knowledge possessed by different actors play a major conditioning role in their relationships. And as will become obvious in the next section, relationships between and among farmers and trainers tend to be mediated by a history of differences: in education, resulting in a lower value attached to the knowledge of people with less or a different kind of education; in resource capabilities, engendering dissimilar perceptions of status and power; and, in institutional architecture, philosophies, practices, motivations, and agendas. Ultimately, all these factors impact on remuneration—monetary or positional recognition. Changing the narrow perception of knowledge was a grounding concept of the action research.

1.2 Grounding Conceptual Framework

Before turning to a discussion of the proposed solution, first there is a need to ask and understand why trainers (in the global sense defined earlier) and farmers are systematically wrongly directed in how their relationships are constructed. Notably, why are farmers “dictated” to by trainers? Conversely, why do farmers seem to willingly accept the “slave” role? A straightforward answer to the first question might be surmised from Farmer Jobe's statement: “the trainer goes and learns about farming in a book then comes to teach the person who has been squatting and farming all his life with the attitude that the farmer knows nothing.” In other words, the farmer's knowledge is discounted in favour of the trainer's. Actually, Farmer Jobe's entire

script points to a simple fact: a struggle over whose and what kind of knowledge counts. Is it the trainer's technical knowledge, in the case of researchers and extension agents typically derived from controlled experimentation and observation? Or, is it the farmer's practical knowledge, accumulated informally through prolonged experiential learning? And why can't both, technical and practical knowledge, count?

It is noteworthy that whereas Farmer Jobe recognizes the value of combining "their knowledge and our knowledge," the status quo is, unfortunately, quite the opposite. Criticisms abound that the knowledge, skills, and adaptive abilities of farmers are systematically and unjustifiably devalued because farmers are perceived as passive, powerless, and voiceless receptacles of externally generated knowledge (Kloppenburg, 1991; Murray, 2000; Röling & de Jong, 1998; Selener, 1997; Sumberg, Okali & Reece, 2003). Particularly in the development of most agricultural technology, the normal process has followed what Wilson and Cervero (1997) described as a strict technical rationality. What this means is that material artefacts, for example, equipment, chemicals, or a new seed variety intended to improve agricultural productivity, would be developed by researchers (or research scientists) and transmitted to farmers, traditionally through extension agents, for subsequent adoption or rejection. This is the process of transfer of technology. As Deshler and Grudens-Schuck (2000) argued, the farmer's involvement in knowledge construction, in "doing science," under technology transfer is neither necessary nor required. Given the recognized shortcomings of this model, the need for a reversal cannot be overstated.

The reason change is required is embedded in the Wollof proverb Jobe opened with, reinforced by Paulo Freire's (1990) argument that "[c]onfrontation with the world is the true source of knowledge with its different levels and phases" (p. 100). Moreover, Freire asserted, "there is no such thing as absolute ignorance or absolute wisdom" (ibid. p. 43). Jobe expressed similar sentiments in his observation that

diminishing the value of one knowledge system reflects negatively on the other. Jobe was identifying with a belief system in his cultural milieu, to which I also belong, based on a saying “*xamxam du bena, xamxam du doi*,” which literally translates into “knowledge is not one, knowledge is never-ending.” In that setting it is appreciated that when people are faced with a common problem or agenda, mutually desirable value is created only through dialogue (called “*disoo*” in Wollof) in order to “exchange” and share a variety of perspectives, technical and practical.

Apparently, this is not a widely practiced norm. The reason, as James C. Scott (1998) noted in making the case for “the indispensable role of practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation in the face of predictability” (p. 6), is that agriculture worldwide, but especially in less developed economies, has suffered from “an imperial or hegemonic planning mentality that excludes the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how” (p. 6). In the case of The Gambia this has often resulted in a narrow framing of the system of problems encountered in the agriculture sector.

Another explanation for why farmers are dictated to might be found, strangely enough, in the second question: why they seemingly accept the assigned deferential “slave” position. Despite what are apparently trainers’ poor attitudes and assumptions about the knowledge and capacities of farmers, Farmer Jobe agreed that “the farmer will go along with you even though he knows your advice won’t work . . . we listen and say yes to everything he says.” Why is this so? I later found one clue in a statement from a farmer involved in the study: “Farmers are *smart*; they will mobilize for projects. They are like passengers in a taxicab—when there is a breakdown they get off and wait for the next one. But I know that’s not sustainable and we need to change our mentality.” The mentality in question is what the farmer went on to describe as “a beggar mentality which causes government to manipulate us.” Such a

relationship would hint of power issues likely defined by different resource capabilities and conflicting interests among agricultural stakeholders.

Briefly, the argument could be made that the marginalization of farmers is linked to ineffective working relationships with trainers conditioned by issues of control, influence, and differential motivations and agendas. Perhaps more critical, the reason farmers are assigned a subservient status in agricultural decision making, planning, and practice is a tension between the value given different kinds of knowledge: the technical or theoretical of trainers versus what has been variously termed the local, indigenous, and practical knowledge of farmers. The major point to be taken away from the above discussion is that theoretical and practical knowledge are not equally valued globally. I would argue it is a myopia that has compromised, if not made impossible, intelligent practice in agricultural development endeavors worldwide. This personal conviction, combined with Freire's, Scott's, and Farmer Jobe's perspectives, represents the grounding conceptual framework of my dissertation action research on creating desirable forms of relationships among actors in order to synergize different kinds of knowledge and learning for more sound agricultural development decision making and implementation.

This grounding framework accords with a constructivist epistemology which posits that learning, or the creation of knowledge, consists of a social process in which all participants interact and negotiate what is socially known. The process consists of the individual making meaning based on previous and current knowledge structure (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Constructivist perspectives espouse the pluralism of knowledge while rejecting the hegemony of knowledge, and recognize the value of progressive co-learning. Additionally, integral to a constructivist epistemology is that learning is best facilitated when learners are empowered to take charge of their own meaning-making. Farmer Jobe's example of the farmer-trainer relationship in Senegal

aligns with this principle. Meaningful learning and the creation of new knowledge are believed to result from the integration of the cognitive and affective dimensions. Thus constructivist learning theories propose active engagement and active learning, both of which yield deeper understandings of process and output. This model is consistent with systems thinking and focuses on the development of a process to provide continuous feedback on a project as it is implemented.

Applied to the agricultural development arena, constructivism would place equal value on both the technical knowledge of research scientists and the practical knowledge of farmers. Within a constructivist framework, the creation of agricultural innovations, rather than being a technological achievement alone, would be seen and therefore conducted as a social process where stakeholders engage interactively, taking on both active and proactive roles in their learning. It would consist of an active learning process grounded within the realities of the participants in the process, exactly as Farmer Jobe affirmed. Actually, the farmer's entire story underscores the key precepts of a constructivist framework, notably that 1) reality is constructed by the individual based on his or her social environment and experiences; therefore, 2) learning is experiential, with the individual actively (not passively) constructing knowledge from experience through a reflective process; hence 3) interpretation is an individual phenomenon. My dissertation action research on how to adopt and adapt to partnership relationships was fully conducted according to these principles.

1.3 Overview of the Proposed Alternative Relationship

Worldwide, negative impacts on the performance of agricultural development, emanating from hierarchical relationship among farmers, researchers, extension agents, policymakers, and donors, the key actors in agricultural development, have prompted calls for qualitatively different relational arrangements that would recast their roles as active agents engaging in democratic, collaborative learning processes

for agricultural development (Escobar, 1997; FARA, 2003; George, 1997; Ondeng, 2003; Thrupp & Altieri, 2001; Uphoff, 2000). A top-down, non-integrative approach to development planning in general, but particularly so for agriculture, has generally proven inhospitable to the dialogue and open communication essential for multiple actors to create shared meanings of problems and to generate optimal solutions. Jules Pretty (1994) pointed out that effective and sustainable agricultural development depends on concerted effort and collective action by diverse actors, a similar allusion made by Farmer Jobe in 2002. No doubt creative responses to dynamic challenges encountered in agriculture would best be facilitated through forms of interactions able to harness the required diversity of expertise and resources unlikely to be supplied by a single group of stakeholders.

Increasingly, partnership is advocated as a desirable relationship among stakeholders for more effective agricultural development (Biggs & Smith, 1998; Byerlee, 1998; Castillo, 1997; Crawford, 2003; Krishna, 2003; Tandon, 1990). Partnership relationships are expected to facilitate the process Jobe recommended, namely, “. . . to combine their knowledge and our knowledge.” One of the most important questions, however, for which the search for answers continues unabated in the worldwide agricultural development community, especially in my disciplinary area of Extension Education, are the mechanisms that might eventuate desirable changes. For, how might one effect change among agricultural development actors accustomed to relationships based on lifting and being lifted from the top—to paraphrase Farmer Jobe—to modes of horizontal engagement consistent with the principles of partnership?

Partnership has been variously defined. Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus (1993) defines partnership in both structural and cultural terms. Thus, partnership could be an organizational structure, or, in a cultural sense, a form of relationship with governing

rules and norms. The structural definition is more commonly applied in its traditional home of business and management, where it identifies a form of inter-organizational alliance between two or more existing organizations that agree to combine resources to deal with such practical problems as operational inefficiency, resource scarcity, and lack of facilities (Bowditch & Buono, 2001). Generally, the partnership takes the form of a named, identifiable hybrid organization, established with the objective to take advantage of economies of scale and reduce uncertainty in the operating environment of the organizations. The partnership is governed by mutually defined norms and rules to protect partners' investments and achieve mutually defined goals.

Usage of the concept in agricultural development parlance is less clear-cut, suggesting the possibility of some ambiguity relative to whether the meaning attached is structural or cultural. For this reason, a variety of definitions of partnership abound, depending on the context and purpose of the user. Nevertheless, there are commonalities in the ideals advanced, including cooperation, sharing resources and expertise, and working toward mutually beneficial goals and outcomes (Castillo, 1997; Engel, 1997; Thrupp & Altieri, 2001; Uphoff, 2000). In both broad and specific terms, partnership is proposed as a novel idea for stakeholder relationships, intended to bring together plural voices, enabling them collectively use their knowledge and resources in conceiving, designing, implementing, and evaluating agricultural interventions. By enabling the mobilization and optimization of the comparative strengths of diverse actors, it is anticipated that partnership will yield higher rates of return on investments in agriculture (Byerlee, 1998; CORAF, 1999; FARA, 2003; Hall et al., 2001a).

Such high expectations raise multiple inevitable questions related to mechanisms for creating and sustaining partnership. The questions must be asked because the notion of partnership might be a radical idea in the arena of agricultural development. It is radical because actors expected to engage as partners belong to

institutions or organizational structures with highly different philosophies, practices, and resource capacities, with disparate motives and agendas and quite dissimilar perceptions of status and power. These differentials have historically supported a hierarchy that has defined who is or is not included in decision making processes to identify agricultural problems, opportunities, and needed actions.

Yet, partnership is desirable. It is a relationship consistent with the grounding constructivist framework elaborated on in the previous section. But partnership as a new institutional relationship for agricultural development would suggest significant changes in the approach and methods for generating and disseminating knowledge. Conceivably, the most sensitive changes would likely occur in the roles and perception of power by the different stakeholders engaged in a partnership. This is because even in the most ideal of relationships people bring to the table different interests, objectives, and agendas, all inputs into the negotiation process. For these reasons, therefore, the question that must be posed is how ideals (or ideas) might be translated into authentic practice. Or is partnership simply a matter of switching labels and continuing with business as usual? But if it is something more, what is that more, and how would that be attained?

These questions are pertinent to two crucial elements apparently overlooked in the discourse on and advocacy for partnership. The first element, power, is defined as the capacity to exert influence and is central to any human relations. Foucault's theories on power (1980) propose that all social interaction is defined by power relations. Power is never one-sided; rather, a dominant power position is met with a corresponding counterforce so that society functions by a multiplicity of points of pressure and resistance. In other words, power circulates. However, power issues are often ignored in the development discourse (Chambers, 1997; Crawford, 2003).

If partnership for agricultural development ought to be the difference from business as usual, then authority and control issues should be taken into account, because power rests in the control of resources and in agenda setting—what to do, why do it, who does it, when, how, and where. I would expect that partnership relationships between or among multiple parties should be premised on mutual interdependence, collective agency, and focus on learning to expose different views, possibilities, and actions. Unquestionably, such an egalitarian relational practice would entail a power sharing agenda, or what Edward Chambers (2003) described as relational power, where all concerned parties have an equitable voice in the decisions regarding the innovation process. It would fall in with Foucault’s concept of the circulation of power and its possession even by those apparently powerless (Foucault, 1980). But, according to Farmer Jobe, the “power over” agenda seems to prevail under present arrangements for agricultural development. How do we avoid using partnership as a cosmetic guise that would continue the “power-over game”?

Capacity appears to be the second neglected element in the advocacy for partnership. What is the state of preparedness of institutions and institutional actors to embrace the alternative norms and behaviors embedded in the notion of partnership? For instance, if partnership is advocated among farmers, researchers, and extensionists in a specific context where the traditional relationship is based on an “expert/non-expert” culture, then we should ask whether or not farmers and their organizations have the capacity to act, and be recognized, as agents in a partnership. Likewise, the question may be asked of research and extension institutions: are these entities able to embrace partnership as a relationship between them, and with farmers? In fact, Hall and Nahdy (1999) have suggested that since partnership is promoted in old contexts defined by centralized, bureaucratic hierarchies with historical patterns of practice, philosophies, and professional aspirations, institutional capacity is a determining

factor in whether a partnership is of a genuine or instrumental type. Noting that partnership is about relationships, Celia Castillo (1999) asked the following question: Is it possible to build capacity for relationships?

In combination, the key questions around power and capacity converge in the central research problem: how do we create and sustain democratic and reciprocal partnerships that are mutually powering? Acknowledging both the common sense for and shortfalls in the intense advocacy for partnership, Krishna (2003) argued the need for documentations of actual preliminary processes in specific contexts that assess the range of background conditions, design principles, and evolutionary patterns needed to support abiding linkages. This action research dissertation sought to shed some light on the mechanistic questions about creating and nurturing meaningful partnerships among stakeholders historically accustomed to vertical, top-down relationships.

1.4 Participatory Action Research and Organizing for Local Change

“We are missing too much and losing a lot by not collaborating.” This remark from one of my partners represents the clarion call for the action research I initiated and collaboratively implemented with a community of inquirers in The Gambia from August 2002 to September 2003.

To give some personal background, I have been a vested stakeholder in the Gambian agriculture sector for more than two decades. I was trained academically and professionally as a horticulturalist. I am a former employee of the Gambian public agricultural services, having worked in horticultural research and extension. I have had considerable management experience in the non-governmental organization (NGO) community. Last, I have been a private farmer/producer operating a commercial horticultural venture. All combined, I have had presence at both ends of the public-private agricultural sector continuum, and so have worn different hats as both a “trainer” and a farmer.

From such multiple vantage points and as a vested insider in the research setting, I was in a unique position to engage with horticultural producers/farmers, agricultural researchers and extension agents, government policymakers, officials of non-governmental organizations, and representatives of key donor agencies, in an exploration to understand the “how-to” questions around crafting stakeholder partnerships for more effective agricultural development in The Gambia. My co-partners in the inquiry represented the “critical reference publics” (Wadsworth, 1998), drawn from multiple categories of stakeholders constituting the urban agriculture system. Their collaboration occurred naturally, was invited, or was welcomed because it was expedient. The selection process is described in fine detail in Chapter Two.

The inquiry was situated in the urban agriculture system located in the Greater Banjul Area of the country. Urban agriculture (UA) is defined as the practice of growing and marketing high-value food and non-food products within and on the fringes of towns and cities (Mougeot, 2000). In the specific context of this dissertation, the urban agriculture system encompasses the integrated planning, producing, processing, marketing, and consuming of high-value perishable, edible (fruits and vegetables), and non-edible (ornamentals) horticultural crops; livestock; and related services. This system is highly market-oriented, with horticulture accounting for approximately 80% of entrepreneurial urban agriculture activities, the remaining 20% represented by livestock production (Akinbamijo & Fall, 2000).

Within the UA system itself the emphasis of the study was the horticulture subsystem. As the most important component of the urban agriculture system, horticulture holds considerable potential to promote national food and income security, two key ingredients for sustainable socio-economic development. Unfortunately, horticulture has suffered from the general malaise affecting the broader agriculture sector. It exhibits all of the deficiencies inherent in undemocratic processes of shaping

agricultural development goals and policies. The rationale for situating the study in urban agriculture was to contribute to exploiting the promise the sub-sector holds, through the creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships that would enable pooling of the knowledge, experiences, and resources of its diverse actors to yield better policies and programs. I should point out that throughout the dissertation, unless otherwise differentiated, the terms urban agriculture and horticulture are used interchangeably.

As a beginning step to move toward partnership relationships, my research partners and I began by interacting in various collectives to explore and reflect on the nature of current relationships among actors at two distinct but interlinked nodes along the urban agriculture continuum. First, we looked at the relationship between the frontline trainers, that is, agricultural researchers and extension agents, and, second, that between producers and “trainers.” Together we probed to discover answers to the operational questions: How did stakeholders currently relate to each other? In what ways were relationships strong or weak, and what underlying contexts influenced these? While surfacing constraints and weaknesses, we also explored opportunities to stimulate our relationships to perform better, and the concrete changes needed to move us toward partnership as a sustained practice. Throughout the entire action research, new questions kept emerging from the various activities undertaken.

Because it was action research, remedial interventions were initiated alongside the inquiry; in fact, at times the research was inseparable from the direct action. We were, however, conscious that results from our various research processes were intermediate, yet indispensable, contributions to a continuous process to improve upon the way actors organized for innovation in urban agriculture. As our collaborative study unfolded through spatial and temporal boundaries, and across various actors over the course of 11 months (and beyond), my partners and I were learning that partnership entailed much more than simply re-labelling existing relationships. We

learned it would be impossible to enter the realm of true partnership without first building integrity within our respective stakeholder institutions or organizations. This meant we had to begin by addressing deficiencies that hindered reaching inwards within individual stakeholder categories, even as we sought to reach outwards to others across the urban agriculture system. As one of the co-researchers soundly argued, “Let’s first strengthen the foundation, put in the concrete pillars, before building up the walls to the house.” I could not have agreed more.

My dissertation chronicles the home-grown process of building a solid foundation to ease the change into partnership modes of relating, philosophically and in practice. The narrative is written from a highly reflective perspective consistent with the mixed role I played in the study as a researcher, organizer, educator, process facilitator, and chronicler of activities.

1.5 Structure and Reporting Style of the Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two presents in detail the action research journey my research partners and I embarked upon in a quest for some answers to the question of forming partnerships. It discusses the action research approach, linking its epistemological foundations to methods used for gathering, analyzing, and utilizing data in the specific context of urban agriculture, whose systemic attributes are also described. Learnings from the action research at the two nodes are offered in two chapters; it is not that they are disparate, but are so presented for the sake of clarity. First, in Chapter Three, I report on the fold of the study in which researchers and extensionists engaged with me to critically reflect on the nature of their relationship with one another and how these affected their interactions with farmers. In the process we also identified constraining factors as well as options for improvement.

Chapter Four discusses learnings from the phase of the research in which I collaborated with different cohorts of urban agriculture stakeholders to understand and take action to resolve problems constraining relationships between producers and other stakeholder categories. Specifically, I provide an analysis of our attempts at organizing urban agriculture producers. Chapter Five draws on findings to present some emergent perspectives on partnership and implications for urban agriculture practice in The Gambia and for Extension Education. The dissertation ends with conclusions, offered in Chapter Six.

Before moving on to describe the action research journey, I should clarify a couple of points regarding the role of my personal experiences, the place of the literature, and the reporting style adopted in this dissertation.

Because I am a vested member of the research context, my personal experiences formed the foundation for this inquiry; therefore, bracketing them out of the whole process was not an option, accounting for certain choices made in the study. First, I chose to conduct my dissertation research using a qualitative approach, rather than a survey-type approach, because the former accommodates frontal parading of these experiences, and because of the affective and normative nature of the issues explored. Cresswell (1998) defined qualitative research as an exploration aimed at understanding a social or human problem in a natural setting to ground findings in context. The natural setting of this study has been my professional backyard for nearly two decades and my home for much longer. Strauss and Corbin (1998) convincingly argue that “the qualitative researcher is shaped by the process and is unafraid to draw on her own experiences when analyzing materials because she realizes these are the foundations for making comparisons and discovering properties and dimensions” (p. 5). My personal experiences along with those of my research partners are interwoven

throughout the dissertation, offering insights and illuminating the cultural context of the study.

The second point I want to explain is the place of literature in the dissertation. As important as the experiences of the research partners were to the analysis of this study, the insights of others outside of the research context who may have journeyed similar paths were equally critical. Naturally, the published literature has been a valuable source of additional knowledge to clarify both conceptual perspectives and empirical discoveries on the substantive topics of the research. However, because of the emergent nature of the study, it was impossible to have *a priori* knowledge of all the literature relevant to the emergent context-specific problems encountered. Therefore, reference to the literature occurred throughout the research process—before, during, after the fieldwork—and continued through the completion of report. More importantly, I chose to abide with H.F. Wolcott’s (1990) preference of not lumping the literature review as a separate chapter detached from the conceptualization, conduct, analysis, and interpretation of the research. As such, I contextualize the literature by presenting the dissertation chapters as a dialogue that interweaves the experiential knowings of the community of inquirers and the propositional knowings drawn from the literature, resulting in what Heron and Reason (2001) described as an extended epistemology.

Last, I recount the story of this dissertation using a narrative style. I did so because this form allows me, the action researcher, “to capture and represent shared stories of myself and the participants . . . to prepare a text that at once looks backwards and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experience within place” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 139). Similarly, for Greenwood and Levin (1998) narrativity permits true reconstruction of the cogenerative learning process that defines action research. The messiness of action research, brought about by the fusion

between data collection and action, becomes even more evident in the reporting. Narrativity easily accommodates such messiness. Moreover, a narrative style enables me personally, as the chronicler of the research process in my dissertation, to integrate reflections on my prior and present experiences in the setting. Above all, narrativity represents for me personal accountability, which Ellis and Bochner (2003) insist on, questioning how it is possible for authors to exclude their personal feelings and thoughts in their writing. To paraphrase the authors: after all, who is the person collecting the evidence, interpreting it, and drawing the conclusions?

Unfortunately, I faced one ethical dilemma in writing my dissertation. It concerned the issue of protecting research partners by not using their real names in reporting research findings. Whilst writing my dissertation, I constantly asked myself why I do not disguise who I am in this report, but cannot do the same for my research partners. As equal partners engaged in a democratic relationship, we spoke honestly and frankly to each other without any reservation. Therefore, it is distressing that I cannot openly credit them by identifying them in person; instead, only their anonymous but eloquent voices are heard. Considering the small size of the research-extension network in The Gambia, I cannot even give a brief description of speakers without exposing their identity. How should I give credit where it is due?

The way out was to compensate by “richly inhabiting the research writing with their voices, not just mine,” as advocated by van den Berg (2001: 91). I have abided by using extensive quotations from our many conversations over the 11 months of the fieldwork. In addition, I sometimes use the term “*we*” in retelling the research activities as another tribute to our collaboration. After all, we collectively took initiatives and were collectively responsible for any success or failure of our actions in the field. The only aspect of this journey from which they are absolved is in the

interpretation of the research findings and the conclusions drawn. For those, I am personally accountable.

2. QUESTING FOR RESOLUTION: ACTION RESEARCH JOURNEY

2.1 Impetus: Personal Agitations and Experiences

During the entire process of my dissertation research, from proposal development through the actual fieldwork and into the preparation of this narrative, a persistent question tugged at me: where does one's interest in investigating a specific issue stem from? I was trying to uncover the personal agitations and perspectives, if any, which must have steered me toward a journey to study human relationships. Specifically, what made me choose to focus on learning how to improve relationships among stakeholders involved in agricultural development, my professional milieu?

Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggested a source for a particular research interest that seemed a plausible explanation for my situation. They wrote: "Qualitative social researchers usually ground their research in extrasocial-scientific primary concerns of accidents of current biography and/or accidents of remote biography and personal history . . . that may or may not overlap with codified concerns of their scholarly discipline" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995:13). To state it differently, qualitative researchers bring into their research issues they consider problematic in their lives, and for which they are interested in finding answers. In the case of action researchers, they go a step further, testing the findings in action, effectively turning the inquiry itself into a practical intervention.

Incidentally, the important question regarding the form and quality of interaction among policymakers, farmers, agricultural research scientists, and extension agents, one more favorable to a democratic decision making process that would produce a more effective agricultural innovation system within a particular context, has similarly been posed within my scholarly discipline of Extension Education (Engel, 1997; Lightfoot et al., 2001; Pretty, 1998).

The “accidents” of biography that motivated my action research emanated from both the social and professional realms. In either sphere, I have always sought to understand, to challenge, even to change wherever possible, a condition I term “statusing.” At a consciously personal level, I have always harbored a deep frustration with the phenomenon of stratifying people according to such modalities as ethnicity, caste, economic class, occupation, or level of educational attainment, to name just a few. Particularly problematic for me is when such differentials are ascribed notions of superiority or inferiority and are used to overtly or covertly order the relationships among people interacting within a particular socio-cultural domain. I am deeply disturbed when, under such circumstances, those negatively attributed are denied voice and influence. Underlying this discomfort is an unshakeable belief that each person holds an equally valuable piece of the different threads that weave the tapestry of life. This mindset of inclusiveness constitutes the code of ethics that has guided my social and professional relationships, and especially my encounters with diversity.

Within the Gambian agriculture sector, particularly in the urban horticulture system, I have been dually identified, for over 15 years, with the “trainer” and farmer constituencies demarcated in the previous chapter. From multiple vantage points, I have been concerned by what I experienced as functional deficiencies in the relationship between and among the key actors operating in the urban agriculture system. Urban agriculture, and horticulture in particular, offers considerable potential to contribute in the socioeconomic advancement of The Gambia. Yet, relationships among researchers, extension officers, high-level policymakers, and farmers are rather tenuous, with much-weakened interactions. This situation has resulted in failures to exploit opportunities to pool the diverse knowledge and experiences of stakeholders essential for the creation of more responsive solutions to the myriad problems that contribute to the poor performance of urban agriculture.

As an active stakeholder in the sector, I have been obsessed with changing the status quo for the past 20 years. It is a fixation that compelled me to use the opportunity of my dissertation research to understand why this situation existed—but beyond mere understanding, to learn what practical actions were needed to strengthen stakeholder relationships. In this respect, I was the quintessential “opportunistic researcher” (Reimer, 1977, cited in Ellis and Bochner, 2003), studying to change my own setting.

2.1.1 Deciding on a Fitting Research Approach

When I embarked on my quest for answers, I was convinced that my experiential perspectives alone regarding the problem were insufficient. Moreover, I was concerned about the possibility that my perspectives might be construed as one “expert’s” assessment of the situation and which might be not necessarily embraced by other critical stakeholders. More to the point, if there was a need for change, as I was so convinced, certainly a single perspective on the problem and its remedy would be insufficient to initiate the crucial transformations. With such convictions, I recognized the value of engaging with similarly concerned actors so that we could develop a shared narrative of the problem, together search for deeper understanding of the complexity of issues involved, and collectively create possible solutions. Pretty’s (1994: 38) reasoning for participatory research resonated with me: “All actors, and particularly those stakeholders with a direct social and economic involvement and interest have a uniquely different perspective on what is a problem and what constitutes improvement in an agricultural system.” Consistently, I decided to use an action research approach (Greenwood & Levin, 1998) that provided the spaces and safety that served to draw forth the knowledge of multiple critical actors.

In conducting the study, I openly capitalized on my positionalities as a Gambian, a professional horticulturalist, a former private-sector operator, and

especially as a doctoral candidate to engage with key stakeholders to investigate the themes that shaped current interactions, and with the understanding generated, to take requisite actions to move toward relationships based on more democratic partnerships. Any anxieties I initially harbored of a unilateral view of the problem and options for its solution were put to rest by the enthusiastic and collaborative style in which the action research process reported in Chapter Two unfolded. One of my research partners provided the reassurance in this statement: “We have real problems that need real solutions. Developing effective, functional partnerships cannot wait for textbooks, cannot come from the World Bank, but from stakeholders on the ground coming together to seek real solutions. We should maximize the power of partnership, but our partnerships should not just be something in the head, they have to be results-oriented, and therefore the process has to be homegrown.” The textbook was a veiled reference to my dissertation, but my saving grace was the action research approach I had decided on that placed “stakeholders on the ground” in the center of the quest. And, of course, he was reminded that I, too, was a ground-level actor.

2.1.2 Overview of Chapter Two

Chapter Two describes the homegrown process the community of inquirers embarked on to learn how to build the foundations for changing into partnership modes of relating—philosophically and in practice. Over the course of 11 months, from September 2002 to August 2003, my co-researchers and I interacted in various configurations and through several group processes, generating mostly qualitative data that guided the concurrent actions taken. Consistent with qualitative action research, the process was emergent, unfolding almost like the pleats of an accordion. It consisted of a mix of pre-planned, expedient, serendipitous, but overlapping and interlinked research and action events. Since I was a constant presence in each of the activities, the various episodes informed one another. As fresh learnings and

perspectives emerged in one, these were brought into and utilized effectively in a different activity. Moreover, in keeping with the tradition, the entire action research process was an inevitable fusion of data gathering and direct action organizing. Naturally, this created a major writing challenge to maintain a neat separation between the investigative processes—the “research”—and the direct interventions—the “action”—aimed at bringing change. An illustration of such blending and its accompanying messiness is provided in section 2.4.5.3.

A core characteristic of action research is its context-specificity; therefore, following this introductory section, I provide a description of the salient attributes of the urban agriculture as practiced within the boundaries of the research setting. The description will include location, practices, actors, significance, and the systemic problems that warranted an inquiry into the processes of constructing and managing democratic stakeholder relationships in urban agriculture. In section 2.3, I discuss the action research approach adopted for the inquiry, its assertions regarding knowledge construction, and particular fit with the context and problematic situation. Next I explain another important issue often debated in both action research and qualitative inquiry (Cresswell, 1998; Maguire, 2000). It is the role of the professional researcher, who may be either an outsider or an insider in the research setting, relative to the issue of what and whose interests controls the research. In my case, I qualified as an insider. I narrate some critical incidents that show personal motivations for the inquiry and justifications for my role and practices adopted throughout the investigation.

Section 2.5 offers a rich and thick description of the actual study. I attempt to recapture, as much as possible, the minutiae of the multi-fold and cyclic process. I explain the unfolding of the research, from its initial conceptualization, to the actual fieldwork, specifically, the selection of research partners, our interactions that led to agreement on the final focus questions, data collection methods, through to gathering

and acting on the information. The strategies used to ensure quality of the data are presented in section 2.6. I end the chapter with my reflections on the process, challenges encountered, and the personal exhilaration experienced while engaged in the action research.

2.2 Setting: The Urban Agriculture Innovation System

Contributing to the debate over conventional technology transfer and process-oriented participatory approaches to agricultural development (specifically research and extension), Hall et al., (2001a) suggest looking at their institutional context from a policy perspective based on the concept of a national system of innovations (NSI). NSI is defined as the network of national institutions, their incentive structures, and their competencies that determine the rate of technological learning in a country (Edquist & Johnson, 1997). Drawing on the NSI literature, Hall and colleagues (2001a) described an innovation system as a network of institutions and their actors interacting within a specific physical domain of production to produce, diffuse, and utilize economically useful knowledge. The idea of an innovation system provides a useful framework for analyzing its component parts, the nature of their interactions, flows of knowledge and resources, and system bottlenecks as the basis for necessary remedial actions. A parallel notion with comparable function is that of the agricultural knowledge and information system (AKIS) propagated by Röling and Engel (1992), and more commonly used in current agricultural development parlance.

The Gambian urban agriculture innovations system includes a network of public- and private-sector institutions and stakeholders who interact in some form that keeps the system functioning. Their interactions produce, disseminate, and utilize a wide range of innovations. In this dissertation, the term innovation is given a broad meaning, encompassing technical, social, and political dimensions. Hence, innovations might include material artifacts (e.g. a new seed variety) and new agronomic practices;

new processes or policies, adaptations of an existing social organizational arrangement, or the creation of new institutional norms and expected patterns of behavior governing the relationships between and among stakeholders. Furthermore, and perhaps more critically, interactions among stakeholders produce practical judgments about what ought to be done, to benefit which interests, to pursue which purposes, and about who performs what functions within the system. Therefore, the aim of learning how to build partnerships is directly linked with where and how the work of making practical judgments happened in the urban agriculture system, as currently constituted.

For studying stakeholder relationships in a particular innovation system, Hall et al. (2001b) suggest a set of analytical principles that synchronized with the questions posed in the action research. These include assessment of the extent of institutional interactions, impediments to flows of knowledge between nodes in the system, opportunities for and constraints to interactive learning and institutional innovation, and policies and practices that can cause failures of the component parts to operate as a system. To enable the analysis presented in subsequent chapters using these principles, key systemic attributes of the urban agriculture setting of the research are described in the next section.

2.2.1 Location and Demographics

The inquiry was situated within the systemic context of urban agriculture practiced in the region officially designated as the Greater Banjul Area, which is located in the Western Division administrative area of The Gambia. The Gambia lies on the extreme western bulge of Africa, along the Atlantic Ocean coastline, and is surrounded on its east, north, and south borders by its only neighbor, the Republic of Senegal. A former colony of Great Britain, The Gambia gained independence in 1965 and is now a sovereign republic with a democratic political system. The institutional

framework governing the various branches of the State, including the public agricultural research and extension system, was inherited from the colonial administrative system, and has not changed in any significant way since the country gained independence in 1965.

Geographically, the Greater Banjul Area (hereafter, GBA) is an aggregation of large towns, periurban interstices, and rural settlements that exhibit similar characteristics in terms of functions, services, influence from urbanization, and population densities (Greater Banjul Master Plan, 1994). Major towns located in this region include the capital city of Banjul, Serekunda, Bakau, Brikama and environs. Because of its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean coastline, the GBA enjoys a relatively milder coastal climate, which makes it a suitable agroecological niche for the production and marketing of high-value, perishable horticultural crops and livestock, the two main activities of urban agriculture in The Gambia.

The GBA is also different from the rest of the country in other important respects. Notably, it has experienced a comparatively higher population, growing at a rate of 10% annually, and presently accounts for approximately 40% of the overall population of 1.4 million (Central Statistics Census Report, 2003). A consistent influx of in-country rural migrants and immigrants from countries within the West Africa sub-region has increased the proportion of the urban population. The rapid rise in population has been accompanied by rapid urbanization, a phenomenon characterized by concentration and intensification in human activities. Iaquina and Drescher (2000) identified three components of urbanization that are also recognizable in the GBA, namely: high population size and density; a large service, non-agricultural, sector; and a socio-psychological awareness of being urban, not rural. Additionally, the region is the seat of the government with all Departments of State (or government ministries) located within the municipalities of Banjul and Kanifing, which include Serekunda

and Bakau. Most significantly, the GBA is the commercial hub of the country, and the location of a dynamic tourist industry that constitutes an important sectoral linkage with urban agriculture.

Another relevant characteristic of the GBA is its demographic makeup. The area has a larger concentration of people with formal [Western] schooling employed in the public and private service sectors, and people with comparatively higher income levels and purchasing power. As is typical of Africa's metropolitan areas, the area is also endowed with comparatively better infrastructure, namely, modern utilities, communication, transportation, and urban markets. The seaport and airport are also located in this region. All of these climatic, demographic, economic, and social features of the Greater Banjul Area have supported the growth of a complex system of entrepreneurial urban agriculture crucial to the urban food system.

2.2.2 Practice, Actors, Significance, Problems, and Need for Solutions

Urban agriculture might sound like an oxymoron to most people used to associating food and fiber production with rural contexts. What's agriculture doing in the city? The question has been asked (Mbiba, 1994; Phororo, 1999) even though archeological evidence from South America and Europe shows farming co-evolved with cities and towns (Harlan, 1992); urban agriculture has rapidly evolved into a scholarly discipline by itself (van den Bliet & Waters-Bayer, 1996; Mougeot, 2000); and the practice has increased worldwide, embraced in many countries as a food security strategy for growing cities (Dreschel et al., 1999; de Zeeuw, Guendel, & Waibel 2000). Especially in sub-Saharan Africa, the cultivation of crops and rearing of livestock, a common practice that supported pre-colonial societies, continues to serve as an economic survival strategy, contributing to food security (FAO, 2000; Kintomo, Ogunkegede & Ogunbaigbe, 1997). The question about the practice of agriculture in cities and towns is not only rhetorical, however. It is extremely important because the

way it is answered, especially in many African countries, bears implications for the amount of policy support provided to agriculture practiced in urban locations.

With regard to what urban agriculture is exactly, there is no universal definition; variations abound depending on the purpose of the user. The multitude of meanings compiled by Quon (1999) from the growing disciplinary literature provides evidence that urban agriculture defies easy classification, in part because of the diversity of spatial and scale boundaries of the practice, variety of activities in different contexts, and the actors and interests involved. For the purposes of this dissertation, the comprehensive definition submitted by Mougeot (2000), in which UA is embedded in and integrated into the urban economy and landscape, best fits with the characteristics of the urban agriculture system of the Greater Banjul Area. Mougeot defined urban agriculture in the following economic and social terms.

An industry located within (intra-urban) or on the fringe (peri-urban) of a town, a city or a metropolis, which grows or raises, processes and distributes a diversity of food and non-food products, (re-) using largely human and material resources, products and services found in and around that urban area, and in turn supplying human and material resources, products and services largely to that urban area. (Mougeot, 2000: 11)

As an integral part of the urban environment, UA is therefore subject to competition and complementarities in the allocation and use of resources between agricultural and non-agricultural use. Moustier (1998) prioritizes land, water, and labor as key resources over which conflicts could arise, the outcomes of which depend on how urban agriculture is perceived. Urban agriculture in the Greater Banjul Area exemplifies this potential for conflicts as expanding residential sprawl into areas with high potential for agricultural production poses a significant threat. The potential competition for resources, as well as the opportunities presented by urban agriculture, has occasioned calls for multi-stakeholder partnerships in decision making directed to

these complex systems (Binns & Lynch, 1998; Dreschel et al., 1999; Jacobi et al., 2000; Smith, 1999; van den Blik & Waters-Bayer, 1996).

UA Practice: Urban agriculture activities in the Greater Banjul Area comprise primarily the integrated planning, production, post-harvest handling, processing, marketing, and distribution of high-value perishable, edible (fruits and vegetables) and non-edible (ornamentals) horticultural crops; livestock (poultry and cattle—beef and dairy); and the provision and utilization of related services. Eighty percent of entrepreneurial urban agriculture is accounted for by horticulture activities, and 20% by livestock (Akinbamijo & Fall, 2000). These two activities are generally carried out by different constituencies but complement each other to the degree that waste from livestock production is used in large quantities as supplemental organic fertilizer for horticulture crops. In recent years, gradual attempts have been made to develop integrated horticulture and livestock urban agriculture systems. The dominance of horticulture in the Gambian urban agriculture system, in addition to the fact that it is my professional area of expertise, made it a choice of focus for my dissertation research into stakeholder partnerships in urban agriculture. Thus, as a convention, I have used the terms “urban agriculture” and “horticulture” interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

Horticulture in the Greater Banjul Area comprises a complex system of pre-production, production, harvesting, postharvest handling, distribution, and marketing activities of highly perishable fruits and vegetables. In the case of vegetable crops, production is highly intensive and characterized by a variety of cropping systems and practices (Table 1). And being mostly concentrated between October and June, it is a dry-season activity whose success is reliant on adequate water supply for irrigation. Furthermore, horticulture brings together multiple actors operating a wide range of farm enterprises delineated by size of land holding, items produced, sophistication of

production infrastructure, notably type of irrigation system used, and level of innovation in terms of technology used (Ceesay, 1996; Jack 2001). Irrespective of who is involved, size of operations, or crop focus, a unique feature of urban horticulture is its market orientation. A large assortment of fruits and vegetables are grown, intended for both domestic and export markets.

The shape of entrepreneurial urban horticulture as practiced in the GBA approximates a pyramid. At the top are found large-scale commercial operations farming on 100 hectares or more. Operating in most cases in joint venture status with significant foreign ownership, these enterprises are capital-intensive, distinguished by their state-of-the art irrigation and post-harvest handling facilities. Production is primarily targeted to the European Union (EU) market, with the domestic market used as a secondary outlet either for low-grade un-exportable produce, or as an alternative when overseas markets slow down because they are not competitive with produce from other countries selling to the same EU markets. At the time of my study, only one company in this category was in operation, farming over 400 hectares and accounting for an estimated 80% of horticultural exports from The Gambia.

Located across the center of the pyramid are the medium-scale horticultural enterprises with farm holdings of between 20 and 50 hectares. These farms also have substantial investments in modern irrigation facilities and other production infrastructure. Production is targeted for both the export and domestic market, the latter outlet supported by demand from an expanding population and a dynamic tourist industry. A large number of Gambian-owned private horticultural businesses fall within this group. Their proprietors constitute membership of the association of Gambian horticultural producers and exporters, GAMHOPE, which was founded in 1990 to provide leadership in the efforts to develop a commercial horticulture

industry. GAMHOPE was a key institutional stakeholder in the study; the roles played by its members will be elaborated on in Chapter Four.

Along the wide base of the pyramid are located two types of small-scale horticultural enterprises farming from 2 up to 20 hectares. One group consists of a diverse mix of individually owned operations with varying levels of investment in irrigation facilities, ranging from simple wells to deep tube wells with electrified pumping systems for lifting and distributing irrigation water. However, the most important production systems in this category comprise the village-based communal horticultural gardens. Communal horticultural gardens are bounded plots of land ranging from approximately 5 acres (about 2 hectares) to 40 acres (about 16 hectares), and equipped with a variety of irrigation systems (open, concrete-lined wells or boreholes with mechanized irrigation facilities). These units produce and supply an estimated 85% of the total amount of vegetables consumed on the domestic Gambian market (Ceesay, 1996). Additionally, they produce for the export market via contract farming arrangements with exporters who operate the production systems in the other sections of the pyramid. Thus, overall, the communal gardens constitute a most vital component of the national horticulture production system.

A prominent feature of the communal production units is that they are almost exclusively operated by women farmers. The average number of women working in each unit depends on the size of the communal garden, and may range from 100 to 300, with each woman allocated a small area, approximately 25 to 50 square meters, in which to cultivate vegetables. It is also important to note here that the communal horticulture enterprises attract a significantly high amount of donor funding for development. The role of communal horticulture in the agricultural economy of The Gambia, as well as the part women vegetable growers played in the study, will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four.

Table 1. Characteristics of Urban Horticulture Cropping Systems.

Cultural Systems					
Farm characteristic	Rain fed	Lowland rice fields	Irrigated		
			Women's communal gardens	Medium-scale commercial	Large-scale commercial
Farm size (ha)	<0.1 – 1.0	0.2 – 0.5	2 – 15	15 – 50	>50
Fencing	None	None or temporary	Barbed wire & live fencing	Barbed wire & live fencing	Barbed wire & live fencing
Irrigation technology	None	Residual moisture, shallow wells	Cement-lined wells; pipes & reservoirs	Bore-wells, sprinkler systems	Bore-wells, sprinkler systems
Mechanization	Low	Low	Improved	High	High
Labor source	Family	Family	Family	Hired	Hired
Cropping methods	Intercropping	Intercropping	Mixed	Monoculture	Monoculture
Growing season	July – October	October – February	Nov./Dec. – June	All year round	All year round

* Examples include leafy vegetables, okra, pumpkin, pepper, and local garden egg.

** Cabbage, carrot, tomato, and onion are the major vegetables.

*** Export crops: bean, sweet corn, zucchini, Asian vegetables, among others.

Table 1 (Continued).

Cultural Systems					
Farm characteristic	Rain fed	Lowland rice fields	Irrigated		
			Women's communal gardens	Medium-scale commercial	Large-scale commercial
Fertilization	Organic Manure	Organic Manure	Organic Manure; some fertilizer	Inorganic Fertilizer; some organic	Inorganic Fertilizer; some organic
Pest control	None	None	IPM	Chemical	Chemical
Crop focus	Indigenous* vegetables	Indigenous vegetables	Exotic **& indigenous	Fruits & high-value*** vegetables	Fruits & high-value vegetables
Yields	Very low	Low	Low-average	Average-high	High
Primary markets	Auto-consumption	Home and domestic	Domestic & contracts	Export, hotels, supermarkets	Export-oriented
Funding source	Personal	Personal	NGOs, govt., donors, personal	Private funds, commercial banks	Off-shore banks, private funds

These three, broadly delineated, production systems have a fairly symbiotic relationship. They often compete for labor and share the same local market channels. Perhaps a more clear linkage is the frequent contracting arrangements between the small-scale enterprises and the medium- and large-scale operations for the production of high-value, but labor-intensive, vegetables such as green beans and chili peppers destined for export markets. The contract normally consists of a verbal or written agreement made in advance of planting, specifying the type(s) of produce, quantity and quality expected, and the purchase price at harvest. The contractor provides production credit in the form of seeds and fertilizers, and provides technical supervision to the contractee with the understanding the crop will be purchased depending on the quality.

Actors: Who are the actors operating in the market-oriented urban agriculture system? The categories of actors can be broadly defined as producers, service providers, policymakers, and donors. They approximate some of the actor roles delineated by Ganz (2002), namely constituencies, leadership, governing body, supporters, competitors, collaborators, and mediating institutions. Normally, though, different urban agriculture actors tend to occupy more than one precise role at a particular point in time, or move from one to another over time and space.

Producer actors, the basic constituency, are an eclectic mix operating within the three production systems of the urban horticulture pyramid. They include men and women, of Gambian and non-Gambian origins. They are formally, informally, or non-formally educated. Some are engaged full-time in urban agriculture as their primary or sole source of employment and income; others are involved on a part-time basis to supplement other income streams. Producers consist of currently employed or retired government civil servants, come from different professions (lawyers, doctors, and teachers), and are proprietors of large, medium, and small non-agricultural businesses,

and individuals employed in the general service sector. At any one time, these different producer actors are invested in one form or another in urban horticulture production and marketing. In terms of function, they may focus solely on production, only on marketing of produce, or they may integrate both functions.

A peculiar feature in Gambian horticulture would appear to hint of a gender dimension. Among producer actors, women farmers have traditionally dominated in vegetable production and marketing. On the other hand, men have been more inclined toward fruit production. However, in the past 10 years, this division has gradually blurred as increasing commercialization has prompted both men and women horticultural producers to exploit the attendant enhanced market opportunities for fruits and vegetables. And, as will be discussed below, the challenges and problems encountered in urban horticulture, while their severity may vary only in degree, impact both men and women producer actors.

A second group of equally critical actors in the UA system is composed of the professional agricultural advisory services and their personnel. They largely provide extension and research support, and may come from both the public and the non-public sector. With respect to the provision of extension services, the principal public institution is the Department of Agricultural Services (DAS). A plethora of non-governmental organizations also perform extension functions intended to complement state support. The National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), a quasi-public organization, and the International Trypanotolerance Center (ITC), a private institution, are the main agricultural research organizations in the country. I will describe these three institutions in more detail in the next chapter.

Policymakers from the central government, officers of the various state departments and their specialized technical units, local government municipalities, international donor/financing agencies, and international and indigenous non-

governmental organizations comprise yet another relevant group of urban agriculture actors. They exert considerable influence on the entire system. Government and donor organizations in particular determine the agricultural policies and programs that ultimately shape the contours of urban agriculture practice. As described in detail in Chapter One, at this higher level of decision making the process tends to be exclusive, with the most important voices, those of the producers proper, whatever their demographics, usually left out.

Last, input sellers and produce traders make up another important actor category in urban agriculture. These people may or may not be horticultural producers proper; however, they play a critical role in sourcing and supplying seeds, fertilizers, agrochemicals, and other essential production inputs. They also perform essential marketing functions.

The foregoing description of the technical systems and practices of urban agriculture, and of the actors who keep the system functioning, reveals a complex and vulnerable arena: indeed, one whose performance would be easily compromised by non-democratic approaches to decision making about its development that excludes critical constituencies. Reducing such vulnerabilities, through building and working by rules of collaborative partnerships, was a major justification of my dissertation action research.

Significance of UA: Urban agriculture attracts many different interest groups for myriad reasons. Worldwide, urban agriculture systems are recognized as offering considerable economic and environmental benefits (Jacobi et al., 2000). Increasingly in sub-Saharan Africa, urban food requirements and distribution systems are sustained directly or indirectly by urban agriculture (Smit, 1996; Smith, 1999). In the case of The Gambia, urban agriculture already makes substantial contributions to the Greater Banjul Area food system. A recent survey found that over 80% of the perishable

vegetables and fruits consumed in the urban corridor originate from the urban production systems previously described (Akinbamijo & Fall, 2000).

From a macro-economic perspective, Gambian urban horticulture holds tremendous potential to promote national food security, increase incomes, enhance prosperity, and diversify foreign revenue earnings through exports (Ministry of Trade, 1983). The capacity for horticulture to improve food and nutritional security rests on the higher yield potentials and nutritive benefits of fruits and vegetables (Hopper, 1989). Moreover, being labor-intensive, horticultural production and marketing activities provide avenues for gainful employment and income generation. Recent figures show the sector employing over 65% of the agricultural labor force in the Greater Banjul Area (Akinbamijo & Fall, 2000). Through strong linkages to other growth sectors, the domestic tourism industry especially, urban horticulture substitutes for imports of fresh produce, thereby saving foreign exchange. Last, the production of high-value fruits and vegetables offers possibilities for diversifying foreign exchange revenue streams, to the extent that export markets can be identified and penetrated (Gaye, Jack & Caldwell, 1998).

In fact, urban horticulture's potential to reduce trade deficits through increased export of high-value fresh produce has been the force driving governmental and donor actors' interest in its growth and development. In the early 1980s, adverse economic conditions turned attention to the development of export-oriented horticulture structured on the existing traditional communal production systems. By the late 1970s, The Gambia had been losing revenue from groundnuts, its primary cash crop, because of low world market prices. The problem was exacerbated by poor rainfall conditions caused by the Sahelian drought, which resulted in a decline in groundnut production. In addition, other public expenditure problems came in the wake of structural adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank.

Since then, horticulture, an area previously neglected in the government's development planning agenda, became marked as a high-priority growth sector, and by the mid-1980s was attracting considerable amounts of investment and interventions (Barrett et al., 1997; Gaye, Jack & Caldwell, 1988). Chapter Four will demonstrate that the attention has not abated to this day. If anything, it has intensified as efforts focus on integrating the large, medium, and small-scale production systems for a more sustainable horticulture export industry. Over the years, the Gambia government, with support from international financing agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Islamic Development Bank (IDB), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), European Union (EU), and many other non-governmental organizations, has funded numerous horticultural development projects consistent with its policy of supporting the agriculture sector through development projects. My dissertation research was intimately linked with a horticultural export promotion program that was being planned, and which is described in more detail in Chapter Four.

Despite its economic and social significance, and notwithstanding nearly three decades of state-planned interventions costing several millions of dollars, and in spite of the increase in private [commercial] sector investment encouraged by incentives offered by government, urban horticulture has yet to deliver on its potential. Overall the sector has not exceeded a 4% contribution to the agricultural gross domestic product. Particularly within the small-scale communal system that accounts for almost 85% of total horticultural production, a string of failed expensive development projects abound. Some key problems that have conspired to prevent urban agriculture from delivering on its promises are explained below.

A System of Problems in Urban Horticulture: Russell Ackoff (1974) developed the concept of “mess” to refer to a system of problems based on the argument that no

problem ever exists in isolation, that there is always an interaction with other problems. The idea of “mess” would best describe the challenges faced in the urban agriculture system where my research was located. The problems are multi-faceted, covering the gamut of financial, technical, technological, organizational, managerial, infrastructural, and policy issues. However, depending on the stakeholder group, the emphasis may differ.

When producers discuss difficulties in UA, issues that are prioritized include, for example, limited access to capital, poor production and postproduction infrastructure, low productivity because of poor management, bottlenecks in the marketing system that serve as disincentives, insufficient research and extension support, unfavorable government policy and regulation, and land tenure insecurity. The system of problems is experienced across the board, albeit to varying degrees, and lamented by all categories of producers operating along the horticultural production pyramid (Gaye, Jack & Caldwell, 1988; Jack, 2001). I recognized an opportunity in the fact that since problems did not discriminate according to gender, education level, or economic or social class, producers could be brought together to work collaboratively to find optimal and mutually beneficial solutions through a process facilitated by action research.

Conversely, research and extension stakeholders bring in different perspectives, placing considerable emphasis on low technological innovations in UA production. They often highlight the low adoption rates of research-extension recommendations to producers, a situation generally blamed on weak linkages between research and extension actors, as Chapter Three will reveal.

For policymakers in central government and other financing organizations, the issues in urban horticulture have generally been viewed from a narrower production perspective. Among these actors, the problem with urban agriculture has been viewed

as one of low production and productivity of fruits and vegetables, a situation that has failed to support the volumes needed to compete in the export market and increase foreign revenue, their primary interest in the sector. As a remedy, this actor group often offers solutions that almost always focus on area expansion, accomplished through funding support for new production units within the small-scale communal horticulture systems. Given the fact that governmental policymakers and donor officials wield significant influence in decision making for overall agricultural development in the country, by virtue of holding the financial resources, their viewpoints would naturally prevail. Nevertheless, many of the failures of horticultural, as well as other agricultural, development interventions have been attributed to such a narrow perspective, which neglects other important considerations and viewpoints—from other actors—that would result in increased productivity (Ceesay, 1996).

Need for Study: From the above overview, it should be obvious that the Gambian urban agriculture represents a dynamic system with myriad problems, and multiple public- and private-sector stakeholders of differential resource capacities, and hence potentially conflicting and complementary interests. Unfortunately, a piecemeal approach has traditionally been taken to address the many and varied challenges that reach deep into the system. Different groups of actors are normally focused on a particular aspect of the system of problems, neglecting interrelated issues. Consequently, the system has historically been plagued with a series of overlapping or disjointed interventions. I am of the opinion that dealing with the complexity of horticulture demands a relationship across different cohorts of stakeholders to enable interactive engagement. This would make it easy to harness resources of various kinds and to better address issues from a holistic perspective.

However, I would argue the system of problems described above was symptomatic of a much bigger crisis: the tenuous nature of the relationships among

researchers, extensionists, policymakers, and producers. That such a state of affairs would not augur well for addressing the development challenges in the urban horticulture system is an understatement. To elaborate the sense of impasse in the approach to resolving problems in the urban agriculture system, but also to demonstrate the desire for change, I will share a couple of relevant quotations from three different actors who participated in the study. Perhaps more important, the quotes provide a glimpse forward into the actual action research process, in particular the deliberative nature in which it was conducted and which ensured that issues investigated and acted on were of concern to all research participants.

The success of this program needs greater involvement of stakeholders; therefore we want to use a participatory approach so that we can increase ownership. Sector stakeholders should be involved and will negotiate with government to implement recommended strategies. However, stakeholders are in charge of developing the strategies in their respective sectors and then government comes in, is invited in, later during the implementation. We want this project to be a partnership, and to move away from government dictating what happens in your sectors.

You have all these initiatives, and yet . . . that's why I'm interested in this whole idea of partnerships for urban agriculture. People are doing different things with the same constituencies, duplication, not making any impact. That has been a big problem in the horticulture sector. Seems like we are back to the 80s when everyone was talking horticulture; yet we never really outlined how we wanted to go about it, what aspects we want to develop and how do we go about it. I think it's about time that we moved away from this short-term crisis management programs.

I call it epileptic. Each of these initiatives is like a droplet and droplets will dry out easily. But if pulled together, eventually we can get a puddle somewhere and that's much more difficult to dry out.

In summary, the collaborators in the action research were united by an interest in curing this epilepsy, to pull together their knowledge and experiences, just as Farmer Jobe ordered in his story, with the singular objective to promote responsive innovations in urban agriculture. Working through multi-stakeholder partnership

forms of relationships was considered a viable option. The overarching goal for my research partners and me was to enable the mobilization and release of different human, knowledge, financial, and physical resources needed to improve this important socio-economic sector of the agricultural economy of The Gambia. Toward that end, we engaged together as vested actors in a multi-layered investigation blended with direct action organizing to learn some design principles for making the requisite changes.

2.3 Research Approach and Design

2.3.1 Action Research

Action research is a pragmatic scientific approach to social research aimed at generating knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The approach is nested within the family of participative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1997) and entails the pro-and inter-active engagement of people who are experiencing context-specific problems in the processes of generating knowledge to solve them. An important characteristic of the participative research process is its grounding in the lived experiences and personal stories of the affected community. They join in identifying the problem, collecting data and analyzing it, and utilizing the knowledge so generated to improve their situation.

In this respect, participative inquiry consists of an ongoing process of living, learning, and knowing that legitimizes the knowledge of all concerned. Such timelessness of knowledge construction is also conveyed in a saying in the Wolof culture of Farmer Jobe: *a person need keep mind (sense) to the past/back while looking to the front/tomorrow*. This maxim, as does participative inquiry, belongs within an epistemology of constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), where it would be expressed more formally as a process wherein people come to understand the complex

world of their experiences by continuously interacting, constructing, and negotiating knowledge useful to them.

Furthermore, Greenwood and Levin (1998) describe action research (AR) as a democratic research partnership between a professional researcher and a defined community of stakeholders who are united by the express purpose to collectively understand, interpret, and take action to improve a local problematic situation. By weaving together the search for understanding and the acting processes, not separating the two in time and space, action research offers a synchrony that Dick (1999) described as the *responsive* quality of AR. This single characteristic makes AR appropriate for situations needing responsiveness, flexibility, and action. Thus, action research seeks three aims, all of which were central to this study: to solve or improve the problematic situation of poor stakeholder relationships; to bring about the participation of groups or individuals in searching for solutions; and, in the process, to gain a deeper understanding of the social structures and processes necessary to promote social change.

In action research, practical knowledge about an issue of concern is co-created through a social process of interaction and learning among the community of interested stakeholders. The process is premised on a belief that those experiencing the problem often hold some of the solutions in their hand although they may be unaware of that fact (Chambers, 1997; Selener, 1997). The community I, the professional researcher, collaborated with comprised horticultural producers, agricultural scientists, extensionists, and policymakers from both public and non-public organizations. All the research partners were either directly involved in the urban agriculture system, or influenced its functioning in one way or the other. As a community of inquirers, we engaged in various configurations “as knowing subjects and agents of change and improvement” (McTaggart, 1997) over space and time to explore a series of questions

for the primary purpose of addressing long-standing but neglected problems in the way stakeholders were organized for innovations in urban agriculture.

Using action research reflected my personal values and beliefs that people have an innate capacity as well as the right to employ their knowledge and experiences in contributing to finding optimal solutions for problems that affect them. Drawing on, using, and continually renewing this capacity begins with democratizing the process of constructing knowledge, which action research enables (Levin & Greenwood, 2001).

Action research itself comprises various strands that all adhere to the same core precepts, namely, a context-bound problem relevant to local people, research to gain deeper understanding of social structures and processes for addressing real life problems, democratic inquiry through participation of diverse publics, and the use of constructed knowledge in social action that gives research participants the capacity to control their own destinies (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The brand of AR that most closely approximates the process in my dissertation research is participatory action research (PAR). PAR emerged in the 1970s to render international development assistance more responsive to the needs and opinions of the local populations receiving assistance (Whyte, 1991). This strand of action research integrates research, education, and socio-political action within a democratic process that aims to question power relations among people operating within a hierarchical system. The arena containing the study, agricultural development, with its diversity of stakeholders, interests, and resource differentials, is characteristic of a hierarchical system based on a definable power structure.

2.3.1.1 PAR, Power, and Knowledge Construction

PAR places emphasis on the political aspects of knowledge construction, and thus gets to the heart of power and democracy (Reason, 1998). On this account, participatory action research provides an opportunity to equalize the dialogue among

research participants. The political nature of participatory action research is vividly conveyed in the following passage, from Orlando Fals-Borda (1991:3).

It is useful to recall from the beginning that PAR is not exclusively research oriented, that is not only adult education, or only sociopolitical action. It encompasses all these aspects together as three stages, or emphases, which are not necessary consecutive. They may be combined into an experiential methodology, that is, a process of personal and collective behavior occurring within a satisfying and productive cycle of life and labor. This experiential methodology implies the acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge upon which to construct power, for the poor, oppressed and exploited groups and social classes—the grassroots—and for their authentic organizations and movements.

This was the essence of the participatory action research project I initiated in The Gambia. It was conducted in a process of full and interactive participation that validated the knowledge of those involved in the investigations and interventions that aimed to solve relevant and situated problems. Through multiple forums, different stakeholders jointly defined problems in their relationships, explored specific questions, and gathered, shared, and analyzed information that led to collective actions they determined appropriate. Participatory action research offered an open democratic structure that encouraged the research partners to cooperate as knowing subjects and agents co-constructing useful knowledge for social change (Levin & Greenwood, 2001; Maguire, 2000). Research partners engaged in a continuous and participative learning process, making use of different knowledge and experiences to understand how to proceed with creating the changes suitable to the Gambian context.

Furthermore, PAR was appropriate for the study because building and maintaining social relationships, the central issue of the study, entails affective and normative dimensions. These elements are perhaps best understood and accomplished when those concerned engage in group communication processes that facilitate the sharing of visions, aspirations, fears, and frustrations, according to Freire (1990) and

Tandon (1990). With reference to eliciting such information, an approach to inquiry centered on the knowledge of the [professional] researcher and oriented to her interests alone would be inadequate. For my research partners and me, PAR provided us spaces for broad-based and open engagement, multi-way communication, dialogue, trust, and mutual respect. This enabled us to surface the nuances of the human relationship issues influencing other functional aspects of the urban agriculture system. Through critical reflection (Brookfield, 2000; Freire, 1990) we became more appreciative of the social, political, and economic systems that would favor or hinder a change toward new social relationships intended to guide our practice.

Above all, the research itself was an empowering process. It was conducted within a democratic peer relationship that respected each person's experience and contributions to the generation of ideas and information with a mutual intention to make things better. The process aligned with Rahman's (1991) definition of participatory action research as a philosophy and practice with groups of marginalized people with the intention to empower them to positively change their immediate social and physical environment. As research partners interacted, they openly confronted one another, brought out frustrations, and candidly pointed out one another's strengths and weaknesses. Some of the tension was not abnormal because differences in values, ideals, and interests of different people would naturally influence individual judgment.

Finally, by adhering to the principles of PAR, we increased the sense of ownership of the research activity and its results by all participants involved. McClure and Bassey (1991) outlined three attributes of PAR that were experienced during the inquiry. In addition to shared ownership, the process unfolded as a partnership with decision making and control shared among stakeholders, which in turn stimulated community-initiated action. Through collaborative investigation, reflective dialogue, and action, the PAR process instilled among research participants "a sense of

immediacy and personal identification with the discovery enterprise” (MaClure & Basse, 1991). Consistently, since my exit from the field in September 2003, some of my co-researchers have continued to apply what we learned from through our research activities. In the final analysis, then, the study lived up to the essence of participatory action research, which Bawden (1991:2370) further elaborated as: “a collaboration of people to explore complex problematic situations in a system with the aim of creating change that is socially desirable, culturally feasible and ethically defensible.”

2.3.2 Organizing: An Added Twist

The inquiry blended in organizing, a process of unleashing the latent power residing in people, but of which they may not be aware, for their own empowerment (Chambers, 2003; Ganz, 2000; Gecan, 2002; Mondros & Wilson, 1994). Central to the problem of relationships explored through this action research is the issue of power; therefore, the element of politics cannot be bypassed. Agricultural development is a political arena, although this fact is often ignored. Paul Osterman (2002) stated that the key to reviving a vibrant politics, to rebuilding a progressive constituency, is the founding, strengthening, and growing of strong local political organizations, political communities of conversation and learning. A progressive politics of agricultural development privileges the agency of people to connect with others to discuss issues, debate positions, and arrive at agendas. It would provide opportunities for a broader range of people to grapple with issues and to learn to give effective voice to their views. This requires stable organizations that can mobilize people. Organizing is a selective process for identifying and training leaders capable of building the relationships that create organizational entities.

Like action research, the tenets of organizing are “research, action, evaluation or reflection” (Chambers, 2003). Through organizing, my research partners and I sought to speak to power issues in the interactions between and among farmers and

trainers. The process enabled respect of the power and capacity different actors possessed; none ought to be perceived as superior over another. The action research in its entirety was a direct action organizing project aimed at enabling stakeholders I worked with to change first within themselves as a condition to change rules of engagement with other peoples. Our efforts focused on organizing farmers to build strong organizations that would enable them as political entities to take a political stance on agricultural development matters. Chapter Four goes into greater depth on the theory and practice of organizing, distinguishing two approaches, technocratic and educational (Peters, 2002), and providing justification for the one adopted in the action research.

2.4 My Roles and Practices in the Study

I conducted this action research from multiple positionalities as described earlier. Unable to compartmentalize them, I gave equal importance to each one, a situation I must admit was a major source of tension throughout the research; this extended to decisions over which voice I should use in writing this narrative. The hats I wore in the study included that of a social researcher, simultaneously in pursuit of an advanced academic degree and passionate about taking concrete action to change a problematic situation that also affected me personally. I was also a facilitator of learning between different groups, an organizer willing to shake things up and move toward change. Equally, I was the chronicler, documenting activities as they happened, and eventually representing them in my dissertation.

Before describing the multiple roles I played and my practices, I want to reflect on one particular experience, one among several over the course of my agricultural development career, which was particularly instructive and which was uppermost in my mind as I prepared for my dissertation research. I recount that incident to ground the values and beliefs that informed my approach in the study.

In 1985, I worked for an international non-governmental organization (NGO) supporting rural development in The Gambia. An important component of their program at the time was a project supporting home gardening by rural women farmers. As explained in greater detail later, women farmers are the dominant class of vegetable producers in The Gambia. The primary objective for the NGO was to improve the nutritional status of women and their families through the increased consumption of vegetables. A secondary objective of the project was to enable the women to generate income from the sale of surplus produce.

The community in the participating villages provided the land; the NGO financed the construction of more durable concrete-lined wells, secure fencing, vegetable seeds, and extension personnel to supervise the project. The items contributed by the agency, then as now, are major limiting factors to expanded dry season vegetable production in The Gambia. Availability of water for irrigation has been particularly constraining, and the 1980's coincided with a severe drought in the Sahel region. Hence the opportunity to acquire a secure source of water for both agricultural and domestic purposes remains a priority for many rural communities. Since provision of wells is a major component of donor-funded horticultural projects, one can imagine the level of enthusiasm and receptivity of rural communities for such interventions.

At the time, reports reaching the management at headquarters in Banjul, the country's capital, from field extension agents indicated a reversal in the order of objectives. As it turned out, the majority of farmers participating in the home gardening project were selling, rather than directly consuming, the greater portion of the vegetables cultivated in the project-sponsored gardens. In addition, they were cultivating more onions than other vegetables provided through the project. The field agents were concerned that the gardens were not functioning as intended and that

project objectives were not being achieved. I was charged with leading a team to find out what exactly was happening in the field.

The team carried out a survey, the results of which were quite revealing, although not entirely surprising. The majority of farmers surveyed viewed the home gardening project primarily as an income-generating opportunity, which aligned well with their main interest to earn cash income, which was used for their children's education and to meet individual needs. They could do this by selling the vegetables produced on the project-sponsored gardens where they had access to better irrigation facilities than was available on their rice-field gardens. Plus, because onions had a much higher effective demand on the domestic market, the women preferred to grow more of that crop. Moreover, the vegetables (carrot, radish, turnip seeds) provided by the NGO were exotic and unfamiliar items in the local diet. Besides, the women were able to grow in their backyard or rice fields the indigenous vegetables (okra, tomato, leafy greens) preferred for home consumption.

Eventually, and rather regrettably, the disagreement over objectives was never resolved. Many farmers withdrew from the project, gardens were abandoned, and the NGO stopped its support. It was not a total loss, however, because one item for which all the sites had a critical need remained: the concrete-lined, more durable wells that provide a more reliable and safer source of water than the un-lined, sandy wells villagers would typically construct themselves. Several years later, I visited some of the villages that participated in the project and found the wells still in use—important assets valued by the communities. I was left puzzled as to what was actually at work in the farmer-external donor dynamic that I did not understand. Was something hidden there which, if understood, could be harnessed in ways that would yield positive outcomes for both parties? I wondered if the women's pursuit of their own interests, something often dismissed as backwardness and unwillingness to change, was indeed

a quiet resistance that was an expression of power. If so, could it be used in more transparent negotiations with other agents of development? These and similar questions would follow me through the years.

That particular experience introduced me to a phenomenon I would encounter frequently in other situations over the ensuing years. It was the inconsistency between the goals of farmers, especially smallholder farmers, and that of the external stakeholders who supported them financially. It would appear that the former typically have economic motives, engaged in farming for their livelihood. On the other hand, external donors tend to privilege objectives that have more of a social welfare agenda. I have always wondered if such disjuncture did not derive from an erroneous perception, especially among governmental and other supporting institutions, that agriculture belongs solely in the social sector, as opposed to being viewed as an economic venture and all what this implies. During my dissertation research, this suspicion found some confirmation in a comment made by one study participant:

Farming, agriculture is a private business not a social service. A fundamental problem we all have is the wrong concept that farming is a social service. It is not. The farmer is a private individual taking time and money and risk to go into business. So you have to give him information that is useful to him, otherwise he'll just ignore it. Both government and NGOS have not realized this. We still think farming is a social service.

It is not that the two motives—economic and social—are necessarily incompatible, since both seek to create value. From my perspective, the point is what seemingly appear as differential interests should be reconciled at the beginning of any development project, through dialogue and democratic decision making between the inside community and the external supporters. But as argued in the first chapter, some of the reasons for the inconsistency between farmers' goals and outside agencies' areas of interventions and objectives might be connected with an agenda-setting process that marginalizes farmers to a role of [passive] implementers of ready-made

agendas. External stakeholder agencies, namely, government, NGOs, international aid agencies, those with more access to vital financial resources and a perception of having superior technical knowledge, commonly assume the responsibility of defining and prioritizing problems and proposing solutions.

In the case of The Gambia, less than optimal outcomes, if not complete failures, have often resulted. Presumably, such situations could have been avoided by giving consideration to as many perspectives, goals, and interests of all different stakeholders as possible. The high transaction costs of top-down approaches to development planning—clearly wasteful of scarce resources—have been widely documented and criticized, driving the interest in better working relationships between farmers and development agents (Chambers, 1997; CORAF, 1999; Thrupp & Altieri, 2001).

It was these experiential perspectives that informed my dissertation research, defined the roles I adopted, and directed my action research practice. Basically, I did not—could not—place myself as a passive observer outside the arena of the research activities. It will become evident throughout the dissertation that I was at the center of the study, interacting with various co-researchers to construct common meanings of the problems we investigated. With this position, I will be the first to admit that my values were not bracketed out of the inquiry: the value-laden nature is reflected in the kinds of questions posed and the methods employed. I occupied multiple roles in the study, which I have summarized below into the following four domains of learning: social researcher, facilitator, organizer, and chronicler. Because they were interconnected, these roles carry equal weight; therefore, I have described them in alphabetical order to dismiss any notion of a hierarchy.

Chronicler: I played this role primarily by representing the research process in my dissertation. I made clear to all participants involved in the research activities that I

would also be using the information for my dissertation research. Yet I did not get the impression that my research partners were hesitant in sharing their perspectives with me. I would hazard a guess that addressing the problematic issues we face were of more importance to them than the issue of the contents of my dissertation.

Facilitator: In development circles and especially with reference to participatory development approaches as means to bring about social and technical change, the facilitator is the person “responsible for the management of the change process” (Groot and Maarleveld, 2000). The authors go on to classify three facilitation styles and their implications for the learning process, described as being “inside or outside the process; reflective versus problem solving; integrative and distributive mediation style” (p. 12-13). Using their framework, I characterize my role as a facilitator in the following terms.

First, I was an insider taking a pro-active part with other co-learners in the change and improvement process we undertook in our study. Indeed, my insider position enabled me to be a catalyst of some of the research interventions. During private and group meetings, I actively contributed substantive knowledge of the issues at hand. Not once in any of the studies and activities did I adopt the position of a distant researcher observing the process. Neither did I try to totally control the process—I had to be extra vigilant! Second, I played a significant role as a reflective facilitator, structuring spaces for research participants (myself included) to explore and learn about our linkages and how these affected the physical urban agriculture system. We conducted this based on the ground rules of dialogue, listening, mutual respect, and trust. In addition, I also facilitated linkages between our work in the study and other projects relevant to it. In my role as a reflexive facilitator, I used different strategies to generate and maintain enthusiasm among participants over the 11 months of the research. These are reflected in the research methods we used. Third, and

perhaps most important, my facilitation style was integrative, meaning that my focus was, as Groot and Maarleveld stated, on “participants’ interests, the reasons behind these interests, norms, values and perceptions” (ibid. p.14). Given diversities in the research participants, I made considerable efforts to avoid privileging one over the other.

Organizer: In the tradition of democratic organizing (Chambers, 2003; Osterman, 2002), understanding of power is at the heart of the relationship- and leadership-building work that organizers do. As I argued in the previous chapter, power is central to the concept of partnership for agricultural development, because of the differentials inherent in the institutions engaged in this arena. For this reason, I took on the role of an organizer, going one notch up the facilitation role, to insert power relations in our study. In this role, I worked with different groups of research participants to learn how to build leadership, relationships, and networks of support across different stakeholders. This role was one that enabled me to practice my commitment to action and advocacy. Also as an organizer, I was able to bring out unheard voices through the different research interventions. My organizing role was more pronounced in the action component of the fieldwork reported in Chapter Four. That chapter also provides additional background on the organizing tradition.

Social researcher: I also played the role of a professional social researcher, in this case as an active participant, not merely a participant observer. With other research participants as co-researchers and co-learners, I conducted the study using individual interviews, interactive group discussions, a search conference, and relational meetings. In this role, I undertook the research formally and systematically by documenting conversations on audiotape and videotape, and through note-taking. I transcribed all the information gathered through our research activities, and where it was possible or necessary to do so, I shared the information with different research

participants. Relative to the different layers of the research outlined in the next section, my social researcher position was evident across all of them.

These roles required me to show some enabling qualities of a qualitative researcher, among which Cresswell (1998) listed good leadership- and team-building skills; openness and flexibility; belief in others' capabilities and willingness to learn with and from them; friendliness and respect for local norms, values, and customs; empathy and humility to accept criticism; personal fearlessness to fight for what you believe is right; setting examples for others to follow; good understanding of the subject matter and appropriate methods; ability to listen and willingness to get other people's stories heard; and, more important, a good sense of humor to laugh at oneself and with others.

The four roles I played share three elements, namely, research, action, and reflection, which are key tenets of participatory action research and the democratic organizing tradition combined to complete the inquiry. In combination, the mixed role and the defining elements converged into my ultimate role as an educator. From this position I was able to look back on my personal practice, hence the reflective tone used to narrate this dissertation. Moreover, in each and every one of the four roles, I tried to model behaviors consistent with the central issue of the study, partnership: namely, interactive participation, negotiation, reciprocity, mutual accountability, and collective responsibility. The reader may judge the extent of my success.

2.5 Fieldwork: A Fusion of Data Collection and Action

As described earlier, the fieldwork itself was a thick process that evolved, similar to the "folds" in an accordion, through concurrent, intricately connected events, some of which were pre-planned, some practical, and others opportune. The entire process could be grouped into five phases. In addition to the preliminary problem-conceptualization phase and proposal writing completed from Cornell

University, four additional “folds” occurred: re-entry into and shaping of the research program, fieldwork with researchers and extensionists, fieldwork with urban agriculture producers, and studies integrating multiple stakeholders. I will describe each one of these in turn.

2.5.1 Defining the Research Problem: An Issue of Ownership

A study would be qualified as action research when it is grounded in real-life context, the problem under investigation regarded relevant by those affected by it (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The emphasis on context-relevance thus raises an important question for the outside professional researcher with respect to his or her role in the crucial step of problem definition. Fortunately, in my case, I had the advantage of being a vested insider with intimate knowledge of the research setting, albeit with one perspective on the problematic situation. As explained earlier, my experiential perspectives regarding weak working relationships among stakeholders, and the resultant poor impact on innovations in urban agriculture provoked this action research. Because of a passionate interest in contributing to changing the situation, I used the opportunity of my dissertation research to conceptualize a study that would engage different stakeholders and me in deepening our understanding of our relationships, as a basis for improvements.

While recognizing that I had only a partial view of the problem, still I prepared an initial research proposal while I was at Cornell University, and, to comply with academic requirements, delineated a set of meta-questions, research objectives, and data collection methods. The proposal went through several iterations, as I incorporated comments from reviews by different professors and fellow students, and insights from the substantive literature. More important, I sent the proposal to two colleagues in The Gambia, the [then] director general of the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) and the president of the association of Gambian

Horticultural Producers and Exporters (GAMHOPE), to get their perspectives on the salience of the problem. The reviewers in The Gambia triangulated the research problem, confirmed that the proposed inquiry was complementary to ongoing activities, offered their collaboration, and wrote letters supporting my application for funding. I should note that NARI and GAMHOPE were the two institutions I had identified as my affiliates, in compliance with the funding grant I received from the International Development Research Center (IDRC).

With the proposal as convincing as it could possibly be, I submitted it in December of 2001 to the International Development Research Center (IDRC) in Canada for funding through their AGROPOLIS: International Graduate Research Awards in Urban Agriculture program. It was short-listed among many applications reviewed by an international panel of experts, and eventually succeeded in receiving one of nine awards granted in 2002. I also submitted the proposal to, and received additional funding from, various sources at Cornell. Proposal approved by my dissertation committee and adequately funded, I was, naturally, excited to return to The Gambia prepared “to dig where I stand; to change my near environment,” in the words of Patricia Maguire (Maguire, 2000: ix).

2.5.2 Re-Entry and Shaping the Research Program

I arrived in The Gambia in late August of 2002, an insider returning to her professional “backyard” (Cresswell, 1998; Maguire, 2000) after a five-year absence, impatient to start fieldwork. However, I was fully cognizant of the fact that if my dissertation research was to contribute meaningfully to addressing the problem situation, I had to start where people were, to connect with them and their activities. Therefore, like an insider entering a research setting for the first time, once settled in, I went through the critical step of listening for people’s concerns, understanding what was going on (Maguire, 2000). As I embarked on my dissertation research, I was

reminded of a caveat one of my professors made in a graduate research course I took, perhaps his attempt to temper a student's excitement and keep some perspective on research proposal. His warning was, "We don't live life in proposal language. Seldom do researchers, especially action researchers, carry out the research they propose to their committee. We [action researchers] interact and compromise in the field, therefore be prepared to change the proposal once you are out there. You must change your mind in relationship to the information gained in the field," (Davydd Greenwood, personal communication, April 22, 2002). This couldn't have been truer of my research experience.

So, upon arrival in my "backyard" I had to [re] learn the context in order to [re] create a personal niche and ground my work in more permanent activities. The re-learning phase entailed an intense two weeks of courtesy calls to key urban agriculture stakeholders, including government policy makers, research and extension officers, horticulture farmers, and officers of non-governmental organizations and donor agencies. The main purpose was basically to reconnect with former colleagues, explain my research, invite support, and identify areas of mutual interests. I was explicit about the fact that I was completing academic requirements for a doctorate degree—not a secret anyway—but I also emphasized my interest in positioning the research within ongoing activities to contribute to broader development goals—the reason for adopting the action research approach. The meetings produced interesting leads, which eventually resulted in invitations to participate, facilitate, or integrate into my dissertation research compatible activities, some of which are analyzed in my thesis.

Of the 13 individuals I met during this period, five were of central importance to the subsequent research activities on which I chose to focus my analyses. They included the leader of the NARI horticulture research program, two executive

members of GAMHOPE, a research scientist from the International Trypanotolerance Center (ITC), a private research institution, and a private consultant contracted by the government to provide technical support to a national development project I will describe in greater detail in Chapter Four. I engaged with these five individuals, sometimes individually, other times together in different configurations, to coordinate the various research and action activities reported in subsequent sections. We effectively constituted the core action research team responsible for refining the research questions, selecting participants, planning meetings, and documenting the research activities.

2.5.3 Engaging Stakeholders as Research Partners

Participation in the fieldwork occurred naturally, was invited, or welcomed because it was expedient. Study participants included the “critical reference publics” (Wadsworth, 1998) representing multiple categories of stakeholders from different nodes of the urban agriculture system. Their purposeful inclusion resulted in a higher level of commitment to implement actions created through the research process. We used a peer reference system (Rich et al., 2001) to continuously identify research participants as the fieldwork progressed over time and space. The participant identification process would be consistent with opportunistic and mixed sampling strategies (Miles & Huberman, 1994, cited in Creswell, 1998), and relied on the knowledge of participants involved in each stage of the study. The co-researchers were chosen based on their capacity to contribute meaningfully to emerging perspectives on how to improve stakeholder relationships.

The informal, unstructured, qualitative sampling strategies provided a higher degree of flexibility that allowed us to follow new leads, resulted in greater triangulation, and catered to multiple interests and needs. Furthermore, this process established an “emergent selection of participants” (Greenwood & Levin, *ibid.*)

responsive to the multi-fold nature the study. The way in which individual participants from each stakeholder group contributed to the research process will be discussed in the next section, under the specific research activity in which they participated.

Specific individuals from the following stakeholder categories engaged with me in the action research.

1. Urban agriculture producers and their organizations, notably GAMHOPE.
2. Agricultural researchers and extensionists from both public and private institutions (NARI, DAS, and ITC).
3. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
4. Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment (DOSTIE).
5. International donor agencies.
6. Private consulting companies.

There was a practical logic to this broad-based partnership. At the time of the fieldwork, a large number of initiatives were either planned or were being implemented in urban agriculture. Although the activities were almost identical, there was a general lack of coordination because the actors involved were operating independently of each other. One reason for the active collaboration in the study was intense interest in synchronizing these activities—as my ITC partner put it, “collect[ing] all the droplets of urban agriculture initiatives into a puddle that would take longer to dry out.”

Inevitably, our diverse research partnership met with many challenges, chief among these, the planning of group meetings convenient for multiple schedules. Whereas I could devote all my time and full attention to the various research activities, it was not the same with other participants who had full-time jobs or other commitments. However, because of the need for a high degree of participation, considerable patience, flexibility, and tact had to be exercised in order to

accommodate individual schedules. When a meeting called by a particular cohort lacked a good turnout, we did not postpone it, but rather those in attendance proceeded with the agenda, with notes of the discussion later circulated to keep others informed.

2.5.4 Refining the Focus Questions

As previously described, action research requires authentic participation of all possible stakeholders affected by an issue in the entire process of generating knowledge for its resolution. This process, then, should begin with asking the pertinent questions around which data will be gathered. Therefore, one question the reader might reasonably ask is how, and to what extent, key research stakeholders in the particular study were involved in generating the research questions. Who owned the research questions?

I have already explained how the study was conceived, and the preparation of the initial proposal in which I developed a set of meta-questions submitted to my research committee for official permission to proceed to do fieldwork. From the outset, however, the anchoring question was how to forge multi-stakeholder partnerships across urban agriculture farmers, researchers, extensionists, and other development agents. Upon my return to the Gambia to implement the research, I discussed the questions with the six individuals who constituted the core action research team, as well as with other key stakeholders I visited during my courtesy visits. From our review of the initial questions in my research proposal, we distilled them down to the following operational questions: How do stakeholders currently relate with each other? In what ways were our relationships strong or weak, and why? What opportunities existed to stimulate our relationships to perform better? What changes were needed to move us toward partnership as a sustained practice?

2.5.5 Data Collection Devices

In the search for answers to these questions, research participants interacted in various collectives and used a variety of interactive group data gathering and joint action planning devices that drew on elements of the Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (RAAKS). This is a participatory action research methodology designed as a joint learning exercise that helps social actors study the performance of a system which they constitute and suggest specific improvements in the way they interact among themselves as they seek to create agricultural innovations (Engel & Salomon, 1997). RAAKS is premised on a social organization of innovation (SOI) perspective (Engel, 1997), drawing on the concept of knowledge systems (Röling & Engel, 1992) and soft systems thinking (Checkland & Scholes, 1990), arguing that the creation of agricultural innovations is a social and institutional learning process among a variety of stakeholders and not a linear transfer of knowledge, ideas, and technologies. In other words, the process of generating agricultural innovations should consist of a partnership among social actors whose interaction and networking results in a synergy of different perspectives and energies to create responsive and sustainable innovations of many kinds (Bawden, 1996; Korten, 1980; Lightfoot et al., 2001).

Central features of RAAKS include teamwork and joint inquiry, focused collection of information, strategic analysis of constraints and opportunities, and strategic policy articulation and design of future actions. Specific devices or “windows” used for information gathering and analysis included open-ended conversational interviews, dialogical group discussions, a search conference, relational meetings, and document reviews. The devices utilized with different constituency stakeholders are explained in the following sections. Where applicable, I have given background justification for the work with that particular group.

2.5.5.1 Activities with Researchers and Extensionists

The research with agricultural research and extension actors explored the dynamics of their relationships and how these affected overall interactions with farmers. Researchers and extension agents hold important positions in the urban agriculture system. At the field level they act as proxies, interacting on a more regular basis with farmers on behalf of either the central government or non-governmental organizations. In addition, they have a predominant mandate for the generation and dissemination of agricultural productivity-enhancing innovations. Given these roles, researchers and extensionists might be considered as primary agents of agricultural development.

Interactive Conversational Interviews: Over the period of the fieldwork, I personally conducted informal, open-ended conversational interviews with 14 researchers and extensionists, 12 of them employed in the public research and extension system. I selected the individuals interviewed in consultation with the horticulture program leader who was my primary collaborator in this phase of the research. For these interviews I did not use predetermined questions but allowed the conversations to emerge naturally as we probed into our experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of how we related to one another. Inevitably, the conversations dealt with the specific relationship between researchers and extension agents, on the weaknesses therein, their impact on their respective interactions with farmers, and what opportunities existed for improvement.

Out of the 14 interviews, four were conducted individually with an extensionist, a current horticulture research scientist, a former horticulture researcher, and a former director of agricultural research. I asked each person to describe his or her specific practice, in terms of approach to working with colleagues—researchers or extensionists, as the case may be—and with farmers. I later transcribed each

conversation to generate individual practitioner profiles or first-person accounts of practice stories of their experiences in research and extension over the years. Forester (2000) describes profiles as learning and theory-building tools helpful to identify and critically reflect on the skills, strategies, and roles practitioners apply in their everyday practice. These profiles were analyzed for themes relevant to the emerging picture of systemic opportunities and barriers to promoting partnership relationships among urban agricultural stakeholders.

I recorded all the conversational interviews on audiotape, which freed me to engage in the conversation, thus capturing the “interpersonal-exchange dynamic” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) critical to open dialogue. Even so, I made sure to jot down key words during our face-to-face encounters. The notes proved helpful in refreshing my memory of the interactions as I sat down to reconstruct them in my dissertation. Furthermore, immediately after each interview I wrote down reflective notes of my experience and impressions. Subsequently, I listened to each taped interview, searched for patterns and common themes, summarized the information, and shared it with the individual concerned.

Consistent with a participatory inquiry framework, I followed systematic procedures to ensure the rigor of the data. In the interpersonal face-to-face encounters, I used colleague checking (Pretty, 1994) to confirm the accuracy of what I heard them say. I did this by sharing with them my summaries of our conversations. Some individuals requested copies of their taped interview, which I provided. Furthermore, by interviewing individuals from different stakeholder groups, in this case researchers and extensionist—both current and retired—I sought to triangulate information across multiple sources (Dick, 1999).

Participation in NARI Task Force: From November of 2002 to April of 2003, I participated in six meetings of a 20-member multi-disciplinary task force established

by the Chair of the National Agricultural Research Board (NARB) and made up of researchers from the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) and the International Trypanotolerance Center (ITC), a senior extension officer, a non-governmental organization official, and leader of a national farmers organization. The task force was as an essential component of a restructuring exercise to enable NARI to align its work along national agricultural priorities, improve its financial situation, and make its results more tangible and visible. It was given a mandate to define a new research agenda and to formulate specific research projects for the 11 program areas of NARI. All the program leaders were assigned to draft and submit project proposals for their respective areas to a research review committee selected from members of the task force. The institutional setup of NARI is explained in more detail in Chapter Three alongside the findings from the research with research and extension stakeholders.

Relative to my dissertation, as an active member of the task force, I played a mixed role of practitioner, facilitator, and social researcher. First, I was invited into the group primarily because of my background as a professional horticulturalist with many years of field experience in various aspects of the horticulture sector. I was thus able to contribute to the discussion about horticultural problems, opportunities, and potential focus for research.

Second, as a facilitator, I decidedly took the stance that in this renewal process NARI should review its overall approach to agricultural research. At all of the task force meetings, I was mostly emphatic about the importance of involving farmers upfront in the identification of research topics, if NARI intended to gain relevance and recognition. Having previously been at both ends of the spectrum, first as a researcher generating agronomic recommendations, and later as a horticulture producer using the results of research, I recognized the logic in basing research on farmers' needs and

interests, and, most important, incorporating their knowledge. It was on this premise that I worked with the horticulture program leader to draft a proposal for a workshop for selected horticulture producers, researchers, and extensionists to discuss current problems in horticulture and identify priority areas for research. I offered to conduct this as a Search Conference financed from my research grant. We spent two days with staff members of the horticulture unit and drafted a proposal. However, when we presented it to the main task force, it was not approved because it was argued the involvement of farmers at this planning stage was not necessary. The response received was: “We are going to brainstorm as experts in the business and develop research proposals that address national problems.”

Last, as a social researcher, I found that participation in the task force gave me the chance to understand how researchers perceived their role and approached their work in the technology development process. As a former member of this group myself, I also was granted an opportunity to reflect on my previous practice. More important, serving in the task force was a chance to work with researchers and extensionists from both public and private institutions in the same setting and to observe in person how they interacted with each other.

For documentation, I took down hand-written notes during the meetings in addition to recording all the conversations on audiotape. Permission to capture voices on tape was received from the Chair and other members of the task force. Later, the secretary of the task force used some of the taped discussions to write up the meeting minutes. I later transcribed my notes and the audiotapes and used them, together with the circulated minutes, to analyze the findings reported in Chapter Three.

2.5.5.2 Activities with Urban Agriculture Producers

This layer of the research investigated the relationships between producers and other stakeholder categories. My main partners in coordinating part of the study were

the two executive members of GAMHOPE and the private consultant identified above. In collaboration with horticultural producers located at the center and at the base of the horticultural pyramid, we used interactive group processes to explore organizational issues that influenced how producers interacted among themselves and with other stakeholders. This part of the study was also very action-oriented, combining research and direct action organizing that led to the emergence of a network of legitimate producer organizations. It is a tribute to the collaborative action research process that my research partners have continued the interventions initiated beyond my exit from the field. Chapter Four is devoted to the analysis of this aspect of the action research. A brief overview of the specific data-gathering devices used is provided below.

Search Conference: The search conference proposed by Emery and Devane (1999) is a participative learning process in which a group of individuals, concerned about a particular problem, pose a specific question and contribute to the strategic visioning, planning, and collective creation of practical actions aimed at solving the problematic situation. Essentially, a search creates a space for dialogue and networking among its participants, enabling them to share their local knowledge of the problem situation and options for improvement. With this emphasis on the value of local knowledge, a search conference epistemology is consistent with the constructivist framework that guided the action research. A constructivist framework posits that through daily encounters with their environment, individuals develop a tacit awareness of opportunities and challenges and are thus able to extract meaningful knowledge as they construct multiple realities of their situation (Lincoln, 2001; Røling & Wagemaker, 1998). It is the local knowledge and experience resident in participants that a search process seeks to draw forth for the analysis and resolution of issues at hand.

Greenwood and Levin (1998) defined six major stages a group goes through during a search conference. These include 1) creating a shared history, 2) creating a shared vision of a desirable future, 3) creating a view of the probable future if no action is taken, 4) identifying action plans, 5) collective prioritization to select among alternative courses of action, and 6) initiating concrete change processes. A three-day search conference was conducted with producers belonging to the women's horticultural associations, as a catalyst for a pilot direct-action organizing project in response to a finding that relationships between farmers and other stakeholders were influenced by, among other things, the fact that the former were not "organized." Chapter Four is devoted to an analysis of the search, its justification, process, participants, and outcomes. For systematic documentation, the entire event was videotaped.

Group Relational Meetings: The relational meeting is the primary method used in community organizing and consists of a face-to-face encounter between the organizer and a [marginalized] group held for the purpose of exploring possibilities to develop public relationships (Chambers, 2003). The author describes the relational meeting as, "the glue that brings diverse collectives together," and as an art form with "one organized spirit going after another's spirit for connection, confrontation, and an exchange of talent and energy" (Chambers, 2003:44). In the study the relational meeting format was used first in preparation for the search conference, basically to consult with the prospective participants on the need for and to help generate the question around which to structure the eventual search. The relational meetings continued after the conference with the wider membership of the associations represented at the search to follow progress on action plans and to broaden the organizing. Some of the relational meetings were recorded on audiotapes that I later transcribed.

2.5.5.3 Research with Multiple Stakeholder Categories

The fifth component of the action research was an integration of the two described above. It brought together different stakeholders, including researchers, extensionists, producers, governmental policymakers, officials of non-governmental organizations, and representatives of international donor agencies. We engaged in collaborative and interactive group discussions that followed the dialogical research method proposed by Freire (1997).

Dialogical research consists of structured dialogue in small groups that allow participants to surface their experiences of a thematic problem and think critically about ways to change the situation. In other words, dialogical research moves beyond understanding of a problem into application of the knowledge so constructed in practical action to change and improve the situation. Additionally, and more important, dialogical research recasts the roles of researcher and the “researched,” enabling them to engage with each other as knowing subjects and agents of change and improvement as opposed to positioning the researcher as a distant observer of a process (McTaggart 1997). On these accounts, the dialogical interactive group-discussion format harmonizes with the epistemological foundations of the action research framework chosen for the study, namely, the recognition that all of the research participants held a piece of the puzzle and therefore could contribute to the creation of the knowledge to piece it together.

The dialogical interactive group-discussion research method was used in two separate group processes with different cohorts of stakeholders. The first was a pre-planned activity included in the original research proposal I went with into the field. In contrast, the second event in which dialogical research was used occurred serendipitously, not an unusual characteristic of any form of research, but particularly illustrative of action research. Each process will be described in turn. I will start with a

more in-depth discussion of the pre-planned activity, which I offer as a demonstration of the nature of action research as an inseparable process of inquiry and application of findings in action to yield an outcome. “There is no distinction between process and results in action research, there is no temporality, the process is the result,” reiterated Davydd Greenwood (May 1, 2002, last class of Action Research course). Thus the expectations of an action research dissertation may differ from one based on a conventional research method; and so the offering here could equally fit into Chapter Four. In addition, I use the narration to keep the research issue in context; to demonstrate that it had relevance for other stakeholders, not me alone; and to exemplify the deliberative process of all the activities associated with this dissertation. And, last, I use the description to infuse a sense of the “*messiness*” or the twists and turns of the action research journey, sanitized thus far by the rather neat and sequential manner in which I have reported the other interrelated activities. My intention is to draw the reader into the journey throughout their reading of this dissertation.

A Forum for Urban and Periurban Agriculture

Background: As I mentioned earlier, I engaged with different groups of stakeholders in carrying out the various pieces of the multi-layered study. In the episode reported in this section, my primary collaborator was a research scientist working at the International Trypanotolerance Center (ITC), a private research institution based in The Gambia. To maintain confidentiality, I will call him Bami (not his real name). Our collaboration was founded on mutual professional interests in urban agriculture: in particular, a common desire to create a formalized institutional framework that would bring together different stakeholders with the goal of providing coherent direction and support to urban agriculture. This quote from Bami captures the rationale for our collaboration:

I think what we should do is to bring together all those who have interest in horticulture, private and public. Let's find an integration process. More or less have a think tank for the sector. Nobody has a monopoly of knowledge. What you've seen I have not seen. We'll be able to give a voice, appraise very intention and see how it fits together. If what you want to do is of interest to me then it's ok if we talk together about it; and vice versa. It's a singular goal we are pursuing. Since we need the same people so we must collaborate. If you get all the stakeholders, we'll be able to look at different angles to same problem, and maybe important issues will come out. What we couldn't do individually we could now begin to aggregate collectively. This is a good cause for us to come together again.

At the time I was starting my dissertation research, Bami had just completed the first phase of a research project on horticulture-livestock integration and was awaiting the release of funds to begin the second. I became familiar with that project during the summer of 2000 when I visited The Gambia to begin putting together ideas for my dissertation research. Let me mention here that as our collaboration progressed, he voluntarily took on the role of *in situ* supervisor of my dissertation research. Ironically, Bami is a positivist-trained researcher trying to work in a participative mode, whereas I am a fully immersed constructivist-oriented participatory action researcher. Not surprisingly, our research partnership was fraught with some tension; but it was also friendly enough that we could accommodate our theoretical differences, which enabled us to implement our collaborative activities with minimum conflict.

Activity: Bami and I had our first meeting on September 11, 2002. We talked about our different research projects, reviewed each other's research proposal, explored compatibilities, and agreed to complement and piggyback on each other, to make use of our comparative strengths. On this account, Bami offered up ITC to host the seminar I had planned to hold with key urban agriculture stakeholders to analyze the situation in the sector relative to how we were socially organized. Actually, it was a mutually beneficial arrangement that would give him the opportunity to share the results from his research with Gambian colleagues, something he had not been able to

do up to that time—one more example of the weak interactions among actors and the disparate approach to professional practice in urban agriculture. We scheduled the stakeholder seminar for October 11, 2002. In the interim, we drafted a brief description of the seminar, outlining our purpose and expectations; generated a list of potential participants; and drafted letters of invitation. Because of scheduling conflicts, however, the seminar had to be postponed until November 1, 2002.

The first interactive group discussion took place in the ITC conference room at Kerr Serign, a suburb in the Greater Banjul Area, with a setting right on the Atlantic Ocean coastline. Twenty people were invited from different stakeholder categories; 15 attended. In addition to Bami and me, the conveners, others present included the Director (who passed away a month after this meeting; his memory is preserved on the taped proceedings) and the Assistant Director of the Department of Agricultural Services (DAS) responsible for extension; two senior extension officers from the DAS; three representatives of the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), two research scientists and the information and communication technology specialist; four other ITC researchers; and two representatives from the [dormant] association of Gambian horticultural producers and exporters (GAMHOPE). Absent with apologies were invitees from an NGO and four women's horticultural associations.

As an institutional endorsement, the Director General of the ITC officially opened the meeting with a statement that reiterated the importance of collaborative relationships among stakeholders, issues my dissertation research sought to address. Below, I present an excerpt from his welcome speech.

There are changes in the Gambia that are leading to an expansion in urban and periurban agriculture. As institutions we have to be partners in this development. I am happy the forum involves a spectrum of selected individuals in urban agriculture. The urban agriculture sector has potential to combat urban poverty, which is why the market-oriented system improvement program at ITC focuses on urban agriculture. This is an interesting area for development that is begging for attention and requires a different kind of

analysis. Of particular importance is strengthening linkages between stakeholders in urban agriculture.

With the Director's introduction as background, Bami shared with the group findings from his own research on the integration of horticulture and livestock production in urban agricultural systems in West Africa. Describing urban agriculture as a "developmental process," he stressed the importance of "maximizing the power of partnerships to drive development of technology" in this domain. When it was my turn, I presented the research proposal I had developed at Cornell, identifying the need for a new kind of relationship among research, extension, and farmers. In my presentation I stressed the need to improve relationships and strengthen interactions among NARI, DAS, and GAMHOPE in order to improve the substance and quality of innovations in urban agriculture, especially in the horticulture sector.

The level of discussions that followed supported the validity of my concerns regarding the stakeholder relationships. Taking advantage of the congenial atmosphere provided by the meeting, participants frankly expressed their viewpoints on the difficulties encountered in their working relationships and the attendant impact on horticulture. They aired their frustrations with each other as well as their aspirations for better collaboration. I will share four anonymous quotes that shed light on the nature of the constraints, opportunities, and aspirations.

We have observed a lot of gaps in the relationship between NARI and DAS, and between small farmers and GAMHOPE, and also with NGOs. But we should see ourselves as partners for development.

We should look at what individuals are doing to foster linkages among institutions and learn from those. We can then analyze the weak links and identify the priority areas and develop action plans to address them. Another forum will be needed.

We should also involve NGOs and policymakers in our discussion on partnerships. How do policies influence our linkages between our institutions?

I think conflicting policies in research and extension are major problems. Let's study success stories in Senegal and look for principles to adapt.

The weak linkages are based on different interests, but if we come together in a functional network, everything else will follow. We should analyze the weak links and progressively, cooperatively, build a broad-based network to address problems in urban agriculture. We need a strong institutional support for urban agriculture.

In summary, stakeholders at the forum concluded that the key issue of concern to be addressed was the weak linkages across (private and public) research institutions, extension organizations, and horticultural producers. By the end of the meeting, the group decided to constitute the nucleus of an emergent network of urban agriculture stakeholders. The entity was provisionally named the Gambian Urban Agriculture Forum (GUAF), with the anticipation that it would create a space for dialogue and reflection among multiple actors practicing agriculture in the Greater Banjul Area. In fact, the GAUF might be considered an early "action outcome" from my dissertation research, a further example of the process and result linkage characteristic of action research. Bami and I were selected, and we volunteered, to serve as coordinators to follow up with subsequent activities, in particular the recommendation by the group that another seminar be convened with a much broader constituency of urban agriculture stakeholders. For documentation, I taped the entire proceedings of the November meeting on audiotapes, which I later transcribed, summarized, and circulated to the attendees.

The description of the participatory action research process in Section 2.2 may sound as though the research process was flawless. But no, it was not absolute perfection, as will become apparent. Following up with subsequent activities proved a challenge, because Bami traveled yet again, so the group could not meet again until after January 2003. In the intervening period, I was involved in the other activities described in previous sections. Bami and I would hold nine meetings between January

and May 2003 before we could finalize arrangements for the follow-up forum. A major constraint was time. Finding a convenient date in between his hectic travel schedule, national and religious holidays, my concurrent research activities, and other people's commitments placed some limitations on the pace of the action research. There were times when I wondered if everything I hoped to accomplish in the research would happen before my exit in September. So it was quite a relief that after one or two delays we eventually held the stakeholder seminar on May 15, 2003.

During April 2002, Bami and I finalized a program, identified participants, drafted and hand-delivered invitations to 25 institutions (government, NGOs, and farmer associations) and 10 individual producers, and confirmed the venue and completed other logistics for the event. For the second forum, we (Bami and I) decided to use a different approach that would increase participation in the nascent GUAF. To that end, the invitations requested each of the invitees to write a two- to three-page summary describing their activities in urban agriculture and the challenges they faced. Our intention was to compile the summaries and bind them into a working document to be circulated in advance of the seminar. Unfortunately, only 10 were submitted prior to the meeting, another five during the meeting, and all were subsequently secured in a two-ring hardcover binder and kept with the emerging documentation of GUAF.

On May 15, 2003, the Gambian Urban Agriculture Forum held its second meeting at the Bijilo Beach Hotel, also located in Kerr Serign, a couple of kilometers from the ITC. Although the date coincided with a major Muslim religious holiday (90% of the Gambian population is Muslim), 30 people showed up, an expanded group from the first meeting of November 1, 2002. Among the attendees this time around were all those who attended the first meeting (with the exception, sadly, of the Director of Agricultural Services), representatives of several grassroots farmer

associations, non-governmental organization, and two international donor agencies. The large turnout at the May meeting was possible because by then most of the participants had been interacting through the other research activities described earlier, their interaction having generated a tremendous amount of social energy that intensified even beyond my departure from the field.

With consensus that poor stakeholder relationships were causing major problems in the urban agriculture system, participants quickly decided, during review of the agenda Bami and I had drafted, that we should concentrate not on reiterating the problem but on discussions of what concrete actions needed to be created and implemented. The general agreement was to determine how to graduate the provisional GUAF into a more formal organizational entity comprising and representing urban agriculture stakeholders. As a result, the group proceeded to discuss the need for an urban agriculture network and what that would look like, anticipated challenges to setting up such a network, and discussed its role in relation to other existing organizations. There were no disagreements about the importance of establishing a network of urban agriculture stakeholders. The following reasons were suggested as key.

- A network can facilitate the exchange of information and the sharing of experiences across actors, in addition to serving as a forum for the dissemination of research results, skills assessment, and training.
- There are many problems in the urban agriculture system but no organized forum to discuss them. A network would help solve many of them by suggesting and establishing standards of practice.
- A network can act as an advocate to influence governmental agricultural and economic policies in the interest of urban agriculture practitioners,

serve as a clearinghouse on urban agriculture issues, and coordinate donor funding of projects in this area.

However, the group also recognized the challenges the network would face and need to resolve before it could become functional. A major one was what niche it would carve amidst existing producer organizations, in particular its relationship with GAMHOPE, whose members were also present at the seminar. The group agreed the role of the network had to be clearly defined to reduce fear that it would usurp other organizations. To prevent such a situation from eventuating the following criteria were assented to by all relative to its membership: established producer organizations, government and municipal policymakers, research and extension service providers, input providers and traders, and non-governmental organizations working in urban agriculture. Thus the network would be a representative organization.

The sustainability of the network was a major concern. “How do we make the network viable and not die like its predecessors? How can it be financially viable?” asked a participant. Another commented, “Many organizations do not last because they are imposed so this one should be homegrown and demand-driven.” The latter apprehension will be explored in more depth in Chapter Three. After much deliberation, the unanimous conclusion was that the urban agriculture forum was an auspicious beginning that should be strengthened and not allowed to “die.” With that goal in mind a five-person ad-hoc committee was established and given terms of reference to oversee the “birth” of the network. As one of the conveners of the forum I was nominated and accepted to serve on the committee.

The committee met four times between the May seminar and my return to Cornell in September of 2003, and managed to draft a constitution and plan of activities. After I left to write my dissertation, I kept abreast of the network’s progress through email correspondence with Bami. On May 8, 2004, the Forum for Urban and

Periurban Agriculture in The Gambia (FUPAG) was formally launched at an official ceremony blessed by a high-level government minister. Although he knew it was impossible for me to attend, Bami still sent me an invitation via email. I missed the occasion but felt a sense of deep satisfaction that my dissertation research contributed to the creation of FUPAG.

Information-Sharing Sessions with Various Producer Associations

Serendipity best describes the second set of activities in which the dialogical research method was used. Preparing to carry out the action research, I never imagined it would involve working with agricultural producer groups from across the country to find solutions to the same issues my dissertation research was concerned about in the urban agriculture sector. This was an opportunity not to be missed, however, because it confirmed the widespread nature of the problem regarding farmers' lack of voice in agenda-setting for agricultural development. And so over a five-month period, from April through August of 2003, I engaged with representatives of 13 producer groups, two international NGOs, three international donor agencies, the Department of Agricultural Services (DAS), and private agricultural producers in monthly interactive group discussions to understand challenges within their respective organizations and how they could be strengthened.

In the minutes written for the meetings, the name used was "information-sharing session." However, in the language of formal research, the format and process corresponded to the dialogical research method explained earlier. And because I was a central character in those activities (and let me note, again, that all the participants knew about my doctoral research), I analyze the meetings as dialogical interactive group discussions (DIGD). The meetings provided rich data used in the analysis reported in Chapters Three and Four.

2.5.5.4 A Participant Observer at an International Conference

In April of 2003, I received an email from the former head of the National Agricultural Research Institute, who had kept abreast of my research activities while overseas, about two international conferences in Dakar, Senegal, with themes relevant to my research on partnerships. I visited the conference Web site, and immediately registered. A month later in May of 2003, I attended the meeting organized by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) on the role of civil society organizations (CSO), especially farmer organizations, in agricultural research. The FARA/CSO event was the pre-conference activity associated with the biennial meeting of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR).

Both conferences stressed the importance of strengthening producer organizations so that farmers would become more proactive partners in agricultural research for development. The conference was a rich source of literature on partnership. But it was much more. It was an occasion to meet and hear, in the flesh, some of the scholars in the development community promoting partnership, several of whom I have cited in this dissertation. More fascinating, however, was the opportunity to listen to world-renowned scientists reflect on their paradigm guiding agricultural research practice. I found the discussions quite instructive, notwithstanding the fact that they may have been mostly conceptual.

2.5.5.5 Relevant Secondary Data Sources

In addition to the primary sources of data described above, I conducted reviews of documents pertinent to horticultural development in the Gambia. Another beneficial source of secondary data was a series of televised focused group discussion about the Gambian economy produced by the state-controlled media services. Selected individuals from different sectors were invited to discuss a major concern, the free-fall of the Gambia's currency, the Dalasi, which was contributing to economic hardship in

the country. The segment on agriculture was aired in February of 2003, a month after the search conference with horticultural producers reported above. Several of the delegates at the search also participated in the televised focus group discussions. But although they were not as vocal on the televised debates, which were conducted in English and translated into local languages—in contrast to the search conference conducted in the vernacular of the women participants—I still gained a measure of satisfaction to hear the women voice some of the same concerns discussed at the search over national television. I did not participate in the televised debates but obtained videotapes of the sessions from the moderator, which I used as a data source.

2.6 Ensuring Rigor in the Research Process

Within the constructivist framework of the inquiry the quality of the data can be judged according to two sets of criteria—trustworthiness and authenticity as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994). The trustworthiness of the knowledge constructed from the inquiry can be evaluated on its credibility, that is, the accuracy with which this dissertation represents the perspectives of the research partners. The constructivist stance taken in the study is reflected in the methods, which allowed research participants to maintain a dialogue to discuss concerns and challenges and suggest improvements. Test for the validity of the knowledge is the extent to which the research partners deem it acceptable and how it works in practice. Another measure is dependability, which can be tracked through the results obtained from diverse research methods and multiple sources used to arrive at conclusions.

The usefulness of the data can also be evaluated by its transferability or transcontextual credibility (Greenwood & Levin, 1998), meaning whether the findings might have relevance for other situations taking into account the history and context into which applied. It can also be judged through evidence of confirmability, in other words, the degree to which researcher bias is evident in the interpretations and

conclusions. Above all, the credibility of the action research can be judged on evidence of workability; in other words, whether the actions taken in the research process address the problem.

The strategies used to ensure the rigor of the research results are drawn from those identified by Cresswell (1998) and Pretty (1994). The *prolonged and intense engagement* among the research participants over the 11-month period of the fieldwork helped to build trust and rapport, resulting in the open exchange of experiences and information relative to the problems at issue. Moreover, the research participants, as was the case for me personally, have been involved in the research context for considerable lengths of time. This prolonged engagement supported the interest and initiation of actions taken in the research. It was a demonstration of the “catalytic and tactical authenticity” of our study; in other words, the extent to which the research stimulated and empowered action (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, the data were *triangulated* through multiple sources and methods, and by different investigators, as explained in the preceding sections.

Finally, Lather (1986) argues that participatory action research is “openly ideological research” in which values and purpose are transparent—but which might raise issues of validity. My values, as well those of my co-researchers, were openly paraded and placed at the center of the purpose and methods chosen to investigate and address the problematic situation. Since stakeholders with personal interest in the issues were involved in deciding what needed to be known, the knowledge that was constructed might be considered valid to the extent that it was applied to address locally identified needs. The workability of the knowledge so generated constitutes the force behind the trustworthiness of action research findings.

2.7 Reflections

In this chapter, I described the use of action research as a heuristic method to understand the conditions limiting closer working relationships among key urban agriculture stakeholders in The Gambia, with the goal of learning how to create and sustain democratic, reciprocal partnerships among them. Each chain along the action research process created spaces for dialogue and networking among farmers, researchers, extensionists, and policymakers, and brought forth fresh perspectives into specific aspects of their interaction with one another. Perhaps of more importance, the democratic nature of the process allowed each participant to contribute to ideas on how to address identified shortcomings, in the spirit of what Peter Reason (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:264) described as “full reciprocity.”

Using action research enabled us to face up to the fact of the weak relationships among stakeholders and the impact this had on the performance of urban agriculture. Coincidentally, it also led to a mutual appreciation that collective actions were needed in order to change the situation to something more desirable. To that end, feasible actions were initiated alongside the research, some of which have continued beyond the completion of this dissertation. The findings from that collaborative action research process are analyzed and presented in the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

Before proceeding, I should clarify how my own voice is positioned in the findings. In keeping with the constructivist stance adopted in conducting the action research, I was an active participant, not a distant observer. Throughout the various research events, I engaged directly with my co-researchers in conversations as we tried to critically reflect and unpack conflicting thoughts on how our relationships were structured. Consequently, in reporting the findings, I could not have excluded the personal viewpoints I shared/exchanged with them. It is natural, then, that the reader

will sometimes hear my voices in the narration. My literal voice is directly revealed in the dialogues with co-researchers that I've used to tell our story. This is accompanied by my interpretive voice found in the analysis and reflections interspersed with the direct quotations. In the reconstruction of our learning process, I have kept the conversational style of all quotes used, editing only for grammar where necessary. I have done this in order to retain their meanings, and thereby increase trustworthiness and authenticity.

There is one last point that I should make. Fidelity to context is a principle action research shares with case study research (Stake, 1998), the format I have borrowed to write up the dissertation. According to Stake a case study draws attention to what can be learned from a "bounded system" or a "functioning specific" (Stake, 1998: 87) with the purpose of increasing understanding of the specific context rather than generalization beyond it. The findings, actions, and conclusions drawn from the study are specific to the urban agriculture system of the Greater Banjul Area in the Gambia; broad generalizations are not suggested. However, the data may have transcontextual credibility to the extent that it may have relevance to other situations, but taking into consideration the unique history of that bounded system.

3. LEARNINGS: NEED TO BREAK DOWN BARRIERS, AGREED TRAINERS

3.1 “It’s One Agriculture—Not So?”

Recall Farmer Jobe’s opening script in Chapter One, especially the story about the trainer and how he came to learn about the optimal planting time for early millet. Curious as to whom Farmer Jobe was referring in his indictment of “trainers,” whether researchers or extension agents, I asked for clarification. He paused, looked at me, a bit puzzled, and then retorted, “It’s one agriculture—not so? Ah, they are all the same!” *[Note: The expletive metaphor he added is inappropriate to quote here.]* He must have been thinking about this category of trainers in functional terms, that is, relative to services they provide to farmers in support of agricultural production and marketing activities. On that score, I’d concur they could be regarded as the same. Or, perhaps he considered them as being “one agriculture” because in his eyes these trainers are the visible representatives of external agencies—governmental, non-governmental, and others—influencing agricultural development in the country. Here again, from the point of view of institutional affiliation, the said “trainers” probably would not disagree with Jobe.

However, farmer and said trainers might likely hold divergent viewpoints on the issue of professional identities. For, as the reader will learn later in this chapter, if only one feature epitomized the overall relationship between researchers and extensionists, the antagonism and longing embedded in the following comment from an actor in Jobe’s category of trainers would suffice: “We cling to our different identities and follow our individual agendas regardless they culminate in irrelevant outcomes. But we need to engage with each other more.”

Chapter Three is devoted to an analysis of the relationship between the specific class of trainers identified as agricultural researchers and extensionists. It may be

recalled that in Chapter One I developed a broadened profile of trainers to include such influential actors as governmental, non-governmental organizations, and donor agency stakeholders. Researchers and extension agents, as stated earlier, are normally the public faces or representatives of these actors interacting more closely with farmers at the field level. Their role in the generation and dissemination of various types of innovations aimed at enhancing agricultural production and productivity is, therefore, critical. A great deal of the advocacy for stakeholder partnership is targeted at the locus of developing technological innovations, where it is expected to replace the top-down relational arrangement reinforced by the prevalent transfer of technology approach.

Even so, more emphasis seems to be placed on promoting partnerships between researchers and farmers. This trend and the tensions it has engendered will become apparent in the conversations reported later. But perhaps inadvertently, minimal attention has been given to the exact relationship between researchers and extensionists and how it impacts their respective interactions with farmers. And yet, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, understanding the nature of the relationship between research and extension actors, and resolving bottlenecks therein, becomes pertinent in efforts intended to improve the working relationships among all three stakeholders, for enhanced agricultural performance. As background, I will begin with an overview of the institutional context wherein the researcher and extension trainers operate.

3.2 The Gambian Research and Extension System

The Gambian national agricultural research and extension system (NARS) is relatively small and heavily dominated by the public sector. The two institutions that dominate the NARS are identified with the Department of State for Agriculture (DOSA), formerly the Ministry of Agriculture. The National Agricultural Research

Institute (NARI) was created in 1992 as a successor to the former Department of Agriculture Research (established in 1977) and is the principal research organization in the country. The present status of NARI is that of a semi-autonomous institution governed by the National Agricultural Research Board (NARB), a body established by an act of Parliament in 1988. Initially supported by a World Bank loan, the Institute currently receives a subvention from the state. However it is expected to build its own capital base through research contracts and collaborations in order to ensure sustainability. According to the head of the Institute, however, financial constraints have remained the major limiting factor that has prevented NARI from reaching its potential to provide relevant services to farmers.

NARI has a mandate to conduct and/or coordinate research to generate innovations for the agriculture and natural resources sector (National Agricultural Research Institute, 1997). The Institute comprises 12 functional programs, divided into six commodity-based areas (cereals, grain legumes and oilseeds, horticulture, forestry, livestock, and agroforestry), and six disciplinary units that cut across the commodity areas (cropping systems and resource management, agricultural engineering, socio-economics and farm management, seed technology, integrated pest management, and information and communication systems). NARI researchers, in the main, conduct adaptive/applied research, working mostly in collaboration with international agricultural research centers (IARCs). The IARCs provide technologies (mostly improved germplasm) that NARI would initially test on-station prior to conducting on-farm trials. This “external” outlook on NARI’s part has apparently been a source of conflict between researchers and extension officers, as later the quotations will reveal.

NARI’s active participation in the action research was based on their interest in improving services to local farmers, and especially in focusing more efforts on the urban agriculture sector. As mentioned in Chapter Two, I had identified NARI as my

institutional affiliate and worked closely with individuals there to develop my research proposal. During the fieldwork, I returned to the horticulture program as my home base and worked very closely with the program leader and other staff members.

Public extension services for crop and livestock production are the responsibility of the Department of Agricultural Services (DAS) and the Department of Livestock Services (DLS), respectively. DAS provides extension support through its seven specialized technical units: the Agricultural Input Office (AIO), the Agricultural Communication Unit (ACU), the Agricultural Pest Management Unit (APMU), the Soil and Water Management Unit (SWMU), the Food and Nutrition Unit (FNU), the Horticulture Section (HS), and the Training, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (T, M & EU) (DAS, 1999). In addition to normal extension activities, these technical units provide the frontline personnel responsible for monitoring agricultural development projects implemented by the government of The Gambia.

Extension provision has largely been patterned on the World Bank's Training and Visit (T&V) system based on a hierarchically configured management and delivery of extension services. At the top is the directorate of extension with its headquarters in the heart of the urban area, at Cape Point. References to Cape will be heard throughout the narratives. At each of the six administrative divisions of the country, a Divisional Agricultural Office (DAO) supervises extension services implemented through 25 District Extension Centers (DES). Each DAO consists of a Divisional Agricultural Coordinator (DAC), Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs), and Training Officers (TOs). At the village level, Village Extension Workers (VEW) use contact farmer groups to disseminate information and technologies. I have used the terms extension agents and extensionist(s) to identify personnel of the technical units of DAS engaged in providing agricultural support services to farmers. Extensionists from the Horticulture Section were involved in all phases of the study.

Outside of the public sector, several local and some foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are involved in extension activities complementing governmental efforts. With regard to non-public sector research, the International Trypanotolerance Center (ITC) is the only other agricultural research institution in the country. Their goal is to improve food security through improved and sustainable livestock production and use. Using a systems-oriented approach, the ITC research and development agenda has three main programs. The Market-Oriented Systems Improvement Program (MOSIP) conducts research on the potential for integrating horticulture and livestock production among urban agriculture farmers. The ITC was a key stakeholder in the action research, represented by the program leader of the MOSIP, who shared an interest in creating an institutional framework to support urban agriculture practitioners.

With this brief background on the research and extension system, findings from my fieldwork with research and extension trainers in both the public and non-public sectors are presented next. I should reiterate that the Gambian agricultural research and extension system is so small that it is almost impossible to give even a brief description of my co-researchers without revealing their true identities. Therefore, to maintain confidentiality, I have used anonymous quotations grouped around generative themes under which findings are discussed. Even so, the verbatim quotations defy my conventions because the stories reveal their respective professional designations as either researcher or extensionist. Another point of note is the conversational style in which the findings are recounted. As an active participant in the research, my voice in the conversations is clearly identified with my initials, IJ.

3.3 Dilemma of a Relationship

3.3.1 Constraining Contexts

“You and me, whether we like it or not, we are linked by horticulture. So we have to work together for the farmer.” This sentiment was expressed during a group conversation in which we were trying to understand conditions that hindered closer working relationships between horticulture researchers and extensionists. The outlook was pervasive and was echoed variously, for example in this quote elaborating on the status quo: “We are largely operating as independent entities with each doing its own thing. But research should know what extension is doing and extension should know what research is doing since we are both working toward uplifting the livelihood of the farmers.” Thus one would expect no greater logic to research and extension presenting a united front than the fact that farmers constitute what I call a “captive audience” for their respective activities.

However, the picture unveiled through the voices heard in this chapter is one of an ambiguous relationship. It is unquestionably adversarial, characterized by professional rivalry. At the same time, though, it is defined by a peculiar friendly tension, perhaps suggestive of an unspoken appreciation of being caught together in one inescapable trap, which leaves them no other option but to strengthen their working relationship and interactions. In the midst of the fieldwork in The Gambia, and also while reconstructing the research events in this report, there was a persistent image in my mind that I associated with the emergent learnings about the relationship between my research and extension trainer colleagues.

For some reason, I could not shake off the thought of two strings stretched tautly across the same two posts, yet quite oblivious to the fact they are propped up by the same structure. At the same time, though, each had enough elasticity to allow the occasional loosening up and entwining. The latter condition of entwining was the

quest behind my dissertation action research. The underlying contexts for these back-and-forth swings were many and interrelated. Ironically, the most salient seemed to express itself in a quiet struggle between researchers and extensionists for power and influence that was played out in front of farmers, their common audience. The interlinked material themes are discussed below.

Perceptions of Roles and Functions →

Differences in perception of individual roles and functions were major determinants in the researcher-extensionist relationship. Both of these trainers, to borrow the term used by the farmer, were quite definitive about their respective technical roles in the agricultural value creation process. Here is a representative sample of how roles and responsibilities were described.

The extension worker is an agent, a mediator between the ministry and the farming society. Take for example; you have the farmer, the extension worker, and the researcher. The farmer is at the field, the extension worker goes to the field to collect the information and bring it back to the researcher. So therefore we are mediators. I'm a mediator, my role in the farming community is very delicate and it is to collect information from the farmer and take them back to researchers. I also train farmers on new recommendations for agronomic practices from research. And I also have to teach the farmers what crops can bring them more money in the market. And they have to be taught all the new management techniques for their societies. As an extension agent, as an agricultural staff you cover all the fields in agriculture, whatever crops farmers grow, whatever activities farmers do, then you are going to cover those activities, along with the farmer's program and your plan of activities. It means you will not confine yourself to one area. You will be involved in animal traction, in horticulture, in field crops.

Of course, you know as the name implies extension is to transfer technologies from the research to farmers. Extensionists should be there all the time to assist the farmers, to teach the farmers through training and visit or whatever extension methodology we are using.

It is our responsibility to brainstorm as experts in the business and develop the research agenda. We know what farmers' problems are because we have been working in the field for a long time.

Researchers have been in the system for a while and so they are able to identify some of the problems that need to be addressed through research. I think ideally that's how it should be. If it goes very effectively, if each party, that is extension and research, is doing what is expected of them and everyone is doing what they are supposed to be doing, then yes, it is effective.

With reference to extension, the first two quotes clearly delineate how they perceived their function as the primary link between farmers and the outside world of government as a policymaking body, research as generator of new technologies and management practices, and markets as incentives to define production. Equally clear-cut are the assigned role for researchers, namely to conduct research and develop recommendations that extension would deliver to farmers. The excerpts give a hint that boundaries are drawn, that individual technical roles might be jealously guarded. This would imply that the system works so long as research and extension each does what it is supposed to. However, if one group tried to overstep demarcated boundaries a different scenario might conceivably transpire.

Created a Territorial Mentality →

That was found to be the case, exactly. Maneuvers to blur boundaries were a major source of unease between research and extension. The problem boiled down to one simple question: Who among the two should deliver the results of agricultural research and other information to farmers? In other words, who should be at the frontline, training and working directly with farmers to develop agricultural technologies and practices: is it the research scientist or the extension agent? Farmer Jobe might not differentiate between the two, his likely response that both of them should, a viewpoint that would receive the support of some trainers. But what seemed to have caused the disagreement was insistence by some researchers on breaking with tradition. Instead of following the established pattern of working through extension,

the preference was for them to conduct research or take results of their research directly to farmers. This quote describes the situation in no uncertain terms.

It comes down to the same my territory mentality. And I'm on record for saying this, what I'm telling you I've said before, but I'm sure they [extension] might have some reservations. When I go to an institution that is not a quote, unquote, research institution and I find them doing research on a horticultural crop, as far as I'm concerned I'll just be happy. I have no problem with that, in fact, I'm even happy that they have started the ball rolling. If that person calls me and says look here's this variety I have, this is what I've been experimenting with, I won't look that person and say, for example, when I go to a divisional agricultural station, I don't say "your role is not researcher, you are supposed to be getting finished product from me, so I'm not happy that you are couched in your little station here doing research without my permission." You know that kind of attitude. And I think this is what extension does, the beef they mainly have with research; any little venture we make into quote, unquote their territory. For example, when I take my things on farm, they feel they don't have a good grasp or good authority on that thing, they feel no, no, no, you research are overstepping your bounds. They have that mentality with them.

As my partner continued in the next quote below, his explanation reveals the linear paradigm that guides research and extension practice in The Gambia. The "vertical communication" he objects to is typically associated with the transfer of technology paradigm Rogers (1962 & 1995) mentioned in the introductory chapter. The main interest and process of transfer of technology (TOT) is the transmission of technology developed by research through extension and onward to farmers for subsequent elective adoption or rejection. Its singular goal is to stimulate changes in how farmers go about the technical aspects of farming, for example, using a new seed variety or new plant spacing (Swanson, 1997). The economic, social, and political dimensions that impact agricultural performance have generally been overlooked in traditional transfer of technology. It is interesting to note that intense criticisms against shortcomings of the transfer of technology paradigm have been driving the widespread

interest in partnership as a replacement (Bechstedt, 1996; Farrington, 1998). Our conversation continued:

Sometimes I give my finished products to them and maybe I accept when they blame me, saying, you research, you are not collaborating, as you should. [II: *They say that?*] Yes, they do say that. But sometimes the type of collaboration they want is too slow for my taste. I don't believe I have to communicate the intervention I want to do to Cape [extension headquarters] then it filters down to the DAC [divisional agricultural coordinator] and then to the DES [divisional extension supervisor] then to the VEW [village extension worker] then to the farmer in the village. If I can get Mr. X in Janbanjelly village to do something, he's the representative of the Director of Extension; he's a representative of the Assistant Director. That's my view. If I can deal with Mr. Y in Kuntair village in getting my planting materials to farmers, it is the responsibility of Mr. Y to report to his bosses and say "during this month's activity, Mr. Z. head of horticulture research unit came here and these are the activities I conducted with him." Then if you are the head there and you want more information you pick up the phone and call me. These are some of the problems I experience with extension. They prefer a vertical communication; they want you to go through them, that way when the farmer gets the technology, he gets it from the extensionists. They want the farmer to get technology from them; they are the extensionists and that is the definition of extension—extends the technology to the farmer. But we do not wait for Cape. We take our things directly to farmers and we know extension does not like that. But if it gets the job done then I'm happy with it.

II: It's quite a change from my time. We did the research here on the station and then because extension was here in the same office, they diffused the information to farmers. Except maybe under the farming systems project, that time we had some on-farm trials. But I don't remember extension resenting that. Anyhow, what you are doing now is consistent with trends worldwide, you know, changes to the conventional research model you are describing, for example this interest in farmer centered research and extension. Now I don't know to what extent you are doing joint research with the farmers. But then again you are joining the bandwagon. But then the question is at what expense for extension in our context?

Well, for example, people know [one of our staff] here is an expert in [a particular technique] and he'd be invited to train people. He's invited as a resource person to a training program by [an NGO]. Then when extension goes to farmers and farmers say "oh, we had a good trainer . . ." but extension resents that not knowing the circumstances under which he was invited. It's not like he was the one who organized that training; he was invited. I have a feeling if you talk to him he'll say extension are jealous, that's the bottom line.

It was perhaps not surprising that extensionists resented the apparent defiant stance of researchers and the encroachment on their territory. Actually, I found it a natural reaction. They preferred to maintain the status quo, as one extensionist commented to me, “We cannot break the single line of command; otherwise if research doesn’t involve us, then we too will not develop.” The more practical reason it was necessary to continue business as usual, according to another officer, was the difference between their respective approaches in transferring technologies to farmers. Extension claimed research tended to be more aggressive, using such language as “pumping their finished products,” “driving their technology,” and “inculcating into farmers.” The difference in approach is conveyed in this quote.

You know, the problem is that research should work through us but they are going around doing this training and that training when that’s our job. We are specially trained on how to teach farmers about new technology and recommendations. We just don’t go and pump technologies to farmers to adopt. [IJ: *Is this what research does?*] Some, yes. But we show farmers. For instance, when a new spacing recommendation for, say groundnuts, is given to us through our annual in-service training, we take this back to farmers and we do a demonstration. We will ask the farmer to plant his own seed using one spacing and we plant using the new spacing recommendation. We then compare the yield at the end of the harvest. This way the farmer will be convinced which recommendation to take. Sometimes the new recommendation will suit the farmer, will increase his yield. Other times, farmers will say, ‘come I’ll show you what I used to do in the field, it’s much better than what you are showing me.’ And sometimes farmers’ experiments are good. We have to accept that. I learn from the farmers and I take this back to the extension office for us to consider these ideas. In the next season we bring back the technology learnt from the farmer as a new technology. But it is actually farmers’ own local technology. I leave farmers to come to their own decisions to use the technology or not, because we should not be dictators, that farmers should accept whatever we bring. But research, they just want to push their results.

I should explain that contrary to the assertiveness with which researchers expressed their opinions about extensionists, the latter were more circumspect. In all of my conversations with extensionists, even when I played devil’s advocate, views—

or complaints—about research were expressed rather obliquely, politely enveloped in descriptions stressing how they (extension) differed in their approach to working with farmers. To understand what was being communicated required reading beneath the words being said. It was to my advantage that I was an insider familiar with the institutional culture and the dynamics between research officers and extension agents. As is probably the case in most other places, relationships between research scientists and extension agents in The Gambia have been conditioned by education and class issues creating social stratification, or what I described as statusing in the previous chapter.

The following excerpt provides another vivid illustration of the reticence extensionists showed in speaking out against research and the roundabout way they often went about it. Here is an extensionist describing how he “succeeds” in working with farmers.

You have to bring yourself down to the level of the community. First of all as an extension worker you have to understand the problem, you have to understand the people and how they live. We are based at the village so we know what is going on. You have to keep low profile when working with farming communities because it is not easy to work with matured human beings. I have managed to work in Bakau because when they want to be fire I become water. By this I mean when I explain something and they disagree or do not understand I don't force, I leave them until they cool down, their hearts are cooled, and then we go back and continue our discussion. Farmers are not like children going to school. They too have problems they come with to the field. You have to understand your people, your farmers. So you must try to bring yourself to low profile to the farmer and accept that the farmer is somebody you are serving, and that from the farming community you are able to earn a salary. Therefore you should not feel too big to the farmer; you have to bring yourself down. Farmers also are intelligent. We go there and give them new technologies; but we also learn from them. It's no joke, Isatou [*I was chuckling as I listened to him*], as an extension worker with all those recommendations to transfer, all those technologies, if you cannot operate well with farmers then everything is going to be a total failure. Therefore we extension workers, we have to take a low profile. This is how we succeed with farmers.

When the quotes so far presented under the territoriality theme are juxtaposed with Farmer Jobe's harangue, several paradoxes are immediately obvious. To illustrate what I mean, I'll use Farmer Jobe and the extension agent as the protagonists. The extension agent's description of how they went about their work, "... when I explain something and they disagree or do not understand I don't force ... I leave farmers to come to their own decisions to use the technology or not ... because we should not be dictators ... that farmers should accept whatever we bring," would seem to contradict the farmer's actual experience of trainers, which he stated as, "... they come and force you to accept their ways." Or compare this from the farmer, "... the trainer goes and learns about farming in a book ... then comes to teach the person who has been squatting and farming all his life, with the attitude that the farmer knows nothing," with the agent's account: "... sometimes farmers' experiments are good ... we have to accept that ... farmers also are intelligent ... we go there and give them new technologies but we also learn from them ... we bring back the technology learnt from the farmer as a new technology ... but it is actually farmers' own local technology." What is the story here?

The contradictions between the perceptions and experience of the extension agents and the farmer, vis-à-vis the former's modus operandi, is a classic example of the concept of espoused theory and theory-in-action (Argyris & Schön, 1996) in practice. Espoused theory refers to the explanation people give not only of their actions but also the reasons for them. In the present case, the extension agent's espoused theory is presumed in his statement: "Therefore you should not feel too big to the farmer; you have to bring yourself down." On the other hand, theory-in-use refers to the deductions an outside observer makes about the theory underlying the observed action in an attempt to understand what is going on. In this instance, the farmer could represent the outside observer analyzing the actual theory being practiced

by the extension agent. I would submit that Farmer Jobe's terse statement, ". . . this attitude of standing above the people . . .," sufficiently infers the extension agent's theory-in-use. It is evident the two are quite contrary. Greenwood and Levin (1998) assert that because espoused theory and theory-in-use are often at odds with each other, the distance between them "becomes the focus of attention in a group's enquiry into its own actions as a means to try to move the group to a more liberating dynamic" (p. 191). It may be recalled that achieving such change was the motivating factor in this dissertation action research.

Coincidentally, the opinions shared in the last two quotations by extension colleagues caused me to reflect upon an experience I had in the 1980s as a horticulture researcher moving on-station research results to on-farm testing with women vegetable farmers. On-station research had demonstrated the benefits of mulching as a means to improve water-use efficiency on vegetable crops. As I listened to my partners in 2002–2003, I wondered to myself, was our lack of "success" in getting vegetable producers to adopt the recommended technology/technique because of the failure by the researchers to take time to first learn from farmers whether or not it was feasible for them to mulch with rice straw, groundnut husks, or millet straw? The farmers who participated in the on-farm experimentation continued with their usual irrigation practices—the arduous task of drawing water from wells with buckets morning and evening, a problem we sought to address in the water-use efficiency studies.

It was interesting that certain researchers admitted their deficiencies and allied with their extension colleagues, recognizing the latter's crucial role in the communication process with farmers. The following quotes are representative.

We are basically . . . what we know how to do best is randomized blocks, to conduct research. We don't know how to talk with people [farmers] so they can give up their know-how instead of giving us a shopping list of problems

whenever we come to them. They [extension] have a better understanding of farmer behavior; they have some strength we [research] could use. But we have this mentality of I'm the expert, I already know what farmer's problems are so I don't need to go over and over again to ask them before we do our research.

I mean, we should not be doing extension work. Our function stops here, with developing technology, then extension takes over. We may monitor how our research results are doing but it is extension's role to disseminate the technologies to the farmers.

It is unfortunate extension has fallen by the wayside. They are considered part of the agricultural research system and need to be integrated but they seem to be taking a back seat. This is sad because they bring something to the table. Definitely we need to engage them some more, to have better research-extension partnership. But we are clinging to our identities; following our individual agendas regardless whether they culminate in relevant outcomes. I think we need them as interlocutors.

The admission that researchers did not “know how to talk to farmers” is supported in the literature by observations that because of the paradigm under which they are trained, agricultural research scientists are often unfamiliar with participatory methods that should enable them to build on farmers' knowledge (Collion & Rondot, 1998; Hagmann, Chuma & Murwira, 1996). Some scholars have attributed the problem to language, not only relative to the possibility that researchers may not speak the local language of farmers, but more important, to their inability to translate into local languages the scientific principles from the Western lens and language in through which research is often conducted and reported (Agbamu, 2000; Castillo, 1999).

Originating from the History of Institutional Difficulties →

It emerged that the ongoing territorial struggle had a historical precedence. Conversations with several former employees of the research and extension system

shed more light on reasons behind researchers' insistence at "going directly to farmers."

The way we did it when I was with research was we were actually going directly to the farmers. Sometimes we'd go through extension but, as I say, it was ad hoc. Like when we have our on-farm adaptive trials we thought the best way to do it was to go directly to the farmers and do it so that we can collect the data we want. One thing we have realized is that there is a gap, a gap in training in research methodology. Especially when you go to the farmer's level where you need the collaboration of extension it's just not there. It is actually absent. It forces you to be there on the ground to collect your own data. There is also this mistrust that the extension personnel will not take your work seriously at that level because he is not answerable to you. So there is that weak link between research and extension especially at the grassroots level. And it boils down to futility in the sense that it is these same extension people we want to rely on to transfer technology and if there is that insincerity or lack of interest because they are not answerable to researchers then the technology one is trying to develop and disseminate at the same time will not go a long way.

The above speaker reveals a certain perception about social stratification between researchers and extension agents, with the expectation that the latter should be "answerable" to the former. Moreover, the statement substantiates findings from a previous study which revealed that a weak research-extension linkage was an impediment to these institutions' potential to adequately identify, prioritize, and tailor their interventions to contribute to addressing the myriad problems encountered in the overall agriculture sector (CORAF, ODI & CIRAD, 1998). In the case of urban agriculture, Akinbamijo and Fall (2000) showed in their study of urban agriculture production systems in The Gambia that productivity is almost 50% below potential. The authors attributed this to poor management practices and a lack of improved production technology. Clearly, the research and extension system has an important contribution to make in providing producers the information needed to increase and improve production.

Another historical perspective is provided in the following quote from a retired employee.

The department of research was created in 1977. As we moved from commercial crop for export into more food crops the technology was not available so there was a need to develop internal research capacity to provide backstopping to the extension service. In that arrangement the role of the scientists was to provide information for extension to take to the farmers. Scientists were not learning about farmers' constraints per se since they were far removed from farmers. Because the more you link with extension the more removed you are from farmers. We were more linked with extension than with farmers. We recognized the need for research to get closer to farmers to understand their constraints better. But extension formed a barrier between scientists and farmers.

IJ: In what ways were they a barrier?

Because extension had a longer history working closely with farmers and they wanted to retain that link. We were expected to provide them the information to transfer to farmers.

I wondered to what extent this perceived barrier was actually a competition for institutional survival provoked by historical roles and what some of the study participants described as “institutional malaise,” a “system on the verge of collapse” in reference to both research and extension. According to a retired agricultural officer, the public extension service predates the national research service by more than five decades, having been established in the early 1920s, during the colonial era. Its basic mandate then (even today) was to advise or inform farmers what and how to grow the crops dictated by the colonial government. With scientists coming from Europe and technologies for producing the crops of interest, groundnuts and rice, generated at research stations in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, also former British colonies, extension was effectively the link between farmers and colonial agricultural administrators and scientists. This role is still safeguarded: “It was a system that worked very well in the

absence of a national research service,” according to the officer who narrated the history.

However, as attention shifted from commercial production for export to include crops for domestic consumption, a research service was created in 1977, 12 years after Gambia gained sovereignty status from Britain in 1965. The research officers were predominantly Gambians. The establishment and evolution of the research service seems to have been accompanied by confusion about roles and responsibilities of both research and extension. The misunderstanding, as apparent in the obvious rivalry unveiled through the narratives heard so far, seemed to have been aggravated by other crises within the respective institutions. As will be seen, both agricultural services institutions were facing crises: financial crises (insufficient funds to carry out their functions fully), crises of effectiveness (farmers not adopting recommended practices), and theoretical crises (lack of consistency in approach to research and extension). Collectively, these institutional weaknesses appear to have severely affected the relationship between the two public agricultural services. The following conversation I had with a research officer elaborates on the situation.

Oh . . . extension has gone through so many changes . . . let me say here that the good thing about research is that we are better in terms of what we are doing. [IJ: *In what way are you better?*] What I mean is that they have nothing to show for what they are doing, for the resources and the staffing government is putting into the institution.

IJ: But let's be fair, we are operating under a system where extension is supposed to disseminate results research has produced and you say extension is doing nothing. Where is the problem —with extension or with research not producing results for extension to transfer?

If research is not coming with results then let extension raise a fuss! They should talk to research that they are not doing anything. We want to work with them to diagnose the problems that we can put together in terms of research proposals. They need to participate upfront than in the end results of research. They should participate in the development of ideas, technologies, and interventions—whatever you want to call it. Let me tell you, we have a system

that is so outmoded. These people [extension] are in such decay; all they are interested in is money . . . where's the per diem? There's a lot of insincerity. We have some of that in research, too. There is a lack of professionalism, internally in both services. I'm not saying there are not a few committed people but overall commitment is zero. I think it's time for an attitudinal change.

An important idea is contained in this statement. It is his notion of “empowering” extension so that they could take issue with research if the latter was slack in its designated role. It was quite a contrast from an earlier comment that extension should be answerable to research. These two clearly divergent viewpoints exemplify the ambiguous relationship between researchers and extensionists mentioned earlier. Our conversation continued.

IJ: You want extension to hold research accountable? Come on, you know that won't happen. Perhaps it's time for a review of how both research and extension are organized. How would you compare effectiveness of both institutions when housed in one department to what obtains now?

I wouldn't care to compare. The realities are different now. I think we should ask ourselves, look at what's on the ground, and ask ourselves what we have done in the past ten years, for research and extension to assess what they have done. What is the justification for us being there . . . let's look at it? How can we justify our existence? Let's ask ourselves what we have done with the resources. Tie your resources to outputs, what is your impact? If not satisfactory, why is it not satisfactory? What can be done? Is it a question of reorganizing? Is it a question of not being focused? Is it a question of bringing everybody on board? What is it? Is it a question of scrapping everything, this thing about developing technologies and transferring it? We should come together and find solutions. It is time for a review. In the life of every institution there comes a time when you stop and take stock. That is necessary. Otherwise you are in a habitual mode of crises, like you are marching tick, tock, tick, tock, with no stopping for reflection. It is necessary to stop and evaluate what we have done so far.

IJ: Who should initiate such evaluation, introspection . . . ? [Interruption]

Look, my friend, before someone evaluates you, you should evaluate yourself, that's better. You should know what your problems are. Someone from the outside can help diagnose what solutions, but you should know what your

problems are. These guys do not stop to reflect. They are in a driving mode . . . that's why we are in bad shape.

IJ: How favorable is the institutional context of NARI for partnership with extension and with farmers? I mean especially with urban agriculture producers; this could be a focus for NARI to reorient their activities and attract more funding.

This is what is so daunting about this government. They interfere with everything; they stifle you. Can you imagine a board dictating to the institution . . . and they don't question the board's directives? They dictate how to run the institution. We want to work with some of the commercial farms in the urban area, to do work that can spill over to our farmers. But government will manipulate—NARI can't do this, can't do that. First of all here is an institution that's supposed to be self-financing, but does not have a legacy of impact; collaboration with Senegal is not even possible. We should be professional starting from the sub-region and build a reputation through our professionalism. Then when we come up with proposals they are likely to be funded because you would have proven yourself before.

IJ: So this an opportunity, then, for research and extension to work together for mutual survival, given common problems we are facing?

I'm very pessimistic about that. What I think research needs to do is find the resources, channel it to areas that respond to your clientele, where you can make an impact. Use the results to show your achievements to attract more funding. Focus on things you are doing well, that farmers are appreciating, select few and scale up. But that should not deter from real scientific work—that should keep on going. Improvement work has to continue despite what farmers are doing or not doing, because we need to bring in new germplasm to see whether what fits in with our cropping system. Research must respond to farmers' needs arising from new issues. To do this we go out collaboratively and see how we resolve these problems. So really strengthening farmer groups to be better able to express their needs, even to the point of developing their own research proposals, putting their own projects on the ground . . . it's about time.

IJ: What's the positive story . . . I feel like I'm getting nowhere!

We have a small NARS (National Agricultural Research System) and being small has its advantages. We can collaborate and work together internally.

The idea about “scrapping . . . this thing about developing technologies and transferring them” but instead strengthening farmer groups would become a recurring

theme throughout the study among different stakeholders. It was the case even among some extensionists whose very elimination was being suggested. As it happened, the notion had generated a focused debate on the relevance of a public extension system to present-day realities in the Gambian agriculture sector, as discussed under the next theme. This dispute was, for me, the most salient theme in the assessment of the research—extension relationship, in part because of what it meant for my interest to contribute to improving an unfavorable situation. On the other hand, though, it was a chance to start thinking more positively about alternative opportunities for extension.

Precipitated Dispute over Institutional Relevance →

I must admit I was simultaneously fascinated and disconcerted by the intensity of the doubts over the relevance and need for extension to continue to exist as an institution whose sole responsibility was to transfer or “deliver” technologies to farmers. Fascination, because not once in all the years working within the horticulture sector, straddling both research and extension, did I realize such misgivings existed. What I heard during my fieldwork was quite an eye-opener. I had certainly been aware of grumbles from both research and extension personnel with regard to the disproportionate allocation of resources and training opportunities, and also concerning each other’s performance. But the idea that public extension was not needed rather caught me off guard. In hindsight, though, I recognized that such reservations probably explained, one, the reticence of extensionists when asked to evaluate their relationship with researchers, and two, the tenuous rapport portrayed in the narratives above. I had to admit having been out of the setting far too long.

The unexpected theme with respect to institutional relevance first emerged in September of 2002, in the early days of my fieldwork, during a conversation with a former, long-serving officer in the research and extension system. Although retired, this individual still maintained a highly respected and influential position as advisor to

The Gambia Government on matters pertaining to agricultural development. I suppose his standing must have been the cause of my distress. This was because I felt the purpose I was trying to achieve by initiating the action research, improving relationships between research and extension stakeholders, was in jeopardy since, unbeknown to me, a dispute was brewing over the continuation of extension, with influential personalities behind it. At that moment, I started doubting myself and my purpose.

My conversation with that individual began with a discussion of the current situation in the agriculture sector in general. It will be recalled that the Gambian economy is largely agrarian. My research partner and I talked about how agriculture had evolved over the years in terms of its role in the economy: the changing roles of government and of the private sector; the impact of urbanization on land availability for agriculture, especially for horticultural production, in the Greater Banjul Area; the direction the horticulture sector was heading. We talked about the emergent debate within policy circles over which of two objectives, food self-sufficiency or food security, government should pursue.

With regard to the latter, what was essentially at issue was whether government ought to continue to invest in projects aimed at increasing domestic rice production for the objectives of attaining self-sufficiency and reducing importation of this staple food. Or, if efforts should be focused on promoting the idea of food security, in which case policies would support agricultural production for both export (to earn foreign revenue with which to import food) and for domestic food consumption. At first I was unsure how the two objectives were incompatible, so I argued both could and should be pursued, simultaneously. However, he pointed out that this was not a trivial issue because the decision could determine how and where resources would be allocated for research and extension. He did agree with me when I

emphasized that it was an issue for national debate that should involve farmers and other stakeholders, rather than a matter to be decided unilaterally by government.

We progressed into discussion of the historical roles of extension and research in the agriculture sector, their institutional setup, and the approach to service provision. It was then the issue came up about whether or not it made sense to have separate extension and research institutions in the Gambian context. I will share ample extracts from our conversation, which I found extremely instructive because it brought up similar issues currently debated in agricultural development circles. Especially topical to agricultural stakeholder partnership and to Extension Education are issues related to the role of the State, influence of donors, role of farmer organizations, and debates on the ideal institutional architecture for research and extension (Anderson & Van Crowder, 2000; Byerlee, 1995; Collion & Rondot, 1998; Rivera, 1997; Thompson, 1995). My partner and I spoke candidly, without hesitation or reservation, probably because neither one of us was currently employed in the public research and extension system. Our conversation is presented in the natural dialogue format in which it occurred with the retired official identified as ND and myself as IJ. He started with some historical background.

ND: We introduced a farming systems approach in the early eighties. We were convinced that as we [research] evolved, researchers had to go out and work directly with farmers, for direct technology transfer. We could not depend on extension to do it. In fact the more they researchers do that [work directly with farmers] the more irrelevant extension [the public service, not the function] becomes, and that's what's happening today. It's either you have a strong extension service and a weak research service. Why? Because then research will be out of touch with reality on the ground. Or, you have a strong and effective research working directly with the farmers and you don't need an extension service. Then you do your work with farmer organizations and get your technology moving.

IJ: Are you saying then that extension is a colonial relic?

ND: No, extension is not a colonial relic. It was an institution that worked very well for the colonial government. It was a mechanism established basically to inform, to advise farmers on what to grow and how to grow it. The technology was coming from Sierra Leone and Nigeria mostly for rice and groundnuts. Scientists were coming from Europe and extension was their linkage with local farmers. It worked then and it was very successful. But as we evolved a national, internal capacity for research, extension became more and more confused in terms of its goals. Now people have to question if extension is justified. But the corollary of course is that research must develop the capacity to link with producers, work upstream with other research scientists, and work downstream with the local private sector and producer associations in a horizontal manner.

IJ: But there should be a middle ground, for both research and extension to work side by side, be equally strong and effective. Can that happen in our context? I recall back in the seventies when I worked with horticulture we had both research and extension in the same unit.

ND: I don't know. What technology will you be extending? Look at the private companies; they recruit their own people to do extension. We have a very top-down approach. There's talk about moving from a vertical structure towards a horizontal system, which lessens need for a central command. But you need a mechanism to coordinate the horizontal system. It's been talked about at the international agricultural research level, too. But the key to all this is to have strong farmer organizations; otherwise you will have to rely on some kind of extension mechanism. But my main argument is this: with a strong research system you have a weak extension service; with a strong extension service, research may be strong technologically, scientifically but will be irrelevant to the farmers, will not be providing needed services, because they are not generating technologies farmers need. [IJ: *How come?*] Because they are far removed from the social scene of farmers, they are not learning about farmers' constraints. Research then becomes nuclear, an ivory tower just doing research for the sake of it. That is what we have now, a research system that is non-existent, on the verge of collapse. There is confusion as to whether they should engage in basic or applied research: lack the expertise to do engage in basic research; adaptive research being carried out by extension through demonstrations.

In Chapter Two, I described the research formulation task force constituted by NARI in which I was a member. That task force was additionally charged with elaborating a plan to restructure the institute in order to increase the level of professionalism, strengthen capacity to respond to national agricultural problems and,

overall, to build a reputation that would attract research collaborations and contracts through which the institute can finance its activities.

As our conversation continued, an important emergent theme was farmer/producer organizations. It would become a pointer toward the direct action organizing subsequently undertaken in the course of the study. Essentially, my partner was proposing farmer organizations as an alternative mechanism for providing extension services. Picking up on this point I probed into the reason why, compared with Senegal, The Gambia did not have a history of viable farmer organizations. I was especially intrigued by the first sentence in his response.

ND: Because, extension had no interest in creating strong farmer organizations. [*IJ: Why not?*] Because if they did they'll go out of job. I'll give you an example. When we had the maize growers association back in the seventies and eighties, under the mixed farming project, the farmers were able to put pressure on the government and USAID (United States Agency for International Development), the donor, to continue to support maize research. This made it move from a backyard, subsistence crop into a commercial crop. They [farmers] were dictating the price of maize in the market.

IJ: You are not saying extension operated under a deliberate agenda of not building farmer associations?

ND: I don't think it's a deliberate agenda. It's subconscious . . . it's just that people didn't make the effort. With the maize growers association, those people did not work with extension. They would go directly to Sapu research station to the officer there and then they'd make noise; they would go to Yundum research station and make noise; they'd go to USAID which was supporting the mixed farming project and make noise. USAID would put pressure on the research system to respond to these farmers. USAID would go to government and say you are not interfering with the maize market. The association had that influence because they were strong and well organized. So when you have strong associations they bring about change because they push for change.

Agreeing with his point about farmers' organizations as potential pressure for change, I reminded him that in 1990, 11 large-scale commercial horticultural producers came together, without any prompting from the government, to form the

association of Gambian Horticultural Producers and Exporters, GAMHOPE, a key institutional stakeholder in the study. GAMHOPE was founded to operate as a lobby for the horticulture sector, and with its powerful membership of financially autonomous, entrepreneurial urbanites, it was able to negotiate and gain concessions from the government for its members. Although GAMHOPE became dormant for several years in the aftermath of the 1994 military takeover of the former civilian government, the association is still regarded as a leader in the horticulture sector, especially in light of government's continuing policy of private-sector-led growth. I continued with a question seeking confirmation that farmers' associations were critical for bringing about accountability in the research and extension system. His rejoinder was this:

ND: Of course, look at anywhere agriculture has developed, it's because producers have gotten together and put pressure on somebody, either on the government to give them better prices for their produce, or the institutions to give them the information they need. Pressure groups are the only way to get things done: consumer groups put pressure for standards and quality of foods; producers put pressure for the technology and other things they need. Coming back to the horticulture sector, I think revival of GAMHOPE will bring about some change. What I find strange is that the horticulture sector is not very strong. The horticulture women's groups are there but they are not organized as associations; producers are not organized. They are just women farming, not organized as such, but if you can get them organized those people can be a big influence and bring change in the way things are moving in the urban agriculture sector. They can exert influence on government and can begin to dictate the research agenda. Accountability will come only where you have a mechanism and this is where we come back to the issue of horizontal linkages, to partnerships. And where you have strong farmers associations that have the capacity . . . through the funding system . . . tied to agricultural productivity . . . with farmers having a say into how money being put into research is spent. That's how research can become accountable.

At this point, I started thinking here was the opportunity for extension (the institution and its actors) to *counter* the allegation of being indifferent to building strong farmer organizations. In what ways could extension help get farmers

“organized” to enable them to “be a big influence” without necessarily putting them out of a job as ND suggested? Answers would be sought in the activities reported in Chapter Four, where the study focused on the question of what it meant and how to “organize” farmers. Our conversation continued as I picked up on the issue of accountability.

IJ: What about extension being accountable? You seem to be leaving them out.

ND: It’s actually research that has to be accountable because at the end of the day they have an output to deliver to farmers—fertilizer, seeds or some system of production to deliver. Extension has nothing; at best they can convince farmers to try certain things.

IJ: Regardless, I think dismantling the extension service is a remote possibility. Besides they have other functions apart from just extending technologies. I will agree they probably cannot continue to do the traditional work they’ve been doing . . . so if they must exist, how can they reform?

ND: But Extension doesn’t have to exist! I cannot justify the Department of Agricultural Service today in The Gambia! In the past 15 months every time I talk to farmers they tell me “your agriculture is dead,” that’s the first thing they’ll tell you. When you ask why, because they extension don’t know what they are doing. In other words extension has lost their focus because they have not evolved with the situation. They are still doing package deals. I agree with the concept of extension. You still need to extend information; but do you need the extension service to do that? Farmers have worked together all their lives. If my neighbor is growing something I ask him, I learn about what he’s doing . . . [I interrupted him]

IJ: Sure we are doing farmer-to-farmer extension and farmer field schools but that should not mean we eliminate the extension. They can still play a role. It’s all part of the worldwide discussion on what extension’s purpose in today’s agriculture is and how to reform it.

ND: But nobody is brave enough to say extension should be scrapped, nobody. Even in the World Bank. Yes, you go to the Bank, you talk with some professionals, they tell you we don’t need extension, what we need are stronger linkages between farmers and research scientists, but nobody will do anything about it. They theorize about it. Because of debts and loans, and that’s just money down the drain. Extension projects are pet projects for the Bank. Look at ADP 1, ADP 2, ASP, all a mess, no sustainable development; the money just

went down the drain. *[ADP stands for agricultural development project and ASP agricultural services project; both were World Bank-funded projects]*

IJ: But you are looking narrowly at what extension does. Let's agree we have stronger linkages between farmers and research scientists. The ratio of researchers to farmers is very small. If there were no extension services then how would results of research spread to a wider audience, and who takes over the other functions that extension does?

ND: Like what, farmer training? If farmer associations and researchers are working together, technology transfer is going on, where does extension come in? What is the role of extension? Let's take Banjulinding, for example, it's a periurban setting, and they have a farmer group. They don't need a full time extension agent to tell them what to do. What they need is technology and information to improve their production. If research were effective it would use them as a research site to develop and test technology, so you'd have a direct linkage between a farmers association and research system. You have good communication, instead of going in and out. You'd have research sites right there; you're transferring technology right there on the spot. Look, no one is daring to say it but extension is becoming very unpopular. Nobody is doing that but it has to be argued. Look at the agricultural research policy adopted in 1988. Researchers were to be evaluated on the basis of linkages with farmers. I'm saying where you have a mechanism where researchers work directly with farmers you don't need an extension service as we understand it. And this is the current discussion I'm having with the Ministry [Department of State for Agriculture, DOSA]. What you can argue is that researchers don't have time for the more specialized services like pest control; so you need a pest control service to attend to pest outbreaks, like a fire brigade, you know. These have regulatory function, a policing function. These services have to be created, to regulate pesticide use, seed quality, and storage. Part of their job is to be involved in training, in information management and having linkages with research. Such services can either be private or public. But extension per se, as we know it, just going to talk to farmers, when you have a strong effective research system, cannot be justified. But without an effective research system you have to have a mechanism to go find the information and that's what extension is all about these days. But again I'm arguing that farmers associations can do this. I may be biased but I think it's more cost effective to have a research system than to have an extension system.

IJ: So you foresee demise of extension in The Gambia . . . ? [I was interrupted . . .]

ND: If the National Agricultural Research Board (NARB) had worked the way it was supposed to extension would have been dead by now. The way the NARB was designed in the act, it was to advise government on the

development of agricultural policy; prioritize research, to ensure effective research system to communicate results to end users, meaning producers and private sector. The guiding principle embodied in the national research policy is for research to work directly with farmers. If this policy had worked as well as it was supposed to there won't be any need for extension. I'm still saying we don't need an extension system. But because that system hasn't worked extension is still there. There was a time both the NARB and NARI were very strong and that weakened the extension service. People were beginning to see they didn't have to go to Cape [the extension headquarters]. They went directly to Yundum or to Sapu [the research stations]. I can see extension dying a natural death.

IJ: How so?

ND: Because extension has lost its focus. They think they cannot do anything if you don't have money, have workshops. And that's part of the World Bank system. They support projects, pump money, and people just get used to money. And the system collapses once the money is finished. But if the system doesn't work you need to change it—as simple as that. But then, there is the question of where pressure for change is coming from. Is it coming from the institution or is it coming from the outside?

Sometime, being privy to certain information can exceed one's comfort zone; it certainly did mine. I left this encounter feeling so deflated I held off any more conversations and interviews for four days, while I reflected on the information. In the mass of readings a graduate student does prior to fieldwork, I had read somewhere that an inquiry process frequently yields more questions than answers. Well, at this point I was asking myself a question not identified as one of the research questions, neither in the initial ones I came up with nor those agreed together with my research partner. The new question was this: How feasible would be attempts to improve upon the relationship between research and extension when doubts about the *raison d'être* of one of the parties were so prevalent? Rather than the two strings tightly interlacing, I started to see the danger of them individually unraveling and actually cutting ties from the same stake.

Not to be daunted, however, I recovered and resumed, curious to find out how commonplace were ND's viewpoints on extension. I homed in and followed up on the theme with other researchers and extensionists currently employed within the public agricultural services system. Unintentionally, the question became the focal point of my work with these actors up to the time I exited the field. Whenever I had meetings with agricultural services officers, I directly posed the question: Can we justify the role of extension in today's Gambian agriculture? This unexpected turn provides another justification for doing action research—working with others brings out additional questions as the research process unfolds.

Responses were varied, with the majority more empathetic, but some were certainly aligned with ND's position, although expressed less assertively. As to be expected, though, extensionists (and even some researchers—to their credit) recognized that internal problems hampered their performance and effectiveness, but were in total disagreement with the idea of going extinct. Some senior extension officers with whom I broached the topic did not even think it worthy of discussion, and summarily dismissed the notion. It appeared that whether or not extension was justified was a problem felt more in the researchers' camp than in the latter's. The following quotes offer additional perspectives, fortunately all positive toward extension, on the ongoing debate.

It's hard to say, yes, you do see them around once in a while in their vehicles so you know there is a system, they are there, but the effectiveness is a big question. You go to the different divisions they are there. Again resources come in to play, motorbikes are not available they are not going to meet the farmers as they were doing before. Where we operate in the North Bank we collaborate with extension. We invite them to participate in our programs. But again they are not so active because they have to cover a wide area with limited resources. The resources are not there for them to move around.

Yes . . . [*Hesitantly at first*] in a way, we can justify extension. [*More assertively now*] However, I think it definitely needs changes to be more suitable to addressing present day problems. I mean extension cannot still be

thinking of working the same old bureaucratic way. We are making some changes, doing what has not been done before and they can be effective. [IJ: *What changes?*] For example, the agricultural training and resource centre at Jenoi under the South-South Cooperation program of the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations], they are bringing in farmers as resource persons to train other farmers.

I still think what they have right now, for example with the horticultural projects supported by the Taiwanese, just like in your time, I think their role is to have a technical person stationed in the village supervising farmers, advising farmers on what to do and what not to do. I think that kind of setup in the extension system should be encouraged. What I find with some schemes set up by donors, they don't have that, someone stationed there. The extension personnel are a little detached. They have so many things to do.

There is a regional network that wants to show that yes extension must be recognized. We had a sub-regional meeting recently about the relationship between non-governmental organizations [NGOs], farmer organizations [FOs], extension, and research. We realized the relationship is not strong. The meeting called NGOs and FOs in West and Central Africa but public extension was not invited. [IJ: *Why the exclusion?*] It was purposely for the NGOs because it is realized many of them are complementing public extension and probably are more effective. Why? That's because we don't spread ourselves thin as opposed to government extension. Anyway, although NGOs are not involved in research, they perform an extension function and therefore should be involved in what research is doing from day one. They are a force to reckon with because they operate in well-defined areas and usually with specific mandates. The one problem is that NGOs are donor dependent; therefore support comes and goes. But where money is available NGOs are performing fine and are a force to reckon with. As a matter of fact, that's why I still think we need the public extension service in a developing country like ours.

Extension should still be technicians advising farmers on agricultural techniques that are relevant to their situation. And also be involved in training farmers with knowledge that they've gained through their academic training. In fact, that's something extension needs more of, manpower training to take care of the attrition rate, to replace those who leave, to have continuity. One of the pluses of the extension system is having subject matter specialists with grounding in special technical areas. We need to have more of that; it's one way of trying to keep the extension system relevant to farmers' needs.

I don't understand where this is coming from but of course extension should exist. What we need is more resources to do our work better, and to increase our collaboration with research. Anyway, extension is purely a government institution supported by the government and because of this we will always be

there. That's the difference with NGOs. They depend on donors and that is a problem because there is no guarantee there will be continuous financial support. Therefore we will continue to exist side by side with them and complement each other.

I deliberately used the last quote in this series to convey the sense of confidence and security extension felt regarding their existence, sentiments no doubt derived from the fact that extension is positioned as a governmental institution. It was an unwavering position demonstrated at different occasions and one I found reassuring, because it offered some promise that my purpose in the action research was attainable, after all. During a meeting with a group of officers from both NARI and DAS, for example, I floated the idea of creating, in the future, one entity to be called the national agricultural research and development institution. Reactions to this hypothetical body were varied: researchers were more excited and saw some possibilities; conversely, extensionists thought of this entity not as a replacement of, but simply as complementary to, the current extension service. The extension professionals at the meeting were consistent in their interest in strengthening the weak links with research, a need justified in the comment "We should have an understanding that we are partners in development. We are missing too much and losing a lot by not collaborating."

I was still probing to better understand the nature of the controversy over extension, specifically what would be at stake if the service were discontinued. I asked extensionists what they did beyond the technical role researchers seemed to emphasize, and which they might use to argue for their continued existence. The following description from a veteran extension agent who works mostly with women horticultural producers was typical of answers offered. The initials IJ identify my voice in the conversation.

Extension Agent: "My work is not only technical!"

If you don't have extension who else would deliver the technologies to farmers? We have to train the farmers, to remind them now and again to use the right technologies. For example, you go to the gardens; they have a lot of pest and disease problems because farmers don't follow a rotation. They keep doing the same things so extension should be there to tell them how it should be so they can increase their yields. The extension agent is there to implement the technology for farmers to understand.

IJ: Is your work only technical, then?

No, although my role is just mainly technical on the production side. But I also deal with other issues that may have an impact on production, like training. If you are to produce and you don't train the farmer then the impact will be lacking. Training in better management of their crops, production plans, market survey, fertilizer management, seed germination test, land preparation, pest and disease control, all these things we have to teach the farmer about. But you must also remember we work with farmers to push them organizationally to better manage their groups. But that has a limitation meaning the farmers have to make their own decision in their group management. I don't control what they do.

IJ: What do you mean by you "push them organizationally"? For example?

For example, I was in Kafuta village from 1996 to reorganize their garden during the first republic. Kafuta was a downfall after the previous extension agent left. It became dormant; it was a complete failure. My role was to reorganize to bring the project back to life, bring the organization back to life, and bring the peace back to life. I found the 25-hectare (62.5 acres) garden weedy. My boss showed me the place and asked if I can bring it back to life. On Friday when I was going to the mosque I bought one kilo of kola nuts and gave it to my lodger to give to the Imam to inform him I was the new extension posted to the village and come to reorganize the garden. After two Fridays I send another kola. There was a general meeting of the dormant society. Some said it was impossible to work as society. I asked what problems there were and told them to come together to let bygones be bygones. Let's work together for our own benefits. I asked them to give me a chance to reorganize and they agreed. I told them to believe that we can make it, but if they believed we couldn't make it then we'll fail. Believe that we can reorganize. We took that as our motto, in Mandingo we said "*jangwo mba dada noola*" [literal translation: *this place here, we will work it.*] They used to sing that in their local drumming. On the third Friday I invited the whole village, both men and women to a meeting at the garden . . . everyone came. I asked them what Kafuta meant in Mandingo. It means 'it has increased.' I pointed out that they have increased but they were taking each other to court over that piece of land (the garden). I told them my intention was to bring them together to work

together. By then the garden was originally divided according to blocks allocated to each village Kabilo (ward), even in all. But I reorganized it and allocated a number of beds to each Kabilo and whatever you (farmer) produced was yours. It's not going to the Kabilo. Previously whatever they produced was taken to the Kabilo; the farmer had no say, no belonging. But I changed things everybody had own share, own bed, own sale. That is what I mean by pushing them in their management.

The agent's argument about his work being not only technical brings out an important point about extension practice worth dissecting. His narrative would posit extension as a complex and multi-faceted practice that is simultaneously educational, communicative, and behavioral. In such broad application, agricultural extension would correspond with the often-stated purpose of it being a service to provide information intended to assist farmers identify potential improvements in their practice, make sound decisions about the use of their resources, and effect changes in thought and action (Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996). Neither its technical nor its communicative dimension is privileged over the other.

Unfortunately, the dominance of the transfer of technology approach in extension has meant a greater tendency to emphasize the technical function of extension at the expense of its educational or learning dimensions. Röling and de Jong (1998), in discussing types of learning produced by TOT-driven extension, argued that while it might result in technical transformations, its more negative outcome was passive learning that did little to transform people's behavior. This is because of the relationship between extension agent and farmer, best described as a teacher/learner transaction with the assumption that knowledge resides in the teacher alone, that of the learner being devalued. Witness Farmer Jobe's compliant about Gambian trainers not respecting farmers' indigenous knowledge: ". . . since you are teaching . . . we listen and say yes to everything he says." Paulo Freire (1997) famously described this

transaction as a “banking” approach to education and learning. Vehemently opposed to the banking approach, Freire proposed an alternative process.

Freire’s work on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1990; 1997), which has greatly influenced the evolution of participatory development, advanced an alternative approach to learning based on the notion of “conscientização.” This idea refers to a process whereby people become critically aware of the influence of socio-political and economic factors on their action or inaction. In contrast to the banking model, conscientização, or critical consciousness, seeks to improve the human condition through engaging with people so that they actively participate in the search for answers to their problems. A model of extension with the purpose of enabling critical consciousness would reverse the role of the agent and the farmer, very much in the sense Farmer Jobe described the methods used by Senegalese “trainers.” Here the farmer would be rightfully regarded as an expert with indigenous knowledge about his or her local environment. The extension agent’s place then would be not to impose his or her own ideas and knowledge, but rather to facilitate an active learning process that recognizes and relies on the farmer’s observation, abilities, and action. The relationship between farmer and extension agent would take the form of co-learners with each respecting the knowledge of the other. Ultimately, a “conscientização-driven” extension model would privilege a pro-active educational practice shaped by two-way communication between farmers and agents, motivating farmers to take the initiative in problem definition, and seeking and testing solutions. Farmer Jobe’s harangue in Chapter One expresses this aspiration. The direct action organizing reported in the fourth chapter was an attempt to initiate a change.

Incidentally, the above conversation foreshadows the substantive issues addressed in Chapter Four relative to women’s horticultural garden projects. Very briefly, development-oriented projects are the primary mechanism for government’s

support of horticulture, a growth area considered because of its potential to generate foreign exchange through the exportation of fruits and vegetables. The garden in question, Kafuta, was one of three large-scale, communal, highly capitalized gardens each equipped with a sophisticated drip irrigation system, established in 1986 with financial support from the Islamic Development Bank. The scheme has since closed down as a result of organizational problems similar to those discussed during the search conference reported in the next chapter.

For the moment, the development project phenomenon actually appeared to offer one explanation for the obvious competition within the research and extension system. It most certainly seemed to have contributed to the self-assurance exhibited by extension officers amidst the controversy over their continuation. In an earlier section of this chapter, I outlined the key role of the public service extension agents in supervising the implementation of development projects, the main conduit through which the Gambia government, backed by international cooperation and development institutions/donor agencies, supports the agriculture sector. Because farmers are the “targeted beneficiaries,” nearly all such projects have an extension component, with the responsibility falling under the purview of the various units of the Department of Agricultural Services (DAS). In a sense, extensionists, in their capacity as what I call foot soldiers of the state, play a role that is both economically and politically expedient. Quite conceivably, this role bestows on them an apparently favored status with the government. Proof of and reasons for the protective relationship DAS enjoys are provided in this excerpt from the [personal] Web site of the Gambian President.

The government of the Gambia since 1994 had taken agriculture as a priority sector in her development agenda and has provided the biggest support to the extension service in terms of both personnel and physical and financial resources. The advent of development projects in the sector since 1994 has to a large extension [sic] increased the capacity of the extension service, which remained low in the past. The support provided by these development projects

has enhanced the capacity of extension services to monitor and supervise crop production activities to improve productivity and alleviate poverty.

I should explain here that 1994 was a pivotal year in The Gambia's history. It ushered in a new military government through a coup d'état of the previous democratic government that had been in place since 1965, the year the country gained sovereignty status from England. Statements comparing achievements by the government in the first and second republics as revealed in the citation above are rather commonplace. Unfortunately, as much as I would have liked to pursue the topic, an exploration into the dynamics of civilian and military governments is beyond the scope of this current dissertation.

Despite extension's position in the eyes of the government, or because of it, there have been concerns about their long-term sustainability because their survival was so dependent on the funding of development projects. One officer described the situation: "We operate on SOS [save our souls]. If there is no project there is no training, no vehicle to do the work. It is crippling sometimes." It will be recalled from my conversation with ND recounted earlier that extension represents an area of "pet projects" from international donor agencies—regardless of effectiveness or efficiency. I would hazard a conclusion, nonetheless, that so long as agriculture remains the primary sector of the Gambian socio-political and economic landscape, and as long as government continues to exert a hold on interventions therein, externally funded projects will always be implemented which extension personnel will be charged to supervise and monitor. Perhaps it was this certainty, at least in the foreseeable future, which explained why extensionists were consistent and insistent in their demands for closer collaboration with research and for the latter to refocus on addressing domestic issues. Clearly, "dying a natural death" was not at all on extension's agenda.

Last, it appeared that criticisms directed at the public research institution itself were fanning the flames of the argument regarding institutional relevance. Talking to extensionists, I heard the mild grumble that “NARI is more interested in funded research projects with outside research organizations rather than farmers’ problems at home.” Other views were less generous, for example, this supporting statement from another participant:

If you go to NARI you find them doing research completely irrelevant to Gambia’s needs. If the farmers come saying we have this problem we’d like you to work with you to do this, the response is don’t waste my time. This is because they don’t have money and their interest is based on who can bring money not ideas. So you find them doing tests and trials in this environment for outside organizations.

That it was a case of backlash was evidenced by this reaction from a NARI researcher during a discussion about the link between NARI and farmers.

In fact the criticisms you hear against NARI, NARI what are they doing, it’s the educated people in Banjul who will raise that question more than the farmers. Because they are not direct recipients of the services we deliver. If you sit in a fast-food restaurant on the corner of Buckle Street [*a major commercial area in the capital Banjul*] you won’t know what I do with farmers in Fatoto village [*the last town in the interior*]. You know, given the nature of my job I am responsible to the farmers. I’d be more distressed if farmers started asking me what my program is actually doing. If the farmers I deal with start asking me then I have a problem. They appreciate what we do. I’m confident if you go to those farmers we work with you find very good evaluation of our program.

IJ: If we went to the farmers and I asked them about their perception of research, do you think they’d be biased because of your presence?

In fact what I told the last [donor] mission when they were going on a monitoring tour, I said I’m deliberately keeping away because maybe if I go you might think the farmers are saying certain things because I’m standing right there. You go and critically assess what I’ve done. That’s what I like about the consultative forums organized by [some donor projects] where farmers are the majority. They really put us to task . . . I’m glad the farmer can tell me off. But also that’s what clearly engendered the jealousy because my program comes away with accolades. We do not wait for extension to take

anything to the farmers, we take things directly. I'm confident if you go to those farmers we work with you'll find very good evaluation of us.

Based on the narratives heard so far, the relationship between researchers and extensionists would be characterized as complex and confusing at best. At worst, it appears not only weakened but also very adversarial. Perceptions of roles and functions, the sense of territoriality this engendered, reservations about the continuation of the extension service, and systemic and structural institutional malaise appear to be the key influential factors. Up to this point, therefore, the reader might see no less than a hopeless situation in which promoting forms of engagement based on principles of partnership could be quite a daunting task.

Except that there is another side to the story. I interpreted the candid venting as a subconscious longing, a desire presumably arising out of a commonsense recognition that there was no other option but to improve current working relationships. Therefore, constraining contexts notwithstanding, and maybe recognizing the inevitable, my research partners and I talked about the key changes needed to enable research and extension actors to eventuate a more positive working environment.

3.3.2 “Have to Agree to Break Down Barriers”

Roles, associated responsibilities, and attendant relationships are acted out in specific domains where stakeholders interact to produce knowledge, material goods, or services. In Chapter Two, I used the term “innovation system,” borrowed from Hall et al. (2001a), to define such a domain, which in the case of my dissertation research was the urban agricultural system located in the Greater Banjul Area of The Gambia. The way roles, responsibilities, and relationships are perceived and constructed would presumably have some sort of impact on how the domain would function. The

following comment from one of my co-researchers illuminates the situation in the urban agriculture system, and hence the motivation for change.

Because the research-extension relationship has been very weak, it has had a lot of effect on productivity at farmers' level. There are technologies developed before farmers may know about, but extension is not doing its bit to remind farmers now and again, because you have to use the technologies. Many pests and disease problems persist in the women's horticultural gardens because no rotations followed. Sometimes you do not even see beds [for planting vegetables]. You don't even see these guys [extension]. They [farmers] keep doing the same things when extension should be there to tell them how it should be done. They are not inculcating farmers to see that the horticulture component is more important than what they do in the wet season, growing rice. Knowing that what they can earn from horticulture can buy bags of rice for the whole year.

In most sub-Saharan African countries, public or state-governed institutions provide agricultural services. Public research and extension services have been criticized for not having achieved their potential, either because appropriate innovations have not been generated, or where developed appropriate innovations have not been diffused because of inadequate linkages between research institutes, extension agencies, and farmers (CORAF, 1999). The preceding conversations between extension and research personnel provide ample testimony. The generation, verification, and dissemination of agricultural innovations should involve the sharing of information and other resources without hindrances in the flow of these among different actors. Having open communication channels and effective linkages across those concerned would facilitate this. As might be surmised from the narratives in the previous section, the substance and quality of stakeholder relationships is very much dependant on social, economic, institutional, and organizational contexts. The ample verbatim quotes in this section provide some optimistic perspectives on the changes needed in the mediating contexts. I have arranged the discussion around thematic areas generated from analysis of my field notes.

Changing the Guiding Paradigm

We don't have to be too rigid. Number one, we all have to agree we have to break down the barriers. I mean, for example, saying that anything research is research's domain, anything extension is extension's domain. If I see anything horticultural extension and if I do it, I think the head of extension is not going to be happy, I'm sorry, I'll do it. Later on, if I do it, he can say we can do it in a better way but I will not see it as an exclusive territory. I see the farmers. If we are trying to deliver to the farmers . . . and at the end of the day if we can deliver and the farmer is happy, it might not go through the bureaucratic vertical research extension network.

I think the way NARI is trying to go now, involving so many individuals into it, makes problem identification and strategies towards doing the research very effective. I think it is a good one. Of course there is still weak relationship between research and extension, but they have made an effort in the past and I hope they continue to do it to involve extension, NGOs and farmer organizations into the research formulation phase. I also think there should be an organization bringing all these institutions together so that certain things are put together so that they can get down to the farmers.

The involvement of extension should be at the very, very beginning. Once you [research] think of an idea, say let's look at storage issues, call some extension people, call some farmer representatives and you discuss. At that conceptualization stage you are already involving them all. And as you develop your proposals discuss it together before it goes on. And the first trial they should also be invited once in a while to see how it is going. So that when you are ready to go on-farm with your trial they were already part of formulation so they will know what this is all about. Then the interest will be there. That is something being talked about in all quarters these days that is, farmers, NGOs and extension should be involved in research. If you are not part of a system then ownership will not be there.

Providing Equal Incentives and Opportunities

Well, we have some jealousies between research and extension. From my own experience, yes our colleagues would see us as well paid because grades are not the same. They see you as principal research officer or research superintendent and when they compare it with that of the principal extension officer there is a big gap. And maybe they also see themselves as not getting the type of training researchers are getting. But now things are changing, you have many extension agents with master's degrees. That's why there is a lull. I think training is one way to get the system to be more effective. You find that it is the researchers mostly going for training at the international research institution level. But in those same institutions there are training programs for

extension officers so that they also go to learn some of the research methodologies. If we have extension attending such training on how to conduct adaptive trials then . . . it becomes more effective . . . we could work better.

I think also with the present set up here at NARI and Sapu, where things are normal [sic] it's possible to call on the extension people within a cluster to do some kind of training, meetings, workshops to know what each other is doing. Although they will argue there is a workshop planning meeting at the beginning of the year to tell extension or research what they are doing. But that I did not see as effective. And the way they do it is cumbersome; all of them come together and within two days they want to tell each other what they are doing? It should be done in sequence, by theme, by subject, one at a time. The manpower is available at NARI to conduct training whereby extension people will be trained for the work that research is going to do.

To have an effective horticulture research and extension I think we need to be planning together, be open and accountable to each other. One should not hide from the other, especially when it comes to resources: this is what we have; this is what we are going to do. Involve each other in everything you do, meetings, conferences, workshops, budgeting, everything. Those involved will put their best into it and the outcomes will be higher.

Setting and Enforcing Conducive Institutional Policies and Practices

Well the kind of collaboration I observe locally with research and extension is not very strong, it's very ad hoc. Ad hoc in the sense that they call upon each other when they think they should. There is no definite policy that says when something is happening in the research institution extension must be there, farmers must be there, NGOs must be there, and vice versa. There's probably limitation with finances but it should be in black and white that this is how it should be done and all the institutions and farmers involved take part in this partnership.

Isatou: I like your idea about partnership. But how would you suggest this might happen?

I think the policy in place calls for all these sectors to come together but then again it is the absence of the units to make sure it is effective. For example if there is a unit at NARI that is entrusted, is given the mandate to bring these two, research and extension, together then that unit is held responsible if it is not happening. But if it is loose . . . you cannot pinpoint it on anybody. We have a policy that is not being put into practice. A research extension liaison officer (RELO) is important. It's the link between research and extension. We had a RELO under GARD [*Gambian Agricultural Research and Diversification; a USAID-funded project in the 1980s*] and it was effective in a

way. But soon after the demise of the project that position was gone. In the present scheme of service there is provision for this position but it has never been filled. But with a RELO anything that has to do with extension from research they are the people that should do it; they should initiate it, coordinate meetings, on-farm research trials, they should conduct it in collaboration with NARI involving the researchers. There should be a RELO for DAS located in the agricultural communication unit, and a RELO for NARI in the institute. They'll be two different units, because the training will be different. DAS is more versed in extension and NARI versed in research methodologies. But each will know a little about research and extension. The DAS RELO will work with NARI using communication facilities to make sure technologies are documented and disseminated. The relationship will be stronger if these units are in place.

I think we should also change this culture about dishing out money. We invite each other to our planning meetings only when there is money to organize them. For example, NARI only invites extension when they have money; extension only invites NGOs when there's money. Otherwise the way it is each is doing its own thing. *[IJ: What is the issue with money? It has come up in several conversations.]* Personally, I think it's something inherited from the past when the Americans were here, under the GARD project and the mixed farming project. They were dishing out money, giving per diems for people to attend meetings. I think this is totally wrong because you are already paid your salary and on top of that you are provided transport and monthly fuel allowance. So if a meeting is organized what should stop those in Cape to come to Brikama or those in Brikama to go to Cape? We should change this idea that if you are not going to sign at the end of the day and receive a hundred Dalasis (equivalent to US \$4 in 2002) then you can't invite others to meetings.

It should start at the very top! From the very, very top, from the Ministry level, they must try to enforce that there exist this relationship between research and extension. Even in the reports they write each quarter should be indicating what has transpired between the two. If it is seen as a requirement in the reports sent to the Ministry and someone is going to look at those reports, then all of them will know there is need for this kind of collaboration. It's not a carrot and stick, but you have to do some kind of a force so that everybody knows that is to be done. There is need for enforcing collaboration.

The policy dimension is important. We have conflicting policies in research and extension, which is a major problem even though we are all trying to service the farmer. If the agricultural policy is developed it can unite us.

Building on Pockets of Cooperation and Social Relationships

When I first joined the DAS, the development wing of horticulture worked very closely with the researchers. At the time horticulture research and extension were in the same accommodation and answerable to the same officer. That made life easy. The horticulture extension and research units worked together, each knew what the other was doing. We worked together on the site where the experiment was taking place, both present at the field level. We have done research in all horticulture areas together, some of it picked by the extension people and disseminated throughout. There still is room for more to be done. But it is better that research and extension are separated although they should be linked. But linking is the problem.

NARI horticulture and DAS horticulture, I'll tell you what has worked to our advantage. The current head of DAS horticulture was right here in NARI and we went together to the US to get our training in horticulture. I go to his living room to discuss official matters. If he has a beef with me because of the training I'm conducting with farmers, I'd say "between you and me, if I find you doing research at Cape, and you've been at research, do you think I will be mad?" He'd say no. I say, "you see, there should be no resentments."

I guess I'm one of those idealistic diplomats; I think I can use my diplomacy anywhere. For me it's been a good relationship with DAS, although I was at loggerheads with them. But at the end of the day if I feel I have to work through their office, I don't even call, I take my vehicle and go personally and say to so and so, you and me whether we like it or not we are linked by horticulture in Gambia, so we have to work for horticulture. So we have our differences but when it comes down to the job my philosophy is to put everything aside and get the job done.

Farmer Organizations as Stimulus for Change

We also need to really strengthen farmers' groups to be better able to express their needs to research and extension, even to the point of developing their own proposals and putting their own projects on the ground. It's about time; but I don't know how this can happen.

Based on my experience in Taiwan, there farmers' organizations are so powerful, so strong . . . I don't know, Isatou; I don't know where we are going to get those kinds of organizations, who will start them for us here. I've been singing this to farmers everywhere I go. It's a way for them to deal with research and extension. In fact I talked to the Taiwanese to have an exchange visit, to take some farmers to Taiwan to visit farmers there, even though the women are illiterate. I had an argument with the Taiwanese who said, "no, no, you are the ones we want to take there, you are educated; so that you can go and come back with knowledge." I said "no, if you take [Farmer X, from

horticultural garden B] she will bring back knowledge she had not before.” This is part of manpower development. I’m talking about taking farmers to Taiwan . . . I’m always asking myself how can I get them to see how farmers there are organized. Those farmers have so much money they do a better job than research and extension. . . . They hire their own extensionists; they have their own banks, gas stations, credit associations. The bottom line is, we need our own farmers’ organizations here.

Of course, look at anywhere agriculture has developed, it’s because producers have gotten together and put pressure on somebody, either on the government to give them better prices for their produce, or the institutions to give them the information they need. Accountability will come only where you have a mechanism and this where we come back to the issue of horizontal linkages, to partnerships. And where you have strong farmers’ associations that have the capacity . . . through the funding system . . . tied to agricultural productivity . . . with farmers having a say into how money being put into research is spent. *[Note: This is a previous quote well worth repeating.]*

There must be formal representation of horticultural farmers, the target groups, in the institutions of research and extension. We cannot leave them out.

In summary, the conversations in the foregoing sections show that research and extension are activities where actors negotiate personal and organizational interests as they attempt to construct knowledge and facilitate learning about agricultural problems and their solutions. Clearly, the requisite relationships and interactions among actors might be facilitated or hindered by the operating environment; in other words, the structure and culture of the institutions concerned are influential. As expressed in the above quotes, strengthening linkages across various stakeholders would demand favorable policies, new attitudes and practices, new professional identities, and new roles. Such changes are important but not easy to eventuate, as one participant adroitly observed: “The institutional structure is not favorable, but the institutional culture needs to and can change. And that goes toward change, and change takes time. Then there is the question of where pressure for change is coming from. Is it coming from the institutions? Is it coming from the outside?” The action research, it seemed, was continually generating more questions than offering answers.

How do findings about the relationship between research and extension “trainers” connect to the discourse on partnership in the global agricultural development community? As noted earlier, partnership forms of relationship are vigorously promoted at the nexus of agricultural technology development where farmers, researchers, and extension agents most intersect (Veldhuizen, Waters-Bayer & de Zeeuw, 1997). Under partnership arrangements farmer organizations, research institutions, and extension agencies would work collaboratively to merge different objectives, knowledge, experiences, and resources with the hope that this will improve the process and product of technology generation interventions. In particular, partnership is intended to fully engage farmers in critical decision making for research and extension to make them demand-driven and farmer-centered activities (Biggs & Smith, 1998; Collion & Rondot, 1998). Through research-extension-farmer partnerships, institutional weaknesses and the high social and financial costs of the top-down transfer of technology agricultural development would be more effectively addressed (Thrupp, 1996).

However, based on the narratives above it is obvious a preliminary step is certainly necessary, especially at the research-extension nexus. Without some sort of reorganization, there would be potential obstacles militating against the adoption of partnership in institutional contexts defined by centralized, bureaucratic hierarchies, entrenched practices, disparate policies, and professional identities. It is reasonable to conclude that prior to, or in tandem with, the promotion of partnership among farmers, researchers, and extension agents, equally critical is the reshaping of the specific relationship between research and extension actors. That’s especially so because, at least for the foreseeable future, both of their institutions and, therefore, their institutional actors, are likely to exist side by side.

3.4 Reflections

Through the lived stories of researchers and extensionists I have tried to reveal some key aspects of their relationships and interactions. The deep cracks that exist are made all too visible through their individual voices, couched differently in narrations of practice that are at once nuanced and explicit. Yet equally evident is the felt and expressed need for change to a more positive relationship. The depth of the suggestions signaled a readiness to work toward such change. I believe the individual stories just heard each tell such a uniquely compelling story that a résumé by me at this point would be anticlimactic. Therefore, I have reserved any conclusions drawn from what I learned in these conversations for the closing chapter of the dissertation. For now, I will share some personal thoughts about my interactions with the agricultural researchers and extension agents who engaged with me in this portion of the action research. I have taken the liberty of using the plural “we” to refer to my research partners and I, as a tribute to our collaboration in the inquiry.

My research partners and I engaged in a democratic critical reflection exercise where we openly shared personal stories about our experiences as agricultural researchers and extensionists. All the same, I felt honored and privileged that my colleagues entrusted me with so much of their inner thoughts and feelings about each other’s professional practice. The voices heard in this chapter belong to individuals with whom I’ve had prolonged professional and, in some cases, social relationships. Nonetheless, on several occasions, I wondered why they were so forthcoming with information, especially when all were aware that I was conducting research for my dissertation. I often said with the tape running, “be careful what you say, I’m going to quote you in my dissertation.” Yet, knowing this did not seem to deter them from unreservedly airing out frustrations with each other, whether it was in one-on-one

interactions with me, or whether we were in a mixed group. I hope my dissertation was of secondary concern since there were bigger issues at stake.

I could only attribute the willingness to share stories to a certain feeling of mutual trust in the face of all the tensions. It must have been a trust supported by the fact that we had a long history of working in the same urban horticulture system, albeit not always in the desirable collaborative spirit. It was, however, a tribute to that shared past that research and extension stakeholders took the opportunity presented by the open process of action research to simultaneously look inward on their interactions, and forward to identify possible new directions for a better future.

As the chief instigator of the study and an insider in the setting—but independent of either the research and extension institutions—I sensed an expectation that I should take the responsibility (risk?) for exposing latent deficiencies, difficulties, and possibilities, and for coming up with recommendations for strengthening relationships between research and extension. Indeed, throughout my work with the horticulture program leader, a common refrain was, “you should include that in the recommendations you’ll come up with in your dissertation.” I had to constantly correct him, reminding him any recommendations would be “ours” and not mine alone.

I would like to believe, though, that the introspection we went through was a healthy beginning for what would clearly be a continuous process of renewal and improvement in the relationship between research and extension. I am reminded of a comment made by a member of my graduate special committee, in a review of the many iterations of my dissertation research proposal: “I doubt you are going to make any institutional changes in the nine months you’ll be in the field.” I agreed with the observation. But I have also wondered just how long it would take to undo more than five decades of what Hall and Nahdy (1999) described as “historical patterns of practice.” At the risk of pretension, I hope I have lived up to my co-researchers’

expectation of me to use my dissertation to carry their message of hope and desire for change. I trust the recommendations in the final chapter are adequate as a starting point.

There is one final point to make before moving on to the next chapter. To a large extent, the learnings that emerged from my work with researchers and extensionist influenced my platform in the concurrent activities conducted within the producer node of the urban agriculture system. In view of the fact that farmers were apparently at the center of a web of struggle between extension and research actors—a captive audience—I thought it reasonable that they ought to have an influence on what was going on among those actors. I agreed with the comment from a research partner, speaking about women horticultural producers and their potential to influence the sector, that “[t]hey can exert influence on government and can begin to dictate the research agenda,” presumably to make it more relevant to their needs. Of course, the caveat he made was that could happen only if the farmers in question were organized.

Accordingly, as the study unfolded, my research partners and I followed up on the notion that if farmers were organized that would positively affect the quality of their relationship with trainers as globally defined. Could farmers have more voice and influence in decision making for agricultural development if organized? In other words, is being “organized” a precondition to enable farmers to engage in partnership relationships with outside agents of development? If so, in what ways were urban agriculture farmers not organized but ought to be in order to enable that voice, to change the slave-dictator relationship? What did “organized” mean, in the first place? We posed these additional questions, sought answers, and concurrently took action in the phase of the action research reported in Chapter Four.

4. LEARNINGS: FARMERS URGE TRAINERS TO REDUCE DESIRES AND PRIDE—BUT HOW?

4.1 “Those Who Want to Lift Us Up Stand Tall Looking Down on Us”

“If you want to lift up people you must be below them, lift from the bottom; otherwise you won’t succeed . . . trainers should reduce their desires and pride and work with the people. This is something you people should talk about,” Farmer Jobe ended his indicting lecture. I hastily assured him the purpose of my action research was precisely that—to initiate conversations between the trainers and the people on how they could work closer with one another. Jobe’s imagery of trainers standing above farmers might as well have summarized the prevalent relationship that existed between these key agricultural actors in The Gambia. Indeed, as the previous chapter revealed, and as will be heard in the present one, additional research was probably unnecessary to confirm Farmer Jobe’s viewpoint. The situation was a given, acknowledged by all actors—farmers and trainers alike.

What was new and refreshing was widespread recognition of the huge costs associated with continuing business as usual, that is, with the skewed relationships between and among trainers and farmers. More substantively, the appreciation seemed to have generated a social energy driving a desire among actors to “talk about” change as Farmer Jobe suggested. The purpose of the conversation was to first gain a deeper understanding of why the problem existed, and then, from that basis, to implement necessary practical actions aimed at reorienting the vertical relational arrangement and rectifying its legacy of shortcomings. But my research partners and I were faced with a challenge related to the research puzzle: how to accomplish such an undertaking in meaningful ways that went beyond mere palliative measures. The action research process would provide multiple arenas for the required deliberations and interventions.

In Chapter Four, Farmer Jobe’s narrative once again provides the reference point from which I analyze some key conditions that emerged as contributing to, and as potentially mitigating, what was perceived as farmers’ “subservient” status in their relationship with outside development actors. In section 4.1.1, I expound on the multiple nuances of the standing-tall imagery by providing additional viewpoints from farmers, policymakers, donors, and others belonging to the trainer category. The quotes presented identify some of the main reasons underlying the dysfunctional relational arrangements but, more important, offer concrete suggestions on remedial actions. All the excerpts are representative, drawn from conversations my research partners and I held on the subject during various research events reported in Chapter Two. Additionally, the quotations will confirm that Farmer Jobe’s concern regarding the status quo was equally disturbing to other stakeholders. Section 4.2 presents an in-depth, reflective analysis of the action processes undertaken in response to emergent findings from the conversations reported in the first part of the chapter. There, reference is made throughout to statements in Section 4.1.1, for which reason I have numbered them for easier identification. Unlike previous chapters, this one does not end with a reflections section. The reason is that the entire chapter is already narrated from a highly reflective perspective that tries to express my angst, exhilarations, leanings, and learnings from the process and emergent findings recounted. Hence, I feel that including summary reflections certainly would be redundant, and anticlimactic.

4.1.1 The Counterpoise: Farmers Must Organize

“Farmers are not organized.” This has been a common refrain among professional colleagues, extension agents, government officials, and other development agents—actors earlier identified as trainers—throughout my career in the Gambian agriculture/horticulture sector. The farmers referred to are generally the

smallholders who make up over 90% of the farming population. Most of the time, trainers would voice the concern at forums at which the farmers in question were seldom present. But what did trainers mean by “farmers are not organized?”

The “problem” has been frequently interpreted in two ways, namely, in terms of organizational development, and in terms of outlook toward farming. In the first instance, at issue was that smallholder farmers lacked stable, legally registered organizations with committed leadership and membership. And even where farmer groups existed, they generally were not formalized, meaning they did not have written constitutions and by-laws governing internal group management and external relations with influential others. Second, the problem was associated with the absence of a serious entrepreneurial orientation to farming. Farmers were perceived as operating in more of a subsistence mode, a situation blamed for the prevalence of reduced agricultural productivity and the attendant low financial returns from farming. Not surprisingly, from the trainers’ point of view, having farmers get organized was the only solution.

During my dissertation research the problem once again emerged cast in the same light. However, by this time I had been pondering over the real meaning behind the phrase “farmers are not organized,” as well as the intention driving the proposed solution “farmers should organize.” I started asking myself whether some critical dimensions had been overlooked in how trainers have analyzed the so-called problem. Notably, I questioned why its interpretation had excluded a possible influence on the exact nature of the relationship between farmers and trainers. In other words, could there be a connection between farmers not being organized and the broader problem of farmers being marginalized in decision making for agricultural development? Were farmers not organized and therefore vulnerable to being marginalized? Or was their marginalization the reason for not being organized? Was there some linkage between

the standing-tall phenomenon, farmers not being organized, and the remedy proposed by specialist outsiders?

Perhaps a better understanding of my line of questioning would be gained from the following quotations, all of which confirm Farmer Jobe's assertions.

1: We farmers are slaves of agriculture; they dictate to us what to do. It's now time to change our beggar mentality and increase independence from external control. That's the only way we can change the way government manipulates us and the way they play politics to divide us. We also want *partnership* with government, farmers, technicians and investors so we can have quality production and marketing but we need to organize ourselves first.

The speaker, whose comment is highly reminiscent of Farmer Jobe's complaint, was responding to a claim regarding the government's desire to implement a proposed economic development program (foreshadowed in Chapter One and fully described in section 4.2.1) as a "partnership" with stakeholders of the concerned sectors, a move away from the traditional mode of dictating sector policies and programs. His contribution at that meeting in late September of 2002, at the Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment, struck a chord with the other 29 men and women in attendance. Many expressed similar complaints and aspirations regarding decision making for programs in their respective sectors. From contributions by other sector stakeholders, it became evident that negative perceptions regarding the tendency for government to dictate the development agenda was not restricted to the agriculture sector alone.

However, as I listened to the farmer, the government representative and the general discussions, the question turning over and over in my mind was: could a partnership between "dictator" and "slave," happen in reality? If so, what would that relationship look like? Moreover, I pondered over the reasons why farmers were "slaves dictated to by agriculture." It may be recalled that "agriculture" was identified as the Department of State for Agriculture (formerly the Ministry of Agriculture),

represented in the field by extension and research officers. It is obvious the questions were prompted by my preoccupation with the notion of partnership between trainers (dictators) and farmers (slaves). The next set of statements provides a possible explanation for and clues into the actual form of the dictating. I should note my understanding that the viewpoints expressed were made in good faith. But some of the assumptions embedded in them, unfortunately, tend to validate Farmer Jobe's accusation that trainers force their ways on farmers and treat them as "not knowing anything."

2: We are talking about approach, about whether communal gardens are the way to improve the sector or should we be looking at something else. But we should remember government too has an objective. For them this communal garden has a political kind of objective where they will say we brought this garden to your village. So government will for the time being use these communal gardens for their own political agenda so that at the end of their term they will say we did this for you. For them we cannot move them away from this objective.

3: Most farmers, they are just producing but they do not know if they are making any profits at the end of the day. For example, [site X], I doubt the women can account for the labor they are putting in and net profit they are making. Some of these schemes just operate because they [farmers] want to grow to earn a living but definitely the profit at the end of the day is what's important. Why can't we get these women to specialize, for each group to grow a particular crop instead of growing a variety? But since they are not literate, they don't know. I think the best thing is to help these farmers organize and specialize in growing a quality crop they can reap enough money out of.

The above excerpts bring out two relevant themes cased throughout the dissertation. The first relates to agenda setting, while the second concerns the linkage made in quote number 3 between literacy and knowing. I will return to an analysis of these themes. For now, let me share my response to quote number 3, made at a meeting to discuss the situation within the communal horticultural production systems. Speaking from a former horticulture producer's standpoint, I pointed out that farmers

make very rational decisions regarding the mix of crops grown. I maintained that under our circumstances in The Gambia, growing an assortment of crops was a risk-minimizing strategy. I ended, saying, “It may be a bit naïve for us to say here let them specialize growing this one crop. I can tell you now it will be very difficult to do. I didn’t do so as a farmer and I’d probably hesitate to advise the women to do so.” The opportunity for the women in question to express their views on “how to organize and whether or not to specialize” will be discussed later in the chapter.

As the stakeholder conversations unfolded throughout the many different research events, the problem of standing tall above the people, and a possible remedy, were reiterated in terms that further surfaced an interesting and important phenomenon in the agricultural development arena. What was emerging was a picture of something I call a “tripartite union” of development projects, donor assistance, and farmers’ state of being or not being organized. The following perspectives situate this theme within the research topic of forging stakeholder partnerships.

4: Farmers are too quiet, too invisible. Others are doing things on their behalf. NGOs are taking over from the government and dictating what farmers do. It is time for farmers’ organizations to have their own voice and get out under the wings of the NGOs. That way they can access support directly from our [Gambia government-donor] agreement. We will provide interim support to producer organizations to bring them to a state of readiness to be democratic, accountable and providing services to their membership.

5: We have to admit that a lot of money is spent on uncoordinated activities and agricultural producer organizations are not involved. The new donor paradigm is not to exclude producers in funded projects, but they need to be organized to access the funds. We will work directly in partnership with farmer organizations that are organized and managed democratically.

The two voices plainly reveal themselves as donor actors expressing interest in getting farmers organized into organizations that could serve as channels for direct donor support to farmers. Responses to the comments above demonstrated the

dynamics among farmers, governmental agencies, and donors (through funded projects). Quote 6 is representative.

6: Donor assistance to farmers is sometimes ineffective. Donor-funded projects are for survival of government institutions, not farmers. Government agencies compete with our organizations because it seems that every time we think of a project, it is hijacked by government departments. Look at [Project P], our association should be implementing it, not the [Department of X]. But also we need to reorganize our selves because to sustain interest in the association members need action.

The above statement is especially significant because it came from an urban commercial farmer who normally would not be ranked among the 90% of smallholder farmers that are usually the targeted beneficiaries of donor-funded development projects. Nevertheless, the association he represented, similar to many others in the country, consisted of both small-and large-scale farmers. As evident in the next set of statements, his viewpoints were widely shared.

7: Most of our farmer organizations are established by projects and collapse when the project money runs out. Farmers are smart, they'll mobilize for projects; they are like passengers in a taxicab—when there is a breakdown they get off and wait for the next one. But this is not sustainable so we must organize.

8: Our major problem is that most of these organizations are created by people who are interested in their own agenda and so they end up failing to address the real needs of those they are meant to serve. For this reason most of them fold up when one of the people who created them leave the scene.

9: The problem is that the beggar has no choice. Farmers should organize and have our own self-funded organizations not donor-funded organizations. Then we can be able to address problems collectively and work in partnership with others to complement our efforts.

Quote 10 below is instructive because it summarizes key concerns embedded in the previous set of extracts. At the same time, embedded in it is an assumption that without external funding, farmers' organizations would not be sustainable.

Implications for autonomy and for effective voice in a potential partnership are not difficult to imagine.

10: A better way of dealing with the proliferation of producer organizations is to let a natural selection process take place. Toward this end there should be a code of conduct or ethics for these organizations, in addition to a peer review mechanism to help rank them in terms of how they are living up to their mandate. This way, potential donors and sponsors will support organizations that are run well, and over time, those that are not effective, or not run well, will wither away.

A counterargument suggesting ways to prevent the obvious carrot-and-stick situation implied above is provided in this next statement.

11: There are a number of factors important to the success of our organizations. First we must stay focused on what we do and do it well. Second we must be able to deliver services to our members. For this to happen though it is important to organize effectively and reflect on where things went wrong. However it is important to remember that organization building is a long-term process that takes time. This way Gambian organizations will be well on their way to getting to the point where our Senegalese counterparts are, that is, vibrant, highly organized, well respected, recognized, and productive organizations that can contribute significantly to national development.

Interestingly, the problem of farmers not being organized or farmer organizations lacking autonomy was not restricted to the Gambian context. It was apparently a widespread concern, as summarized in the following statement delivered to the GFAR conference mentioned in Chapter Two by the president of a regional (West and Central African) farmers' organization.

12: Farmers' organizations are largely donor-driven, and created primarily to implement donor agendas through projects. Farmers have little influence on agricultural policy. It's unlikely we'd have a voice in decisions that affect our lives, including the area of agricultural research and development unless we self-organize and become self-funded.

If one thread ties together all of the foregoing viewpoints, it would be the call for farmers to *organize* in order to give them a voice in agricultural development

decisions that may affect their lives, to paraphrase the last speaker. As revealed in the quotes, there was a general perception that farmers' organizations in the Gambia were weak, not organized, and therefore hardly self-sustaining. With very little effort the reader may see a potential—or actual—controlling interest and influence of external funding and development projects over the status (substance and *raison d'être*) of farmers' organization. As quotes 1 and 7 attest, such authority could have significant implications for the independence and sustainability of farmers' organizations. In this respect, exploring the dynamic in the tripartite union of farmers' organizations, external funding, and development projects becomes pertinent to the quest for understanding the mechanisms to build partnership among agricultural stakeholders.

As previously mentioned, the Government of The Gambia (GOTG) supports the agriculture sector through development projects. Agricultural development projects broadly posit the goal of increasing the production, income, and household food security of farmers. More often than not, these projects are financed through agreements with international cooperation and development institutions or donor agencies. Agricultural development interventions are supported through existing farmers' associations, or as suggested in some of the quotes above, via ones created specially for a particular project. Support rarely goes directly to individual farmers. The former is more common, as a co-researcher observed: “the large number of development projects in the country has fuelled a proliferation of farmer organizations, but there is need for coordination. We need to work through apex organizations so that we can use resources more efficiently.” The foregoing discussion would appear to confirm the suggested linkage between farmers' lack of organization and the substance and quality of their relationships with those who, as Farmer Jobe portrayed it, “want to lift us up.” Doubtless, “standing tall and looking down” contradicts the more horizontal orientation of partnership as generally understood.

Hence, if ideals of partnership were to be translated into reality, to move beyond the rhetorical realm, a reorientation of this relational alignment would need to occur. As will be described in the remaining sections of this chapter, my research partners and I would attempt a change in direction within the urban agriculture system.

The conversations from which the above quotes were extracted occurred over the eleven-month period of the fieldwork conducted with the diverse research partners listed in the second chapter. Our exploration was broad, because we looked at the overall agriculture sector. It was also particular, contextualized to the urban agriculture system in which the action research was anchored. The community (or communities) of inquirers concurred at the very early stages of the research process that despite expressions on the part of government and other influential actors to relax their traditional hold on defining agricultural development agendas and henceforth give farmers a greater say-so, there was a major potential stumbling block. It was the fact that farmers were organizationally rather weakened, a position that might reduce their bargaining power to engage as active agents in partnership with others. This presented a quandary whose answer, as repeated in the quotes above and pointedly justified from a macroeconomic perspective in the following, was that farmers should organize. The speaker was referring specifically to horticultural producers.

Weak farmers' organizations are inimical to overall agricultural development. Therefore reorganizing the association is critical to increase commitment of members and build own funding base. There are many sources of funding we are not tapping into because of lack of a strong lobby. We should remember that "you don't get what you deserve but what you negotiate." We should try hard to revive the association; it is essential.

Let me say that I concur with the observations of the last speaker, especially the point about negotiation to get what one deserves. I'd add that negotiation probably would be more fruitful from a position of [some] power, which in the case of farmers may be created through some form of collective organization and bargaining.

Nevertheless, one critical unanswered question faced the research partners: In what ways would farmers have to organize to precipitate a change from the “subservient” relationship lamented by Farmer Jobe to the desired form based on partnership? To find answers to these questions for the urban agriculture system, I engaged with a select group of stakeholders to actually attempt to “organize” farmers. Our efforts could be considered the “testing findings in action” phase of the action research. Three key questions focused our pursuit: 1) Which horticulture producers were not organized but should be? 2) For what purpose and in whose interests should producers organize? and, 3) How should we go about getting organized? The opportunity to respond to the call put out to organize was presented by a proposed development program that will be described presently.

4.2 Acting on the Call to Organize

It was late October of 2002, and the group of 10 was meeting to discuss the status of the horticulture sector relative to the proposed development program. In attendance were the following urban agriculture actors: five horticultural producers, four of them members of GAMHOPE, and one from a communal village-based garden; three extension agents; the private consultant introduced in the first chapter; and me. The discussion unfolded along these lines. “Horticulture lacks an institutional identity, it needs an organization to lead production and other developments in the sector,” the consultant observed. A GAMHOPE representative responded, “We have our association but it’s been dormant for a while since most of us suspended [horticultural] production. But we have been trying to bring it back to life and address our weaknesses.” In agreement with the first speaker, another GAMHOPE member suggested, “We should call a meeting of all existing members to decide where we go from here. I think we should open up our membership to include all producers, even the small producers.” “Yes, but they (small producers) will need to be organized first.

It's time for the small producers to operate as serious small enterprises; otherwise, we won't achieve the objectives of the program," the previous GAMHOPE member stated.

"[Mr. C] is right, the performance of horticulture depends on the small producers; therefore they, too, must organize into associations. We have to build their capacity and focus on training them in entrepreneurship so that they can address marketing problems. That is important," contributed an extension agent of one of the communal gardens. His suggestion was unanimously endorsed. "Maybe it's time, an opportunity to reconsider the whole idea of communal gardens, if we want to seriously involve the women farmers in export horticulture," I suggested. Then the private consultant announced, "The development program will fund a pilot scheme to address organizational constraints among horticultural producers. It would be a project to promote producer organizations and provide training on how to manage associations. Through this we can re-organize the smallholders and also revive and restructure GAMHOPE. Then the two groups can come together to form a national apex organization. What I'd suggest is for GAMHOPE to take the lead in helping the smallholders to organize. So go ahead and draft a two-page proposal for a pilot project to strengthen the small growers." The terms "smallholders," "small growers," and "small producers" all refer to the women farmers of the communal village horticultural production systems found at the wide base of the horticultural pyramid described in Chapter Two.

I offered the above conversation as background for the organizing project initiated among horticultural producers. If the reader is thinking that the exchange harks of the problem of top-down decision making and agenda setting, in this case the directive of the government (through the consultant) to organize smallholders into an apex organization, I would wholeheartedly agree. Once again, the problem of the

action research and the need to search for solutions has been highlighted. I will now elaborate on which producers organized and how it was done. I will describe the planning phase to choose an approach to organizing, the actors involved and specific organizing tools used and, last, the outcomes. I begin with a short description of the development program that framed the activities, followed by an explanation of how I (and my dissertation) came to be associated with that program.

4.2.1 Development Program Context

With the Gambian economy being largely agrarian, the government places emphasis on productivity increases in the agricultural sector as a means to promote food security and to enhance foreign exchange earning capacity. Two agricultural commodity areas, namely, horticulture and groundnut, have received particular attention. Government's enduring objective has been to improve the country's external competitiveness for exportable horticultural products (fruits and vegetables) and manufactured groundnut products (Ministry of Trade, 1983).

As previously mentioned, the horticulture sector is a priority growth area because of its contribution to gross domestic product (currently at 4–6%) and its foreign exchange earning potentials. Horticulture is also an important source of employment and income for a diverse group as delineated in the methodology chapter. The official policy toward the sector aims to achieve commercialization through greater private-sector involvement, leaving the public sector to provide only essential services such as research and extension support and basic infrastructural development. This policy is enshrined in the Gambia government's Vision 2020 plan, which outlines its long-term socio-economic agenda. Vision 2020 posits a goal of achieving macroeconomic stability and maintaining an appropriate market incentive structure to stimulate private sector development (DOSTIE, 2002).

At the time of my fieldwork, the Gambia government was preparing a new comprehensive national trade strategy built on specific economic sectors with export trade potential. This was in accordance with a policy of exports as the engine for economic growth and development. Five key sectors of the economy, namely horticulture, groundnut, fisheries, niche manufacturing, and tourism and culture, were targeted for a new export promotion program (EPP). Funding for the program was anticipated from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) through its International Trade Center (ITC). The branch of the government that would be in charge of the program was the Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment (DOSTIE).

In keeping with the declared intent of greater private-sector participation, government sought to give non-public stakeholders leading roles in formulating specific strategies and action plans aimed at expanding commodity exports in their respective domains. To the government's credit, this move was undoubtedly a departure from the standard approach of top-down planning, the very problem my dissertation research sought to address. In order to facilitate the transition, a local private management consulting company, which I will call SIMI, was contracted to provide technical support to the selected sector stakeholders involved in the formulation process for the EPP. A SIMI staff consultant was delegated to supervise strategy counterpart teams (SCT) constituted for each of the five sectors targeted in the program. The assignment given each sector SCT was to analyze constraints and opportunities, and develop strategies and action plans for their respective sectors; in short, to conduct research and generate information on which to base actions. I was invited into the horticulture sector strategy team, as I will now explain.

4.2.2 Invitation to Connect Research with the Development Project

Two days after my arrival in The Gambia in late August of 2002, I received a telephone call from the SIMI consultant, inviting me to attend a symposium the next day. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the report of a diagnostic study on sector export opportunities commissioned by the government as part of the new trade policy preparation process. There is one advantage to working in your “near environment” (Maguire, 2000: xv), and it is that you know people who know other people and activities relevant to your work. The local consultant, whom I knew through other familial connections, had learned of my return home through the GAMHOPE colleague I worked with in developing my initial research proposal. He was also familiar with my previous work as a horticulturalist. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the symposium because I was still recovering from a 24-hour door-to-door transatlantic journey. However, he provided copies of documents pertaining to the program for me to read in preparation for a private meeting we scheduled for the middle of September. I also sent him a copy of my proposal in advance of our meeting.

At that meeting two weeks later we explored compatibilities between my research and the proposed export promotion project. During our discussion, I pointed out that my interest in studying how to promote partnerships through an action research approach was to improve the definition of policies, programs, and interventions in urban horticulture. He indicated that was likewise the expressed intentions of the government vis-à-vis the export promotion program. “That’s the new approach, partnership, government wants to take. Ownership has been a problem in the past and we want to move away from that,” was how he put it. We digressed briefly, did a postmortem of previous horticultural development projects, and

identified past shortcomings that would need to be remedied under the proposed new venture.

Establishing that we were looking at similar issues among the same stakeholders, he invited me to join the horticulture SCT that already included the following people: two colleagues of GAMHOPE, both of whom were managers of horticultural businesses; a researcher from the National Agricultural Research Institute (he later dropped out); one senior extension officer from the Department of Agricultural Services; and one field extension agent. The SIMI consultant also requested that I serve as the lead facilitator for the group since the others had full-time job commitments and would be unable to devote attention to the team's assignment. Last, and pertinently, he encouraged me, "The assignment is essentially a research project so you can integrate it with your dissertation and use the methods you outlined in your proposal." That I did, but in consultation with other members of the strategy counterpart team. The team started working together in early October of 2002, meeting twice that month to develop a work plan and allocate responsibilities. At various points during the 11 months of my fieldwork we came together to reflect on completed activities and to determine follow-up events. After I left the field to write my dissertation, our consultations continued via email and telephone.

From a personal angle, I saw the offer to participate in the formulation of the export promotion program as a golden opportunity to use my dissertation research for what Parks (1993) described as organized cognitive and transformative activity. In more practical terms, what this meant was that our process to construct knowledge about improving actor relationships was structured as collective action to give stakeholders experiencing the problematic situation a voice in defining what it meant to them and in creating the measures required to resolve the problem. In other words, the process was a combination of learning and acting. In retrospect (after completing

the research—or its beginning), knowing that I contributed to something grounded and meaningful helped calm the occasional conflicting thoughts and feelings that my participation might have been construed as extractive because the data constituted my dissertation. Such questions come up intermittently, even though the problem investigated was not mine alone and people who collaborated with me knew about my dual purpose; and, regardless of the fact that using an action research approach engaged my research partners and me in an interactive and democratic peer relationship of actors united by mutual concerns. Luckily, while writing this report I had periodic phone conversations with the consultant back in The Gambia. His constant encouragement for me to return home and nurture activities initiated during the action research reassured me that my dissertation was a priority to none but me.

Before continuing it is important to explain that as a consulting company SIMI normally hired other professionals to conduct fieldwork for consultancy contracts they managed. When I decided to link the horticulture component of the export promotion project with my dissertation research, we agreed to forego any remuneration for me because I would have proprietary rights to the data for my personal use. However, SIMI covered all expenses for field research activities directly linked with the export program and conducted by the strategy counterpart team.

Through my association with the horticulture component of the export promotion program I performed all the functions Greenwood and Levin (1998: 178) listed for the outsider action researcher, namely, “a mixed role as instigator, process manager, advocate for groups not yet fully included, trainer in research methods, and, often, chronicler of the activities.” These are equivalent to the roles I defined in Chapter Two. Naturally, and as the authors also stressed, such a mixed, complex, and high-profile role would have many built-in conflicts. I should add that the attendant risks are multiplied many times over when the researcher happens to be a vested

insider in the study context, as was my case. Add on the role of “development worker,” which Smith (1997) argued is not unusual in authentic participatory action research, and especially an activist one at that, and a different level of complexity arises. Notwithstanding the inevitable challenges, by combining these multiple roles I was able to simultaneously act out my personal dedication to research, action, and advocacy for change. Nevertheless, the trickiest part was maintaining a balance between my and others’ interests in what was ultimately a situation of constructing and reconstructing social relations. Moreover, with influential actors (government, donor agencies) involved I had to, metaphorically speaking, “walk the bureaucratic tightrope hoping to come out with my Achilles tendons still flexible.” It was a challenge, but I believe I survived.

4.2.3 Assignment: Organize an Apex Organization

The reader would recall the assignment described in section 4.2 above, that is, for GAMHOPE to prepare a short proposal for a pilot project intended to organize small-scale horticultural producers to establish a formal apex organization. As it happened, the formation of apex organizations was one of the requisite benchmarks for the export promotion program. The diagnostic report discussed at the stakeholder symposium had recommended that if sector actors were to truly take charge of the proposed export program there needed to be appropriate representative structures through which assistance would be channeled more efficiently. Echoes of farmers’ organizations as channels for external funding of agricultural development projects were similarly heard in some of the numbered quotes above. An eloquent reiteration is found in this comment from a co-researcher: “If they [farmers] buy the idea and set up their own organization then it makes it easy for us; if we want to break into the urban agriculture landscape it’s a question of addressing one key organization and we know where to place our feet.” So, given that the EPP hinged on the creation of sector apex

organizations, the SIMI consultant was naturally eager for the different sector strategy counterpart teams to begin work toward that target.

In my car going home after that meeting in late October of 2002, MS, my GAMHOPE colleague, and I continued the discussion regarding how we would proceed with organizing horticultural producers, especially the women farmers of the communal horticulture production systems. “How can we possibly form an apex organization for the women without first consulting them to determine if they find it necessary?” I thought out aloud. MS replied, “Part of the problem we’ve had with contracts between exporters and the small producers is because they are not organized, you know that.” “That’s why I’m wondering if an apex is not premature. You know, I’ve been thinking a lot lately about what organized means, and I agree with you they need to be organized, but we should not make the decision alone. Anyhow, you draft the proposal, we can review it together before sending to SIMI,” I suggested. “Okay, but let’s try and complete the draft horticulture strategy and action plan document by November 13. Send me your part and I’ll compile the report,” MS reminded me.

Earlier, the SIMI consultant had assigned the two GAMHOPE colleagues and me to write a draft export development strategy plan for horticulture, which we had started working on at the time of the above conversation. Subsequently, we wrote and submitted the document by the deadline. The report was a synopsis of current realities in the horticulture sector, based on information derived from our collective knowledge and experiences, and supplemented with fresh data I had gathered from interviews in my “other research track” up to that point. The draft strategy identified active horticulture stakeholders; the linkages, or absence of, between them; who was involved in what kinds of activities; opportunities and specific problems at the various nodes of the system; and the available or required competencies to address those problems. The plan also included a recommendation pertinent to the issue of apex

farmer organizations. Similar to, but independent of, the diagnostic report, our strategy once again highlighted the lack of an institutional identity that would guide horticultural development in the Gambia. My colleagues and I felt it was particularly urgent to address this deficiency if the new export program was to be implemented as a partnership with producers determining its parameters, in contrast to previous endeavors.

Specifically, we pointed out the need to give immediate attention to the weak organization of both the medium- and small-scale producer categories. With special reference to GAMHOPE, whose members constituted the medium-scale group, an organization existed even if dormant, so the need there was to reorganize and revitalize the association in order for it live up to expectations as the main entity providing leadership and direction to the horticulture sector. It was a different story with the small-scale producers. The lack of an organization at that level was felt to be more pressing among the women horticultural producers operating the communal village-based systems. On that account, it was decided to concentrate on “organizing” within that actor constituency so that they could be brought up to par with GAMHOPE. But also while GAMHOPE members were engaged in organizing the women horticultural groups, they would concurrently organize within themselves. Ultimately, by focusing the organizing at both the medium-scale and small-scale producer levels, we would be consistent with Ed Chambers’ argument that “you don’t build power by organizing only the marginalized; it must include everybody” (Chambers, 2003: 93).

In this dissertation, I concentrate my analysis on the organizing work initiated among women horticultural producers for four main reasons. The first basis is the significant role of this constituency in the Gambian urban agriculture arena, especially in the production and marketing of vegetable crops. Second, Farmer Jobe’s lament

over the skewed relationships between farmers and “trainers,” denoted by the standing-tall imagery threaded throughout the report, was more problematic within the smallholder farming community, to which women horticultural producers belonged. So, while I admit there were gender dimensions to the problem of top-down planning in agricultural development, the focus on women farmers here is because they are representative of the situation, but not exclusively affected.

Another important reason is that particular activity yielded deeper learnings about challenges inherent in changing stakeholder relationships from the dominant vertical arrangement to one more democratic and horizontal in nature. And, last, the organizing was a direct means for making practical judgments about the urban horticulture innovation system. These reasons will become clearer in the background description on women horticultural producers and their associations provided in the next section. The explanation is additionally instructive because it further substantiates the claim I made about the three-way connection between farmers’ associations, agricultural development projects, and donor funding.

4.2.4 The Organizing Constituency: Women Horticultural Producers

Women constitute over 60% of the agricultural labor force of The Gambia. They play a mixed role of producers, processors, and marketers of both food and cash crops. Women farmers are notably visible in the smallholder vegetable production system, where they have traditionally been the predominant actors. Their association with vegetable horticulture has a long history in the Gambia, predating the advent of the development-oriented project with which they have come to be identified. It is on record that eighteenth-century European travelers to the country reported the presence of vegetable gardens with many shallow wells and much rudimentary fencing located on inland swamp areas that are also used for rice cultivation, another crop traditionally grown by women (Carney, 1993). To this day vegetable farming, with or without

external funding, remains the major source of cash income for women farmers in both the rural and urban areas.

Production Systems: Women farmers cultivate vegetable crops on a variety of locations, including homestead or backyard gardens, lowland rice fields following the harvest of that staple crop, and on communal irrigated horticultural projects (See Table 1, Chapter Two, for a description of these three vegetable cropping systems). For the majority of women, particularly among rice farmers, vegetable production occurs on all three locations at the same time. The economic logic behind using multiple locations is to increase the total area available for vegetable cultivation and, correspondingly, the income earned from this activity. Given the centrality of vegetable crops in women farmers' agricultural activities in The Gambia, it is not surprising that many non-governmental organizations and other development agencies supporting rural and agricultural development, especially those with a gender focus, use vegetable gardening as a common strategy to improve the economic, food, and nutritional security of women farmers and their families. An example was provided in Chapter Two in the story about my formative experience with an NGO-sponsored home gardening project.

Economic Significance: With special reference to the urban agriculture system, women's horticulture has remained a singular attraction for even more macroeconomic reasons. The Gambia government emphasizes commodity exports as a means to maintain a healthy trade balance through which it can achieve its goals of socio-economic growth and development. Exports of high-value fresh fruits and vegetables to international markets provide a tremendous opportunity for the country to earn and to diversify its foreign exchange revenue streams. It is an opportunity that has continued to be exploited, albeit with varying degrees of success, for close to three decades. In this enduring venture, traditional horticultural systems operated by women

have presented a ready-made foundation for export-oriented production of fruits and vegetables, with women farmers playing a pivotal role.

Development Assistance: Beginning in the mid-1970s, expanding in the 1980s, and continuing beyond, the Gambia Government with the support of international development agencies has poured substantial amounts of financial assistance into horticultural development projects exclusively for women vegetable producers. This is the community referred to in earlier conversations as small growers/producers and smallholders. The main rationale behind the high level of funding for women's horticultural projects has been to increase the volume of fresh produce available for export through contract-farming arrangements between small-scale producers and large-scale horticultural growers/exporters. Secondly, such an arrangement would give the women indirect access to the global horticultural market and, hopefully, better incentives.

The lineup of influential sources that provide development support for market-oriented smallholder horticulture underscores its social and economic significance to the country. Multilateral and bilateral agreements between the Gambia government and major international donor agencies and foreign governments provide the bulk of financial assistance to smallholder horticulture. Over the years, key donor stakeholders that have funded urban horticultural development projects include the following: the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the European Union (EU), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the African Development Bank (ADB). Support has also come from foreign governments, notably Taiwan, which funded two of the horticultural associations involved in the organizing project. Other important sponsors of women's horticultural schemes include foreign embassies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A peculiar and telling feature of most horticultural projects is that they are identified by the name of the funding agency. For instance, farmers and governmental agents alike would call a garden in a particular village the IDB scheme, the EU garden, or the ADB project. One could reasonably ask, so what's in a name? I would answer, actually, a lot. The fact that horticultural projects carry their sponsors' names would tend to reinforce the notion that agricultural development projects in general are not always home grown, not owned by the communities, and therefore externally controlled and driven. This would raise issues about ownership, and in all probability explain the failures that occur when funding ends, as the farmer in quote 7 observed.

Generally, financial support for market-oriented urban horticultural projects has gone into the provision of improved production infrastructure. Such infrastructure might include, for example, the expansion of land area for existing self-initiated gardens, the clearing of virgin land to establish completely new project sites or schemes, the provision of secure fencing for both old and new sites, the installation of improved irrigation facilities such as boreholes or concrete-lined wells to support dry season production, and the construction of produce-handling and storage facilities. Some funding might also be provided as start-up capital for a revolving fund to purchase variable inputs and to support marketing activities. In most instances development funding also supports the provision of extension services. Almost all horticultural development projects have a dedicated governmental extension agent to supervise growers and to monitor the project, as several co-researchers explained in the previous chapter.

Despite the perceived economic significance of women's horticultural production systems and the accompanying high level of investments in this sector, in general, minimal attention has been paid to women farmer's experiences regarding access to information, financial resources, and technical advisory services to support

horticultural enterprises. Particularly found wanting, as the reader might surmise from Chapter Three, is research and extension support. Numerous structural and systemic factors within those two institutions, as heard from the relevant actors, have combined to limit their capacity to respond to the social, economic, educational, and technology requirements of horticultural producers, including women farmers. In section 4.1, one possible factor contributing to such a state of affairs was that farmers were not organized to enable them to demand and pull down the services they required to improve their agricultural activities. It may be recalled that ND made the same argument, especially in relation to women horticultural growers, in Chapter Three.

Social Organization: Wherever they are established, communal village-based horticultural projects are always given in the name of the women's group in the village. These groups are called "kafo" in the Mandingo language, and exist in nearly all villages in the country. (Mandingo forms the majority ethnic group in the Gambia; *Kafo* literally means putting/coming together.) Although women *kafos* have customarily served a social purpose, they are increasingly functioning as economic units engaged in income-generating activities of various types, both agricultural and non-agricultural. Similar to organizations elsewhere, a *kafo* has a leadership structure and designations, which would normally include a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and ordinary members. Membership in a communal horticultural project is open to all women in the village, whether or not they are full-time farmers. In general, there are no established criteria for selecting who may or may not have an allotment in the communal project. In fact, the norm has been that women would feel entitled to a parcel of land within the project perimeter, or forced by group pressure to participate. More frequently than not, women farmers operate within a communal horticultural project on a private basis, producing vegetables on allocated plots of land and also marketing produce individually.

For the organizing project described shortly, 10 women horticultural associations (WHA) were selected. All were located within the boundaries of the Greater Banjul Area, which was earlier described as a confluence of urban and periurban settlements. The 10 came from the following towns and villages: Bakau, Lamin, Banjulinding, Mandinary, Brufut, Sukuta, Sanyang, Kartong, Faraba, and Ndemban. They were identified based on criteria consistent with the goals of the export promotion program, including 1) a minimum garden size of 12 acres (five hectares), counting area under current production and available for future expansion; 2) the availability of improved production infrastructure, in particular, a reliable irrigation system, post-harvest handling facilities, and secure fencing; 3) previous experience producing vegetables for the export or domestic markets; and 4) accessibility of site, in terms of communication and transportation. The 10 associations selected all met one or more of these criteria, and offered a total land area of approximately 500 acres (200 hectares) and an active membership in the region of 3000 women vegetable growers.

4.2.5 Which Type of Organizing: Technical or Educational?

Once the horticulture sector strategy counterpart team completed the selection of women's horticultural associations with which to start the organizing project, another challenge presented itself. As the team set out to begin its assignment, there were differing opinions on the most fitting process through which to get farmers organized. Two main ideas were tabled; both had similar end-goals, but the means for attaining them were markedly different. It would be useful to describe the conceptual underpinnings of the two options considered in order to understand the team's final choice. I should admit this was one point during the entire action research when my roles blurred to such an extent that I had to be extra vigilant—as team leader and professional researcher—against dominating the process.

To begin with, MS drafted a two-page proposal for the pilot project titled *Capacity Building for Women's Horticultural Associations*. It followed a normal proposal format: background/problem statement; specific objectives; project description, including activities, organization, and management; benefits and impact; and budget. The proposal was to be submitted to the SIMI consultant (hereafter, SIMI) for approval before funds would be released. MS and I met to review his suggestions before we sent it off. Let me digress briefly and explain my relationship with MS, because it is germane to understanding the negotiation we went through to finally agree on an approach to “organizing” the smallholders.

MS and I have a long-standing social and professional relationship. He is a veteran horticulturalist, with over 30 years' experience in horticultural research, extension, and commercial farming. MS has been my professional mentor and close colleague since we met in 1978, practically throughout my career as a horticulture practitioner in the Gambia. We both have a lot of respect for each other's professional judgment, even when we stand at opposite ends on an issue. Nevertheless, leaning heavily on the conventional and conservative side, MS has always tried to keep a tight rein on my idealistic, maverick proclivities to always want to do things differently. All things considered, though, our different temperaments balance each other out and we've made a good team, collaborating over the years in different ventures aimed at improving the horticulture sector. For example, we were instrumental in the founding of GAMHOPE in 1990 as a lobby for horticultural producers. And as will become evident, our current partnership was similarly productive.

Coming back to our assessment of the draft proposal, MS and I concurred on the problem statement, which was stated thus: “Some women are organized in loose village groups but the necessary discipline and administration for commercial production is absent.” There were no major disagreements with the objectives he

outlined, which were the following: 1) to raise awareness in village women of the need to organize themselves into economic interest groups to better articulate their aspirations and to promote collective interest; 2) to raise the awareness of target growers, and to inculcate in them the essence of planned production for the successful commercialization of horticultural products; and 3) to create in their village-based organizations a capacity for credit-worthiness. Albeit didactically worded, the three objectives were all logical, a positive interpretation of the organizational and managerial problems encountered within women horticultural producers' associations.

Differences between mentor and protégé surfaced in the method proposed to achieve the stated objectives. Here is an excerpt from the proposal describing MS's initial suggestion.

Representatives of four village women horticultural societies selected by the competent unit of DAS shall be brought to a workshop. The resource persons for the workshop shall give an overview of the structures of grassroots organizations, the economic activities of village women and their constraints. Emphasis will be placed on the merits of economies of scale, collective bargaining, coordinated planting and collective marketing. Participants will discuss the presentations and identify the discrepancies in their own organizations. Remedies to the weaknesses of their own situations will be formulated. They would then go back to their groups with their new awareness and resolve to carry out specific task such as the formation of more regulated societies with instruments of association. A date shall be set for them to come back to another workshop with their achievements. At this forum, the participants will be guided to form an apex body consonant with their requirements.

In due course, we qualified "workshop" with the adjectives "participatory search." But first I should explain how that eventuated, linking it to the opening script and the analysis of the standing-tall problem in the preceding section.

While I agreed, in principle, with my mentor's general idea, I expressed strong reservations about the adequacy of a traditional workshop format to accomplish the broader objectives. Without question, the traditional workshop approach he proposed

would have been a quick and efficient route to establish an apex body within a short time. As outlined, it would have been simply a matter of a trainer giving a lecture to a group of selected producers on the need to become organized and what form an organized structure should take. And by the end of the workshop, the hoped-for outcome, a named entity, would have been created on the spot. From my perspective, such an approach would have reinforced the situation lamented in quotes number 7, 8, 10, and 12 above, that is, the standard operating procedure of creating farmers' organizations to suit someone else's agenda, with all its implications for viability. Granted, it would have achieved the desired state, but at the neglect of the critical process of reaching it.

4.2.5.1 Technocratic Organizing

Undeniably, the workshop method my mentor suggested was consistent with a certain type of organizing, the kind more familiar in traditional agricultural extension work. And I have to admit that in another mindset and circumstance I probably would have proposed the same procedure. The process described in the passage above would fit into the realm of what Scott Peters (2002) has described as the technocratic organizing tradition. It is the kind of organizing arrayed with a politics that privileges the knowledge of trained outside experts or specialists over farmers' indigenous and practical knowledge. The role MS proposed for the resource persons, who in all likelihood would have been extension officers, substantiates Peters' assertion. The extension agents' knowledge would have served as the standard against which the women would have evaluated the performance of their organizations. But the question might be asked, who should know better village women's "economic activities and constraints," outside experts, or the women themselves? The reader might be thinking this is a rather harsh portrayal, and I would accept the argument that resource persons and the women would simply be combining their knowledge; isn't that what Farmer

Jobe was calling for? All true, to a certain extent. Nonetheless, I would still maintain that the wording in the quote further validates the “standing tall above us, looking down” syndrome.

Peters further argued that the technocratic organizing tradition in extension work was often manipulative and patronizing, as he put it: “Seeking to force rural people to adopt new methods, technologies, and even points of views, against both their will and their judgment of what would best serve their interest and values” (Peters, 2002). The description of the project activities would seem to confirm this charge. Undoubtedly, this excerpt from Farmer Jobe’s accusatory script offers unambiguous proof.

Here in Gambia the trainer goes and learns about farming in a book. He then comes to teach the person who has been squatting and farming all his life, with the attitude that the farmer knows nothing. Well, the farmer will go along with you even though he knows your advice won’t work but since you are teaching him, well, we listen and say yes to everything he says . . . They come and force you to accept their ways and when things fail they reprimand you for not doing as told.

Gambian agricultural professional colleagues have been known to criticize farmers for being slow to take up new technologies and resistant to change. Farmer Jobe enlightened me on some possible reasons. His statement, as much as the rest of that impeachment against trainers, further substantiates the argument that the job of the extension agent (or any other agent of change, for that matter) working within the technocratic organizing tradition, rather than being educational, tends to be more along the lines of the following: “Training . . . to ‘induce’ behavior changes and adoption of methods and innovations along predetermined lines, to meet predetermined ends . . . the talents, capacities, knowledge, thoughts, and ideals of people themselves of little interest or value except to the extent . . . might be used to further . . . goals that

had been predetermined by government experts,” in the words of Peters (ibid.). This is the classic transfer of technology model described earlier.

With reference to the proposal MS prepared, had we followed that procedure, we would have given more fodder to both Farmer Jobe’s and Peters’ accusations, and confirmed quote 1, the complaint from the farmer that “we farmers are slaves to agriculture, they dictate to us what to do.” On these accounts, I submitted to MS it was time to align our work with quotes 4, 5, 9, 11, and the second half of 12. That is, we ought to aspire to farmers’ organizations that were self-organized, self-created, and self-funded, with the capacity to pursue their own agenda and to address problems they thought relevant, and with the aptitude to work on a complementary basis with external agencies. I further argued that it was time farmers organized themselves for themselves and not for others. I reminded him of how GAMHOPE was created by horticultural producers without any outside prompting. Last, I openly argued with MS that we needed to move away from thinking about “organized” in the simple sense of registering an association with the Attorney General’s Chambers and having a constitution with a legal stamp.

In the book *We Make the Road by Walking* (Horton & Freire, 1990), Paulo Freire asserts that it is not unethical to put the possibility of change on the table. I interpreted this to mean that whereas forcefully imposing one’s beliefs on others might be unethical, it is the responsible thing to do to share one’s views of change if one believes something is flawed and can be improved. A similar argument is found in the following quote from Russell Ackoff: “An idea can mobilize individuals into a social crusade in search of an ideal. It can induce them to undo and redo what they have done wittingly or unwittingly, and to regain control over the whole of which they are a part and, more importantly, of themselves” (Ackoff, 1974: vii). This was the angle from which I suggested an alternative process that would privilege agency. Agency is used

in the sense described by Amartya Sen as representing the “capabilities of individuals to act and bring about change, to help themselves and also to influence the world, such capabilities being central to the development process,”(Sen, 2000: 18). In our case, it meant allowing the women farmers to use their knowledge and experiences as the basis for defining the specifics of their “not being organized,” understanding the consequences, and for generating necessary solutions and taking action toward change.

Certainly, releasing and cultivating agency would not be a one-time, static affair achieved through a time-bound workshop facilitated by resource persons and no guarantees for follow-up actions. Rather, it would entail a gradual process, a transformation of the consciousness, changing to reflect changing needs (Payne, 1995). Moreover, it would be a process that demanded a philosophy and a practical approach totally different from the top-down and expert-centered model inherent in the perspective and related methods of technocratic organizing and transfer of technology. By the end of our three-hour review session, I had convinced MS that we should “[u]se an approach that would give the women an open, continuous process to reflect and come to a critical understanding of what’s at stake with regard their lack of organization and, most importantly, what *they* could do about it. And a workshop, participatory search or otherwise, was only a catalyst.” When we presented the proposal to the SIMI consultant and the rest of the horticulture strategy counterpart team, there was no objection to the educational organizing approach MS and I suggested. As will be demonstrated, the alternative approach and methods we adopted in the end were markedly different from the technocratic organizing tradition.

4.2.5.2 Educational Organizing

Peters (2002a) defined educational organizing in extension work as follows:

Educational organizing can be understood as the work of developing leadership, building civic capacity, and facilitating learning through bringing people and resources together to identify, deliberate about, and act on important public issues and problems. Such work helps people to learn and act together in relation to specific real-world problems and issues they care about, over time scales that can stretch from several months to several years in length.

According to Peters, this is what Extension educators do—or ought to do in addition to program development, nonformal teaching, and the provision of technical expertise. The above interpretation grounded the work I will describe shortly, after a brief detour to present a theoretical reflection critical to understanding the practice.

As I probed deep into Peters’s definition of educational organizing, I found it visibly pregnant with two critical elements that are almost taboo in scholarly discourse on agricultural development; yet they constitute its very core. But considering that Extension Education is situated within the agricultural development dialogue, Peters could be forgiven for attempting to stay within convention by omitting the yet palpable words “power” and “politics” from his characterization of educational organizing. Indeed, speaking about the United States, Peters admits that organizing “sounds scary—even inappropriate—to many in the extension system,” because it is associated with politics, and extension is generally viewed as “nonpolitical.” I would, however, venture a guess that it might be rather difficult to talk about deliberation among people with different interests and motivations, for the sake of taking action on public matters and problems, without encountering issues of control and authority, especially over the resources that make the action or actions happen. My viewpoint is reinforced by the assertion that “frameworks for agricultural research and extension, whether conventional or participatory, explicitly or implicitly posit a source of power in their conceptualization of agricultural development” (Wilkins, 2000: 297).

Therefore, to break the silent pact, I will combine Peters’s definition with another that expands on the practice of organizing by infusing the “power” dimension.

This one is paraphrased from Marshall Ganz (2000), of the Kennedy School at Harvard University, as he describes organizing in terms of what those who do organizing actually do. Organizers, he said:

Lead by developing the relationships, understanding, and actions that enable people to gain new understanding of their interests, new resources, and new capacity to use these resources on behalf of their interests. . . . identify, recruit and develop leadership, build community around that leadership, build power from that community.

It requires little analysis of Peters's and Ganz's description to reveal key differences between the technocratic and the educational organizing approach. The most patent and germane to the problem of action posed by the study, namely, how to create and sustain partnership, is the democratic nature of educational organizing in contrast to the top-down technocratic kind. Going back once more to Farmer Jobe's allegory, I searched for ideas therein which evoked the egalitarian practice embedded in the two scholars' definitions; that is to say, organizing as a relational practice in which engaged individuals respect and value their individual contributions in a process in which learning and action are interwoven. This passage stood out:

What I want to show by this story is that Gambian trainers should understand that they have knowledge but we also have knowledge that we can share with them. This is where Senegal is different. There it looks like the farmers are training the agriculture officers. They allow the farmers to lead, allow them to follow their own practice and they suggest improvements where necessary. They encourage the farmers to try new ways alongside theirs. This is done with respect and the farmer learns of a different way of doing things, perhaps a better way.

Here again, the two scholars (Peters and Ganz) and the practitioner (Farmer Jobe) are all emphatic about one thing: building and sustaining healthy relationships. One might ask, though, what is it in a relationship that is so important? I would assume that forging relationships is inevitable, because of what might be inevitable

differences among social actors—based especially on self-interest—in terms of how a public issue or problem is perceived, which of its dimensions are critical and should be prioritized, and variations in ideas for what might constitute optimal solutions.

Conceivably, reaching mutually beneficial solutions or outcomes would require a democratic process of deliberation and negotiation that takes as many differences as possible into account. While this might be a subtle point, it is eloquently delineated in the following quote from Ed Chambers, speaking about relational power in the process of organizing:

When we meet in public life, I bring my group's interpretations of the world as it is and as it should be, and you bring your group's interpretations. What you and I can create for our respective groups or institutions and the larger community depends on bringing our respective interpretations together in a better reading of our common situation and obligations than we could do alone, one that enables us to act together with power despite our differences.
(Chambers, 2003: 4)

When these four viewpoints are juxtaposed, what emerges is an understanding of educational organizing as basically an elegant description for relationship building. But it is not just any kind of relationship. It should be apparent that the type of relationship the scholars and practitioner both propose is one centered on democratic values and reciprocal power as diverse people engage in a joint quest to learn about, understand, and take action to address issues of common concern. This would be a mutually empowering relationship, one described by Jean Baker Miller (2003: 5) as “[a] two-way, dynamic process in which all involved move toward more effectiveness and power, rather than one moving up while the other moves down.” The undesirable part of her description echoes Farmer Jobe’s argument that “standing above the people” results in a situation in which “those doing the lifting will improve themselves but we will forever remain on the bottom.”

Thus, when viewed from all angles, educational organizing and participatory action research display intimate congruence. Both traditions espouse research, education, and sociopolitical action, executed in a democratic process that Greenwood and Levin (1998:11) equate with “the creation of arenas for lively debate and decision making that respects and enhances the diversity of groups.” Furthermore, the interactivity and mutuality inherent in such a process have strong affinities with the ideals of partnership found in the literature (Byerlee, 1998; Castillo, 1997; Engel, 1997; Hall et al., 2001a). Having completed the study and with the benefit of hindsight learning, I should add that organizing and action research are not only about building relationships but more so about building the capacity to engage in relationships with others. For, as we create relationships with diverse people over time, we are learning to increase our aptitude to do so even more and to do it better. Hence, to the extent that partnership is about relationship, I posit that where the capacity for such is absent a democratic educational organizing approach might hold some potential for nurturing that competence.

I was introduced to the educational organizing tradition in graduate courses at Cornell University and immediately recognized myself in some of the individuals whose practices we studied. There was immediate resonance with the idea of respecting people, helping them [re] discover and [re] conceptualize who they are, bringing them to understanding the cause and nature of problems encountered, and enabling them believe in their capacity to act to solve their problems (Chambers, 2003; Freire, 1970; Gecan, 2002; Payne, 1995). I was sufficiently attracted to want to follow suit. So this was fundamentally my standpoint when I appealed to the horticulture sector counterpart team to use the opportunity of the assignment given to us to take a new approach to the creation of farmer organizations from a platform of enabling farmers to build and continually increase their capacity to have an audible

voice in the shaping of goals and policies for agricultural development interventions. It would not be unreasonable for the reader to conclude that I was advocating for a reorientation of the vertical and subservient relationship between farmers and outside stakeholders Farmer Jobe so eloquently described. Indeed, that was my purpose.

In section 4.2.6, I analyze the pilot project to “organize” women horticultural producers blended into the action research. My role in the project was as chief organizer, a role Ed Chambers (2003: 91) described thus: “organizers are not the center, but they place themselves at the center.” The organizing project involved the 10 women horticultural associations listed in a previous section. It began in November of 2002, and I was involved in it until I adjourned my fieldwork and returned to write my dissertation. I was a mere catalyst. My co-organizers continued with the organizing process and kept me updated on progress via email and the occasional phone calls I made to them up to the completion of this report. Therefore, to give credit to my fellow organizers, the farmers, and the extension agents, those with whom I started the project and who carried it on during my absence, I have used the possessive pronoun “our” liberally in recounting our work in my dissertation. The rendition is offered from a perspective of personal reflection—mine—after the event.

4.3 Educational Organizing for Making Practical Judgments

4.3.1 Search Conference to Jump-start

As a catalyst for the organizing project, a search conference was conducted with 60 representatives of the 10 selected associations. A search conference (alternatively, search) is a systematically structured and managed participatory process where groups evaluate their past and present environments as platforms for planning actions aimed at achieving a desirable future in their organizations and communities (Crombie, 1987; Emery & Purser, 1996). This is accomplished through a logical sequence of six stages Greenwood and Levin (1998) identified as 1) creating a shared

history, 2) creating a shared vision of a desirable future, 3) creating a view of the probable future if no action is taken, 4) identifying action plans, 5) prioritizing collectively to select among alternative courses of action, and 6) initiating concrete change processes, a step that is mostly likely to occur post-search.

Simultaneously a review and planning tool, the search conference has an inherent logic in its sequence. The reason for starting with a backward movement, next stepping into the present, before finally looking forward is intended to connect the actual with the possible. In our case, such backward and forward movement forced the women farmers in particular, but other producers as well, to look critically at the past and current situation with regard to how they socially organized within themselves and their relationship with others, how they practiced horticulture, what their motivations and orientations were, and how, ultimately, all of these impacted the performance of the sector. Relative to the overall organizing project, the search laid the foundation for honest assessment of where the women's horticultural associations wanted to be and what would need to be done to arrive at the desired point.

The process of critical reflection so integral to a search is actually not a foreign concept to the cultural milieu in which the event was conducted, as one delegate reminded participants the first evening. She was one of only two delegates who belonged to the Wollof ethnic group. In the Wollof language the English verb "look" translates into "*seet*," which is a homonym of the translation of the verb "clean." A common aphorism in Wollof denotes a process of *looking* at an issue in the sense of *cleansing or clarifying* it; in other words, prior to taking any action, one must *seet* (look), *seetat* (look again), *seetlu* (look it through), and *seetental* (cleanse the look). The idea conveyed in the saying is simply that thinking and acting, or thought and action, are inseparable processes. From my perspective, such understanding enhanced the search process and its outcomes.

The theoretical basis of the search conference is ecological learning or the ability to directly construct meaningful knowledge from the world around us (Emery & Devane, 1999). Accordingly, a search process attempts to draw forth participants' tacit knowledge of issues as understood from their lived experiences. The starting point of a search conference is thus the local knowledge of people concerned with finding answers to a problematic situation. That local knowledge is drawn out through a process of backward and forward motions that allows participants to collectively reflect on their past history, evaluate their current environment, and envision a more desirable future history. One of the desirable features of a search is that it provides the interactive networking environment so critical for completing this reflective process.

My choice of a search to initiate our organizing venture was influenced by these and other desirable characteristics consistent with the overall framework and epistemological foundation of the action research with which it was intricately and systematically linked. Notably, the search was responsive because 1) it presupposes that everyone has a piece of the puzzle; therefore, local knowledge of the problem is valued; 2) it provides an opportunity for relevantly different life experiences, or critical reference publics (Wadsworth, 1998) to be represented and heard, thereby facilitating group ownership of results and increasing commitment to follow through with actions; and 3) it offers a contained structure within which democratic dialogue can occur, in so doing enabling the participants to individually and collectively express their capacity to contribute to decision making for actions based on mutual interests.

The pilot organizing project was designed for the purpose of helping smallholder horticultural farmers to establish an apex organization. Toward this end, we used the search as a starting point to bring together representatives of that constituency to begin a conversation among themselves regarding the need for and the

process by which they would establish an apex organization. In other words, the search was an opportunity for multiple voices to weigh in on the problem described earlier about farmers not being organized and the consequences of the lack of organization on their relationship with outside agents of development.

Second, and equally important, the search served as a forum where actors in the women horticultural associations were given a chance to contribute their knowledge and experiences to the formulation, and ultimate implementation, of the horticulture export promotion program. To put it differently, the search, as the primary device used in the organizing, ultimately represented a locus for multiple relevant actors to make practical judgments about innovations in urban horticulture. As stated in Chapter Two, the work of making practical judgments and where that takes place is intricately linked with better partnerships. Consequently, and ultimately, the search was an instrument of learning employed in a process that sought to improve relationships between its core participants, namely, the women horticultural producers and other development stakeholders.

4.3.1.1 Invitational and Exploratory Field Visits

The purpose and nature of a search conference (SC) call for the selection of participants capable of contributing to the learning process. For our case, the selection itself was a crucial step in the educational organizing work. It was, moreover, the start of a continuous learning process for both the organizers and the organizing actors. Selection was accomplished through a consultative process involving members of the strategy counterpart team (SCT) and the leadership of each participating horticultural association. As the chief organizer I took responsibility for ensuring that there was democratic representation of leaders and general members of the WHA at the search. I will explain how this was achieved.

Accompanied by the field extension agent in the SCT, Saits (not his real name), I made field visits to the selected groups in November 2002, nearly two months prior to the search. The purpose of the visits was invitational, to request participation in the organizing project. But the visits were also exploratory, intended as a means to learn about the main concerns of actors in the communal horticulture systems. Over the course of four days Saits and I—he called us the “sensitization team”—visited three villages in each of three days and four in one day, clustering the sites according to proximity with each other since the villages are spread out over the Greater Banjul Area. For the first two days of field visits, we used my car. We hired a taxi, paid for by SIMI, on the other two.

Like me, Saits was no stranger to the groups we visited because he had worked with them on previous occasions as a staff member of one of the technical units of the Department of Agricultural Services. Because both Saits and I were familiar with the associations, we knew the leadership and some of the ordinary members of each group, so we were warmly received at all 10 sites. Actually, earlier in September of 2002, during my “re-learning” phase I had visited four of the associations to [re] introduce myself and to brief them about my dissertation research. Also, in 1998 while working on my master’s degree, I conducted a study on how to commercialize horticulture with the same groups involved in the organizing. So, when I showed up in 2002 talking about another research project, it came as no surprise when some women asked, rather sarcastically, when I would be finished with “school learning.” I assured them the dissertation action research was the last leg.

My relationship with the organizing actors is relevant to understanding many of the decisions taken in the organizing project. I had been engaged with most of the women’s horticultural groups since 1988 when I first joined the horticulture private sector. We worked together mostly under commercial contract farming arrangements,

but also in state-sponsored development programs. While our encounters as business “partners” had its challenges, there was always mutual appreciation that we shared an interest in developing the horticulture sector. Additionally, because we are of the same sex, share the same occupation as a horticulturalist, members of the women horticultural associations always had an expectation that I should safeguard their interests relative to horticulture. I have tried my best to live up to this, if for nothing else out of recognition of their potential to move the Gambian horticulture sector in more profitable directions. Because of this very reason, however, I have always tried to maintain a balance between our social and professional relationship, and similar to my fellow organizers, to engage them in every opportunity in the horticulture sector—not that excluding them ever could have been an option.

During our field visits Saits and I wanted to meet with as wide an audience as possible, not only with the leaders of each group. Therefore, we planned arrival at each village to coincide with the time we knew most of the women would be working at the gardens, normally from early morning to around 1:00 PM, and from 4:00 PM until early evening. We went straight to the garden to find the president of the group or other committee members, as well as the extension agent. After explaining the purpose of our visit we requested a brief discussion with the group. The process was the same everywhere. As was the tradition, the president would call all the association’s executive committee members (present at the garden at the time of our visit), along with other members, to meet with us. Although our visits interrupted their work—mainly irrigating, weeding, transplanting—the women were very welcoming and eager to hear what else I was cooking up this time around.

Each meeting began with Saits handing over to the association’s president the invitation letter to the search signed by the Permanent Secretary of the Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment (DOSTIE), the home of the export

promotion program. Next he gave a brief explanation of the proposed export program and the reasons the government was embarking on it, which were mainly to maintain a healthy balance of trade and to curtail the declining value of the country's currency through increased foreign exchange earnings. We discussed the importance of foreign exchange for the economy and its relationship to the economic difficulties the country was facing at the time. Saits described how each group was identified as a prospective participant in the horticulture export program.

While the consistent reaction to Saits' presentation was general enthusiasm, this was tempered in some cases by reflections on not-so-positive past experiences by the groups that had previously been involved in contract farming for export. One company I worked for in the past was always singled out as the negative example. I knew that was intentional, prompted by my presence at the meeting, and I got the message. As though to put me at ease, however, the complaint was usually followed by, "but that was more than 10 years ago, and we don't have any hard feelings." Offering apologies once again, I explained that the new program intended to prevent the recurrence of previous difficulties and that it was the reason they were being invited to the search to "talk it out."

The field trip had another, more important purpose than just inviting the women to the search. Had that been the only reason, we need not have gone, because one telephone call to the extension agent of each WHA requesting him to select and send five women to a "workshop" organized in the name of DOSTIE would have sufficed. Instead, I wanted the face-to-face, interpersonal encounter so that I could engage with the women, leadership, and general membership, in meaningful conversations about the export program as a way to prepare them for the role they were expected to play during the search conference. I intended the visits also to serve as a self-assessment tool. Our conversations were animated, free flowing, unscripted,

as we picked up and probed emergent issues. We talked about the women's motivations for going into horticulture, how they perceived their role in the broader agricultural economy, the role of horticulture and their role in that; we talked about challenges, opportunities, and threats they faced in farming.

The farmers concentrated on the immediate technical constraints faced in the production and marketing of vegetables. This was not uncommon in discussions with smallholder farmers. They complained about the arduous task of manual irrigation and problems with marketing, especially the lack of a dedicated wholesale market for horticultural produce, but also inadequate transportation to reach the markets. While I tried to steer them toward thinking about and recognizing that they had it within them to address some of those problems, the women were perhaps more practical, seeing the answer in increased external assistance from government and others. During the trip, Saits and I attempted conversations with the women about the management of their respective groups for horticultural production. Unfortunately, this was an issue discussed with less passion than the more technical topics. There was a certain amount of hesitance to speak frankly about problems in that area, problems that we were all very aware of. The diplomatic response throughout was, "you know every organization has problems, even the government." At meetings subsequent to the search conference, leadership and management issues would be the most talked-about concerns.

Meanwhile, each invitational and exploratory meeting adjourned with Saits suggesting that the particular association convene a general meeting to continue the discussions started during our visit, and to democratically select five representatives to send to the search. Based on previous experience we recognized a tendency to send only the leadership to such meetings. Therefore, to avoid a skewed representation, I insisted that each delegation include a combination of executive and non-committee

members. Furthermore, we pointed out that the most important criteria for selection, apart from knowledge of the internal workings of the association, were confidence to speak openly in public and ability to communicate learnings back to the group. To indicate the importance of choosing the right delegates I described the process we would use during the search, contrasting it with the workshop format with which they were more familiar. I told them to expect to take charge of the process as both learners and teachers. Finally, practicing our own policy of being democratic, we informed each group about the others participating in the pilot project as a way of cross-checking that we had chosen the relevant groups. There were no objections.

As part of the documentation for our organizing project, Saits summarized the findings from the field trip. This information, combined with my reflections on each field interaction, went into generating the question on which the search focused.

4.3.1.2 Search Conference Participants and Management

The search was a three-day residential event held at the Friendship Hotel in Bakau, from Sunday, January 19, to Wednesday, January 22, 2003. Each one of the 10 women's horticultural associations sent a delegation of five farmers and their extension agent, making a total of 60 WHA delegates. All the extension agents were staff of the Department of Agricultural Services (DAS), and with the exception of one female agent, the rest were all males. Contrary to our expectations the majority of the women delegates were drawn from the leadership of the associations, including five presidents, six vice presidents, four general members, and 37 committee members holding various positions of office in the associations. The heavy hierarchy did not, however, constrain the discussions.

Generally the women delegates ranged in age from early twenties to probably mid-fifties, and from their questions about when my marital status was going to change, I would assume they were all married. Let me hasten to say, however, that I

did not systematically collect such demographic data because neither I nor the other organizers saw its significance to our task. On a personal note, in the past whenever I've worked with foreign researchers and consultants "studying" women horticultural producers, I've always thought such questions rather intrusive and immaterial, not to mention uncomfortable when the women have muttered to me in the local language, "they ask too many questions."

Perhaps the one piece of personal data with some bearing on the search process itself was the issue of language proficiency. The majority of the women delegates had no formal schooling; therefore, they neither spoke, understood, nor wrote English, the official language and medium of instruction in schools. Their English illiteracy was not a problem, however, since we decided to conduct the conference in Mandingo or any of the other local languages a participant felt comfortable using to communicate her ideas. English was reserved for documentation purposes. The findings shared in this dissertation have been translated from various vernaculars used by the search participants, and as translations much of the essence may be lost. However, I've tried to retain as much of the meanings as possible, sometimes by using transliterations and literal translations, which additionally serve to bring the reader into the world of the search participants.

In addition to the delegation from the 10 associations, other horticulture stakeholders, those with "legitimate interest or say" (Greenwood & Levin, 1998) also attended the search. They included people from the following institutions: the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI); two non-governmental organizations; a national grassroots farmer organization (piggybacking on the search to do its own publicity); and the Department of State for Agriculture (DOSA), represented by senior coordinators of three ongoing government/donor-funded agricultural development projects. Also in attendance were several horticultural producers from the large- and

medium-scale categories, mostly members of GAMHOPE. The SIMI consultant and the desk officer in charge of the export promotion program at DOSTIE attended the opening and closing ceremonies. Approximately 100 people signed the attendance sheet over the course of the three-day search. Their active participation enriched the search proceedings and results.

The search facilitator or manager was a private training consultant with considerable expertise in participatory training and development. Tresi (not his real name) is a person with a great sense of humor, which he used effectively to create an atmosphere of trust and safety for the delegates to speak out on issues they otherwise might not have. Despite having expertise in participatory training methods, Tresi was unfamiliar with the search conference process. So, playing one of the action researcher roles delineated by Greenwood and Levin (*ibid.*) above, namely, “trainer in research methods,” I introduced Tresi to the search by providing the relevant literature and going through two three-hour long orientation sessions. It served as a sort of in-field training, useful for both of us to increase our knowledge of the theory and practice of the search and to make needed modifications fitting our context and needs.

I would have managed the search myself but did not for several reasons. First, I did not feel confident that I could have done so adequately. At the time, my knowledge of the search method was limited to some theoretical concepts gained through discussions in graduate seminars and supplemented by reading the literature. What little practical experience I had of an actual search process came from having gone through a one-day mock search at Cornell University the year prior to my fieldwork. With such limited exposure, I felt a little incompetent. There was, however, a second, perhaps more important reason I decided not to attempt managing the search. As a former horticulture practitioner, I wanted to contribute my local

knowledge to the substantive deliberations. At the same time, I wanted to observe and chronicle the process.

But above all else, I wanted to vigorously play another action researcher role, that of “advocate for groups not yet fully included,” by ensuring that the extension agents and other development agents at the conference would not dominate the process, as was customary in their interactions with farmers. In this respect, I was living true to the overarching purpose of the action research, which, if the reader may recall, was to give audible, not muted, voice to farmers in agenda-setting for agricultural development. The search took place exactly three months after my encounter with Farmer Jobe, and his words still echoed. All right, I’ll own up: I was the other, invisible search manager.

4.3.1.3 Search Experience and Learnings

Establishing an Interactive Rhythm: The tempo that would characterize the three-day search was set during the introductory session on Sunday evening. All 60 WHA delegates, three members of the SCT, the search manager, the SIMI consultant, and the officer in charge of the export promotion project at DOSTIE were in attendance. The DOSTIE officer welcomed the delegations and explained the rationale behind the proposed project. She emphasized government’s interest in having stakeholders take on leading roles in every stage of planning for the horticulture sector, saying, “This is your project and you should play your role.” The SIMI consultant corroborated, pointing out the search was an opportunity for the women farmers to “get your interests on the agenda, government has a lot of respect for you as horticultural producers and wants to hear from you.” Last, he stressed that they needed to organize in order to access the support available to farmers’ organizations. The women listened attentively and then applauded. This preamble was followed by individual introductions. Then, wishing us “fruitful deliberations in the workshop,” the

SIMI consultant and the DOSTIE officer took their leave; they returned Wednesday to perform the official closing ceremonies.

The group that remained settled down to the business of the search, and the search manager, Tresi, and his assistant (hereafter identified as Tresi senior and junior, respectively) took over. Tresi senior launched the search by first asking everyone to move around and change their seats. He did this to break up the natural clustered seating of delegates from the same association, in so doing increasing the interaction across groups. Since the majority of the women were meeting each other for the first time, rearranging the seating meant they found themselves sitting next to someone from a different association. Tresi senior jokingly decreed there was not going to be, in his words, “any group-hugging” throughout the event. The women seemed comfortable with that command. This would be the start of a relationship-building exercise that strengthened over and beyond the course of the nine months I was engaged with the organizing project.

The rest of Sunday evening was spent going over the process of the search. Tresi senior gave an overview of how the search would be conducted, the rationale behind its sequence, and particularly emphasized the role of the delegates. I buttressed Tresi’s statement that the delegates would be in charge since they had first-hand experience of the issues on which the search was founded. I noted again that the facilitators, Saits, and I were there to help them along but not to control the process. To drive this point home, Tresi senior performed a little simulation of a workshop where he was a lecturer and the group the students. “No, this is not the way we are going to do it tomorrow, after tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow. Nobody is going to fall asleep on me,” he ended the exercise. The resounding applause ended the introductory session around 9:00 PM. For the duration of the search, Tresi would use his wit to create a congenial and safe atmosphere that made collaborative work easier.

When we reassembled on Monday at 8:00 AM, the search group was much larger and included WHA delegates and other invitees. Approximately 70 people signed the attendance sheet that first morning. Each participant was identified by a nametag, making it easier for the search managers to address people by name, thus adding a personal touch that encouraged a higher level of participation. In round-robin fashion participants introduced themselves, identifying their respective organizational affiliations. When introductions were completed, Tresi senior, who was very observant, reminded the delegates of his warning against “group-hugging.” At this, the meeting erupted into a big “mixer” as people moved around to change seats. For the rest of the search, with the exception of the group action-planning stage, there was not much affinity-clustering.

When calm resumed, the Tresi managers went over the search procedure, reiterated the proactive role expected of the delegates, entertained and answered questions about the process, and laid down ground rules for interactive discussions. The meeting hall was set up to accommodate an open-circle seating arrangement, rather than a classroom-style row seating, as a means to increase interaction among search participants. For the purpose of reporting on and recording group discussions, a long table, several chairs, and a flipchart stand were placed at one end of the hall.

Group Reflection on the Search Question. To lay the groundwork for the search stages, the group took time to reflect on the search question I had developed, and which Tresi had written on the flipchart: *What improvements are needed in the organizational capacity of women horticultural producer associations to promote entrepreneurship and enable them to engage as effective partners in export-oriented horticulture in The Gambia?* The question was so worded because it fell in line with the learning process approach inherent in educational organizing. The alternative would have been to subscribe to the technical organizing tradition initially suggested

by my mentor, MS, and to be more direct in posing a leading question about how to form an apex organization. That would have fulfilled the primary interest of DOSTIE and SIMI. But the way the question was framed provided the opportunity for the women to reach the decision, through a more critically reflective process, that an apex organization was wanted and needed.

Tresi junior translated the question word for word in Mandingo, and then asked the group to take two minutes to think about it. He ensured that people understood the meaning of the question and why it was posed the way it was. He sought agreement that the question reflected the participants' problems, needs, and interests. Furthermore, he offered the option to pose a different question if delegates felt the other was not representative. With no expressed need for amendment, we moved on to tease out and understand the nuances of three key phrases in the question: organizational capacity, entrepreneurship, and effective partners.

At first, the women farmers took a back seat, because extension agents dominated the discussion. They cited—from their viewpoints—problems within the smallholder horticulture production and marketing system. The agents talked about the lack of attention to quality, and what one called the women's motivation toward vegetable gardening as “a use-my-time type of attitude.” And, not surprisingly, these problems were attributed to farmers not being organized. It was obvious they were steering the women, or leading the discussion, toward the idea of an apex organization. As the “trainers” continued, the women remained silent, probably because they were used to hearing such complaints. At this point, I sent a note to Tresi senior to remind him the search was not an extension-centered training workshop where farmers would be lectured at. Tresi intervened, momentarily stopping the discussion, and conducted an exercise that actively brought back the women into the process.

Picking out one of the women farmers from the group, he asked whether she considered herself an entrepreneur and, if so, to describe what she did that made her one. He had purposefully selected the only woman farmer in the group who was not a member of a communal garden; she produced vegetables on a family farm for sale mainly to the hotel industry. As the farmer explained her practice, Tresi called on another woman to describe hers, then a different one, and another. This went on for almost twenty minutes. The sharing of experiential perspectives helped us reach a common understanding of the term “entrepreneurship.” The concept had initially proved difficult to translate because the majority of delegates did not see how entrepreneurship differed from their normal practice of growing and selling vegetables. Tresi used the same tactic to create a shared understanding of the other key phrases.

Close to one hour was spent discussing the question, but the time spent was well worth it because that ensured group ownership of the search question. Omitting this crucial step, I believe, would have compromised the high level of intellectual and emotional energy that characterized the search and subsequent field activities. Perhaps more important, the time was useful in that it served as a stimulating icebreaker session in which Tresi senior played the role of “agent provocateur” as he pushing the search participants, especially the association delegates, against groupthink. He did this to preempt a persistent and oftentimes limiting cultural inclination. A prevalent norm in Gambian culture is called “*maslaha*,” a habit of being overly polite to the extent that you never openly disagree with someone else, even if you hold a different viewpoint, and more so if that person is in a position of authority. The result is a tendency toward groupthink. So, to prevent *maslaha* from restricting the search, Tresi used the session to “dare” participants to think out of the “association box.”

For example, he randomly picked a delegate who happened to be the president of one of the associations and asked her a question related to governance. Then he asked another member of the same association whether she agreed with her president's remarks. [I thought he was moving a bit too fast, but in retrospect I realized Tresi knew what he was doing.] "Don't look at her, tell me what you think, *you*, not your association," he dared. When the woman hesitated, Tresi got some assistance from the women, now energized and back in charge, and who encouraged in chorus: "Just say it, say what you think." Tresi used this I-challenge-you-to-think-for-yourself approach several times, eventually driving home the point that it was possible to express one's viewpoint without offending, so long as one did not get personal but stayed with the issues. This became the rule throughout the search, and although there was initial hesitation, we became comfortable with it over time. In the final analysis, the icebreaker session confirmed for the delegates that control of the learning process was truly devolved to each and every one of them. Thus the search became, first and foremost, a "confidence building and capacity releasing" process.

Adjusting to Role Reversals. This empowering process became evident in the way the delegates handled the backward and forward motions of the six stages of the search, which began after a short break following the animated icebreaker session. To begin with, they responded with ease to the strict and generally unfamiliar procedure I insisted on for conducting the group discussions and reporting out in plenary. The process followed was that after Tresi introduced a particular stage and participants clarified expectations, people randomly divided up using a counting-off process. As in more formal educational settings, the women then grouped according to assigned number, with all who counted one joining a group, two another, and so. This was another strategy to prevent association-member clustering and so to increase cross-learning.

Within the randomly mixed small groups, the facilitators (to manage the discussion) and reporters (to present findings to the plenary) were selected from among the women delegates; trainers in the groups were asked to concede those roles, but since they were literate in English served as scribes to record the discussions on flipchart paper. Later, during the plenary sessions, the facilitator and the reporter from each small group sat at the high table and reported out—from memory—what their group had discussed. Only in three cases were the reporters literate in either English or Arabic and so read from notes they had written down. In all cases the scribe played a supporting role, putting up the group's flipcharts and pointing out omissions made by the reporters.

The procedure followed was quite a departure from the conventional workshop format that my mentor had proposed under the technical organizing approach, where the extension agent or resource person would singularly perform the roles of group manager, scribe, and reporter. As Farmer Jobe stated, with corroboration from quote 3 in the first part of this chapter, the reason for such an approach so centered around the extension agent is that farmers are “illiterate,” a euphemism for a lack of formal schooling and, therefore, an inability to speak or write in English regardless of whether one can do so in another language, and a condition often linked to their lack of “knowing.” However, through the search we learned of other possibilities and how to make use of them. The reporters quite competently shared with the plenary learnings from the small group discussion, entertained questions, responded sufficiently, and just as easily as anyone else controlled the discussion. Reviewing videotapes of the search, I noticed the looks of admiration in the faces of some extension agents as the women reported. The search demonstrated that “illiteracy,” or not knowing how to read or write, did not equate to an inability to understand (have knowledge of) and debate an issue. Unfortunately, this is the perception most outside

development agents tend to have about farmers who have not received formal schooling. The reader may recall a similar argument made by Farmer Jobe in Chapter One. It is a sound illustration of how education is a statusing modality that conditions relationships, especially among stakeholders in the agricultural development arena.

Surprisingly, the reversal of roles was not difficult for the extension workers to accept. At least that's what they claimed, as heard in the following reflections from the "scribes" when they evaluated their experience of the search process at the end of the first day.

I learnt a new technique of working with farmers, although it was difficult at first to control myself. [*IJ: control?*] I was talking a lot because at first the women were quiet and looking to me I don't know for confirmation or what when they wanted to say something.

It was a good experience for me. The women participants were independent and came up with their own opinion. I learnt a lot from them but it was hard to stay in the background.

The use of the vernacular was the most helpful; it made the objectives clear and enabled everyone to participate freely. I think the women appreciated the process very much.

What was best was giving the women the chance to report on group discussions themselves rather than us. That was new for them; they kept talking about that during the breaks. It gave them a lot of confidence and they got more comfortable as the day went by. It also increased their interest.

Empathetic Engagement. The search was the first opportunity for the leadership of the participating associations to meet in one forum and learn about what was happening within their respective associations. As the women engaged with each other, they understood that their associations faced similar problems, irrespective of differences in origin (whether donor-sponsored or local initiative) and length of time in existence. During the first stage to construct a shared history, participants learned that whereas some horticultural projects (and associations) may have been established

30 years ago, others as recent as 2002, the problems faced were the same, varying only in degree but not in kind. Problems related to inadequate production equipment and infrastructure, insufficient capital to purchase necessary inputs to improve production, difficulties in the marketing of produce, and governance issues resonated with all of the delegates from the 10 women's horticultural associations. The same was true for producers across the range of horticultural operations as reported in Chapter Two.

The knowledge that they were more or less in the same boat generated a deep empathy among the women farmers, leading to a quick resolution to work collaboratively for responsive solutions. With so much impatience, the women wanted to skip the next two stages of the search and move directly to the two action planning steps. But Tesi and I insisted otherwise, adamant that we needed to work through the two visioning stages, namely, imagining a desirable future and the probable future from inaction, because omission could mean creating impractical future actions. My insistence was a sign of the empathy I felt with the women. This was motivated by personal experiences and based on four interrelated reasons with bearing on the second of the organizing questions posed earlier: For what purpose and in whose interest should producers organize? I will elaborate.

The first relates to the overarching research problem, which, it would be recalled, was that smallholder farmers, male or female, seldom participated upfront in agenda-setting, a process I believe should begin with a vision of the desired state. Such exclusion of farmers was articulated in various ways by different stakeholders in previous comments worth repeating. "They come and force you to accept their ways," said Farmer Jobe. "We farmers are slaves of agriculture, they dictate to us what to do," corroborated the farmer in quote 1 in section 4.1.1. The donor representative in quote 4 commented on non-governmental organizations vying with the government for influence over farmers. A practical example was clearly evident in discussions

between the SIMI consultant and the strategy counterpart team about farmers not being organized but needing to by forming an apex organization. It will be recalled that this was a conditionality of the export promotion program, in turn giving rise to the educational organizing initiative and the search conference that kicked it off. For all these reasons, therefore, the search conference was meant to give the women horticulture producers the opportunity to make the decision of forming an apex organization by themselves, rather than the idea being imposed by outsiders.

Another important reason was that agricultural development interventions designed—with good intentions—by government and other outside agency stakeholders might not automatically represent farmers' interests nor match their abilities. Where farmers are not involved in the decision-making and planning process for such interventions but rather are end-users or implementers, the strong potential for discrepancy may not be at all difficult to grasp. The case of the women horticulture producers engaged in the search conference provides a good example. Whereas some may have had decades of experience growing and marketing vegetables, one could not take for granted that the women necessarily possessed the requisite competencies to meet the highly stringent standards expected of export-oriented horticulture. Indeed, previous contractual relationships between women's horticultural associations and private exporting companies were constrained by the inability of the former to maintain a consistent supply of high-quality produce in the volumes demanded by exporters. Some women reminded me of this on several occasions during the pre-search field visits. The key point being made here is that the exclusion of critical stakeholders in the higher order processes of program-visioning and agenda-setting might result in the omission of important actions otherwise essential to achieve more successful outcomes for a planned intervention.

My third reason thus flowed from the two reasons above. I insisted on the two visioning stages so that the women delegates could voice their views and aspirations with regard to the future direction of the Gambian horticulture sector and, especially, articulate their roles and responsibilities in achieving performance goals set for the sector. Hitherto, it had not been the case that women farmers' knowledge and experiences were sought and incorporated in planning horticultural development interventions. For this reason, and to reverse the status quo, the search became above all else a means to engage women horticultural producers in making practical judgments about horticultural innovations. Knowing that the proceedings of the search would be incorporated into the final trade policy document, I was advocating for the voices and input of the delegates into the higher order processes of decision making.

In making these arguments, I could not say for sure that my standpoint in 2003 was not a subconscious need (or was it guilt because I was an accomplice?) to redress a serious omission in 1990 when smallholder women horticultural producers were visibly absent from the first national policy planning conference on horticulture. They were not invited, but instead were represented and spoken for by various categories of "trainers"—extension agents, researchers, policymakers, donors, and other technical experts. And yet horticultural development policies and practical interventions in ensuing years were derived from that conference. I have wondered if the persistent mediocre performance of the urban horticulture sector, despite the substantial amounts of resources poured into its development, could be partially attributed to the perennial disregard of the practical knowledge of its primary constituency, women horticultural producers.

Going through with the visioning stages of the search was critical for a fourth and, to a certain degree, most vital reason. It was to create a consciousness among the delegates that they possessed inbuilt capacities needed to address some of the

problems drawn out during the first stage of constructing a shared history of their experiences with horticultural farming. It would be recalled that during the pre-search invitational and exploratory visits, whenever problems in horticulture came up in our conversations, the women always viewed the answers as residing elsewhere, outside of their immediate personal and physical environments. Surprisingly enough, I did not interpret this stance as a situation of total helplessness. On the contrary, I felt that more than anything else it had to do with an unfortunate historical pattern of conditioning that inclined limited-resource farmers in The Gambia, as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, toward believing (or pretending?) they didn't know or didn't have the solutions to their problems. Not to mention, of course, the fact there was no shortage of external assistance, as attested to in the quote comparing farmers to "passengers in a taxicab," which reminds me of a conversation years earlier with the leader of a rural women farmers group I was working with. Apparently frustrated with demands made by the agency I represented concerning implementation of a certain project, the woman told me categorically that my agency could withhold their support of the group, that other organizations were just as ready to support them.

So, based on all of the above reasoning, my standpoint was that as a social researcher guided by the principles of conscientização propagated by Paulo Freire, of agency in the tradition of Amartya Sen, and by the ethics of democratic relationships advanced by proponents of organizing and action, I had an obligation to create an arena in which the farmers would begin to look within and release the internal capacities they and I knew they possessed, and in so doing play the proactive and interactive role in overall horticultural development. I wanted to move them away from the belief system conveyed in the quote about beggars not having any choice. I believed the time had come to start changing "the beggar mentality and increase

independence,” as quote 1 advocated. So, in the end we did not skip the visioning stages, as described next.

Education and Entertainment. We spent nearly two hours on a session that turned out extremely educational and entertaining. Mindful of the delegates’ impatience, Tresi and I decided to merge the second, third, and fourth stages of the search. Participants spent one hour and fifteen minutes in very animated small group discussions, visioning a desirable future, forecasting a probable future if no action is taken, and identifying areas for change and action. Then we tried and eventually succeeded in ending the small group meetings to reconvene in a large group. As the search participants attempted to settle down, something totally unexpected happened: there was total chaos. One delegate from Sukuta—a brilliant woman with a great sense of humor and the self-appointed mistress of ceremony during the search—decided it was time for an “education-entertainment” break. She stood in the center of the circle and extemporaneously broke into a song she had composed about horticulture gardening, exports and foreign exchange, and the important role of women in horticultural development. She gave the chorus line and everyone in the room joined in the song and dance, opening up a showcase of artistic talent that resulted in several other delegates composing, all extempore, lyrics based on the issues discussed in the small group session.

This went on for almost 30 minutes; the presence of the videographer documenting the process not the least intimidating or distracting—they actually performed for the video (which was sent to SIMI). Meanwhile, the Tresi facilitators felt they had lost control of the meeting and looked hopefully at me to bring back order. I simply shrugged and said to allow them continue; it was part of the educational process. Plus the women were fulfilling the expectations we had of them to take charge of their conference. The search resumed when the main participants

decided it was time to settle down. Over the three-day duration of the event, we would take several such “edutainment” breaks.

Using key problems identified in the first stage as a departure point, the delegates, together with other stakeholders, envisioned a horticulture sector that was summed up in the following statement: “We would like a functioning horticulture sector where stakeholders collaborate to enable production of fruits and vegetables with quality and quantity that can stand up to competition in export markets.” The delegates went even further to picture the women horticultural associations exporting produce through their own organizations and not through intermediaries. However, one delegate cautioned, “We can do that if we move away from the attitude of *‘luma chi am rek jel’* [Wollof for ‘whatever I get from it, I’m satisfied’], a prevalent outlook of minimal effort [some would say fatalism, but I would not take it so far] delegates agreed was inconsistent with entrepreneurship. Let me share some of the ensuing dialog verbatim.

“As the saying goes, individual twigs cannot sweep, but if we bunch them together we can sweep the floor clean. All the problems we have talked about today, and the good things we want to gain from horticulture, the solution is to organize ourselves,” a delegate from Bakau stated. Tresi senior: “What do you mean when you say you have to organize yourselves?” A chorus of voices: “Is it that you don’t know yourself what it means?” Tresi senior: “I have a company that is organized but it may not be what you are talking about!” One delegate: “We have to come together and collaborate.” Another: “We have to strengthen our associations and register them with Attorney General’s Chambers.” Tresi senior: “What will happen to our vision if we don’t do all what you are talking about?” There was a unanimous response: “Then we lose everything. We depend on horticulture for our survival! Is that not obvious?” But another delegate cautioned: “If we do not take action now, someone else with money,

and who is more serious, will take over the production and export of horticultural produce.” A leader of one of the associations summed up the discussion thus: “We have to come together as one association for the whole of the Western Division. We should start here and gradually involve all the women horticultural producers in the country. We will have our association just like the sesame growers do then we can help ourselves. Without us coming together everything will remain the same.” The women had come to the practical judgment that an apex organization was crucial; in this they concurred with the promoters of the export promotion program and the horticulture counterpart team. It was now 1:45 PM and time for a well-deserved lunch break.

It began in the afternoon, after lunch. The group was back in plenary to continue with the discussion on what areas needed changing in order to achieve the vision developed earlier. A delegate from one association known for having very serious management problems posed a question about how other groups went about changing their leadership structure. Her question opened the floodgates. For an answer, others followed her lead and started to describe organizational constraints within their respective associations. Attention began to switch away from the technical problems that had dominated the morning sessions to contentious issues related to group governance and management and their effect on the performance of the different associations. Although the session did not degenerate into a shouting match, the atmosphere became a bit charged as delegates, regardless of position occupied in the association, extension agents, and horticultural exporters openly confronted each other. Neither the Tresis search managers nor I attempted to order or lead the discussion. Instead we allowed the conversation to flow, unstructured, while we tried to record the emergent issues for a later, calmer, dialogue. I thought it was all part of the learning process to alter relational arrangements across urban agriculture

stakeholders. Eventually, the search was called to order and officially adjourned for the day.

The momentum was maintained when later in evening the resident delegates continued the deliberations on their own, without the search managers and outside of the structured stages of the search. During dinner, delegates from the same association sat together—group-hugging—and the table talk was about what they would do next, as a follow-up to the search. This was still the first day, and the women were already thinking about post-search activities. After dinner the women relived the moments of the first day of the search conference by reviewing the videotape and reflecting on the discussion. By the end of the evening, the women made the decision to quickly move ahead with the formation of an apex organization.

Toward that end, they agreed to focus first on reorganizing their individual associations and “sensitizing” the wider membership to the idea. An 11-member interim steering committee was elected with representation from each of the 10 associations and charged with the responsibility of doing the groundwork necessary to creating the umbrella body. I would credit the search for having set the farmers thinking about where they wanted to “go by themselves,” as one vice president commented to me the next day. At the time of writing the dissertation, though, I cannot judge the degree to which my co-organizer, Saits, had influenced any of the decisions made that evening, because he stayed throughout and I could not. To say he was influential would discredit the women’s judgment; yet to think that he was unimportant would underestimate the power of the extension worker. Be that as it may, the action planning, stage five, began that evening.

Coming to Practical Judgment. It continued on Tuesday morning as representatives of the 10 women horticultural associations caucused in their respective groups, creating action plans to discuss with their general membership upon returning

home. About an hour to lunchtime, we reconvened in the large group to share opinions about the priority areas of actions the individual groups had decided on. Not surprisingly, the delegates identified many areas of similarities, evidence of the commonality of issues across associations. The knowledge confirmed the need to develop a support network across their associations, so that they would exchange ideas for effecting local-level changes. Collectively, the representatives agreed that the priority actions needed were to undertake a review of management and make changes where necessary; to review current patterns of production, moving toward some level of specialization within each group and to organize collective marketing; and to establish criteria for fee-based membership in any communal horticultural project instead of an open membership.

After the completion of all six stages of the search by lunchtime on Tuesday, the meeting switched to a more formal training design. In this way, the search accommodated both the educational and some elements of the technocratic organizing traditions. As in previous collaborations, my mentor, MS, and I always manage to reconcile our differences. Starting Tuesday afternoon and continuing on Wednesday morning, resource persons selected from search participants facilitated discussions on the following key areas: integrated approach to horticultural production and marketing, the need for strong producer organizations in export-oriented horticulture, and organizing for entrepreneurship development in horticulture. The entrepreneurship session was lead by an experienced facilitator, a former colleague who first introduced me to the ideas of Paulo Freire when we both worked for an international non-governmental organization. I became quite impressed with his training skills, which he described as “not using a banking approach.” Consistent with his learning style, he had the delegates convene in their individual associations and asked them to draw on their experiences to explore three questions: the meaning of entrepreneurship, who or what

an entrepreneur was, and whether they regarded themselves as entrepreneurs. Each group later reported their answers when we came back to plenary. The fourth and final session was a case study presentation by one of the delegates on the operations of her [private] horticultural enterprise.

The search ended at 1:45 PM on Wednesday, January 22, 2003. But the learning fostered by its democratic and open process continued beyond its three-day duration. The event was the beginning of a process of building relationships and coalitions at different levels. For the 10 women's horticultural associations that had hitherto operated independently, they were enabled to connect with one another. It resulted in an understanding that since they were dealing with the same problems and challenges, they needed to come together to find collective solutions. Furthermore, the search was an opportunity to begin a process of self-evaluation of the internal management of each group, especially with regard to the relationship between the leadership and general membership. At yet another level, and perhaps more important, it demonstrated the possibility of a different pattern of interaction between farmers and extension agents. The process allowed the farmers and other development agents alike to learn that each owned knowledge useful for generating solutions to the problems under discussion. Learnings from the search spread beyond the horticulture sector when Saits, my extension colleague in the strategy counterpart team, later used the same approach with stakeholders in the fisheries sector, one of the five targeted in the export promotion program.

4.3.2 Field-Level Group Relational Meetings

According to Edward T. Chambers, head of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the relational meeting is the primary tool for organizing communities of people to build power organizations capable of forging lasting public relationships (Chambers, 2003). Earlier in Chapter Two, the relational meeting was described as the

“glue” that brings different groups together, allowing them to “embrace the tension” (ibid., p. 44) between the world as it is and the world as it should be. The purpose of the relational meeting is to search for talent, energy, insight, and relationships.

Chambers vividly captures the nature of the relational meeting thus: “It constitutes a public conversation on a scale that allows space for thoughts, interests, possibilities and talent to mix. It is where public newness begins” (Chambers, 2003, p. 45). But whereas Chambers’s relational meeting is a one-on-one, we modified ours into group conversations; yet we achieved the same effect of sharing the stories that “open a window into the passions that animate people to act” (Chambers, 2003, p. 45).

Transferring Ownership. The first series of group relational meetings took place one week after the search conference. This effectively took the organizing back to the field and enabled the sharing of insights about what was learned at the search with the general membership of the participating associations. Toward a goal of transferring ownership of the organizing process, the strategy counterpart team organizers practically handed over the baton to the 11-member steering committee constituted at the search. Although the SCT were present at all field meetings, they took a backseat and served as consultants to the steering committee.

The committee held its first meeting exactly one week after the search at the Banjulinding horticulture project, whose leader was also elected as the steering committee’s president. During that meeting, the members reviewed the terms of reference given to them at the conference, which was to pave the way toward creation of the apex organization. They decided that the first activity toward that goal should be a field tour of each of the 10 associations so that they could bring home the message of the search and begin engaging the general membership. It was unanimously agreed that a visit to each association by all the members of the steering committee would

show the “fruits” of the search and encourage association members to support the cause. The field visit was subsequently conducted in late May of 2003.

Practicing New Relationships. The most important and immediate action step undertaken by the steering committee was to request and obtain an appointment with the Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Department of State for Industry and Employment (DOSTIE), the governmental home responsible for the export promotion program. Meeting with the PS on February 5, 2003, the steering committee expressed their commitment to follow through with plans developed during the search, requesting—naturally—more governmental assistance to do so. And even though Saits and I were present at the meeting, as was the SIMI consultant, we allowed the committee members to speak for themselves. One area of need they were particularly emphatic about was for the government to allocate a site for a wholesale market for fruits and vegetables that would be operated by horticultural producers. This was something that GAMHOPE had been trying to obtain since 1992 without much success. At the time of completing this dissertation, an area had been identified, and negotiations were underway on how to finance the venture.

The meeting between the steering committee and the Permanent Secretary was significant in many ways, the most noteworthy the fact they were able to meet him at his office. This was a reversal from the more common form of interaction between farmers and governmental officials where the latter would visit the former during the occasional monitoring of state-funded projects. The meeting was also a first for the women to deal with another governmental ministry outside of the ministry of agriculture. It was a beginning for the women’s horticultural associations to appreciate the connection between the different branches of the government as well their role in the larger scheme of things. I would suggest that the search gave the women the confidence to know they could demand and gain access to governmental officials on

the latter's turf instead of waiting for the sporadic official tour undertaken to assess farmers' needs.

Direct Action Organizing. Once the delegates returned to their respective associations, they began mobilizing and organizing their members, as a means to strengthen the foundations that would ultimately constitute the apex. By the time the SCT organizers embarked on a 10-day monitoring trip between February 9 and 22, 2003, all 10 associations had completed a first round of internal meetings to share the lessons of the search and to discuss the action plans created. The SCT held meetings with a total of 500 women across the 10 sites. That number was naturally not all of the membership. Each association selected representatives from the different sub-groups within their horticultural project. At each site meeting, the representatives who attended the search gave presentations on what they had learned from the event. This was followed by open discussions. Compared to the pre-search meetings, the focus now was on leadership and management issues and how these impacted technical issues about production, which took a secondary position in the group conversations.

I could not gauge the degree to which the presence of the SCT organizers at the field-level group relational meetings influenced the openness with which those contentious issues were discussed. At any rate, some associations (meaning the women) were able to talk about and eventually make much-needed changes they had previously been constrained to make. In several instances, there were voluntary resignations among long-serving leaders no longer felt to be effective. One of the village meetings coincided with another of a "political" nature organized by the local machinery of the government of the day. The women asked me if the "politicians" could be invited to attend our meeting; I agreed, albeit rather reluctantly. Although they took up a good portion of the time talking at the women, one aspect I found comfort in was when the Member of Parliament for the area urged the group to

strengthen their association without waiting for outside help. It was an unwitting endorsement of the goal behind the organizing by a representative of the government partially funding that aspect of my dissertation research.

Subsequently, Saito and I continued to meet with the steering committee members, on a monthly basis, from March through August of 2003. At our first meeting on March 19 we explored the following questions: what were our expectations of the apex organization, and how should we proceed to establish it? The consensus reached was to take the question back to each association for input by the general membership on what an apex organization ought to stand for. It was a democratic approach meant to involve the main constituency of the apex in deciding the functions of their self-created organization.

Almost a month later, at the second meeting on April 16, we discussed the level of progress in the community-level organizing to date. Six of the 10 associations that had not been registered with the Attorney General's Chambers had completed the process by then. The general membership of each group was rallying around the idea of the apex. The steering committee was concerned about efforts being made by another commodity-based apex organization to recruit urban horticultural producers, thereby preempting the formation of a horticultural growers association. The organization in question had hitherto concentrated on the rural areas and on a particular commodity, sesame production and marketing. As they sought to expand nationwide, urban horticulture became a more attractive area. However, the steering committee members wanted to maintain their identity as a horticultural organization because horticulture was their primary occupation. "So what are you going to do?" I asked. "We'll just have to decline their invitation and continue to build our own organization," was the unanimous response. The committee members concurred that there were challenges to overcome before their apex could be established.

Another significant topic addressed related to the role of extension agents. The committee members decided that extension agents working with each association should be engaged with the organizing endeavor, and not serve as only technical advisors. This was an “Aha!” moment for me, because I noted an opportunity for extension to expand its function beyond that of simply a conduit of technology produced by research. Perhaps extension agents in the role of organizers might address the controversial struggle for influence between researchers and extensionists, especially the former’s preference to bypass extension and work directly with farmers, and the debate over the continued existence of extension as a service “just going to talk with farmers” as reported in Chapter Three. But what would it mean for extension agents to become organizers, and how would such a transformation occur? Some suggestions are advanced in the concluding chapter of this report.

By late April, the steering committee for the anticipated horticultural apex organization had started to attract attention from outside development agencies. One in particular was a regional NGO, the West African Rural Foundation (WARF), based in Dakar, Senegal, and which was at the time promoting organic gardening among members of one of the associations involved in the organizing pilot. WARF uses participatory processes to help farmers diagnose problems constraining their agricultural activities and to create appropriate solutions. Having heard about the apex-in-the-making, WARF sent two officers on a special visit with the steering committee in The Gambia, with the objective of learning more about the *raison d’etre* of the apex and progress toward its establishment, and to identify areas for potential cooperation. In her presentation about their activities in the aftermath of the search conference, the steering committee president explained to the WARF visitors that the main goal of the apex organization was to assist women horticultural producers to resolve problems, especially those related to marketing. [*My thought was “I hope you*

will be more than that!”] She noted that coming together to form an umbrella body would enable them to participate more effectively in the Gambian horticultural export trade. [*“Now, we are getting somewhere,” I said to myself, “but I hope you’ll do even more.”*] The WARF visitors offered their assistance to the steering committee in establishing the organization.

Later in May the steering committee members went on the field trip they had proposed at their very first post-search meeting. Their mission was to assess progress on the implementation of the action plans created at the search conference, to brainstorm with the groups about the purpose and strategies for the apex, and to decide on a date to inaugurate the apex. There was another logical purpose for the committee’s visit, however, and it was to enhance the credibility of the leadership of each of the 10 women’s horticultural association (WHA) as they sought to organize from within. Additionally, the steering committee visits served to maintain the social energy created during and after the search. Saits accompanied the committee, and, based on his detailed report, the most important issues discussed across all sites visited were the following: the non-democratic selection of leadership; the domination of decision making by a few individuals and the low participation of the general membership; the absence of governance rules such as terms of office and a division of responsibility among executive members; a poor record-keeping system; and an inadequate financial management system. These were areas the associations agreed to concentrate on resolving through capacity-building in leadership, group management, and financial record-keeping.

The monthly meetings continued in June and July. By then we had started planning for the launching of the apex organization. The SIMI consultant wanted to see “results,” and so Saits and I had to push to “deliver.” Recall that establishing sector stakeholder apex organizations was a precondition for the export promotion

program to commence. With this pressure, Saits and I, with the agreement of the steering committee, determined that it would be timely to have an official inauguration of the apex organization. In preparation, we helped the committee draft a constitution that reflected their aspirations.

On August 2, 2003, the Western Division Women's *Naako* Organization, or *WONAAKOR*, for short, was inaugurated. Since "Naako" means garden in Mandingo, *WONAAKOR* was a name instantly recognizable as representing horticultural producers. There were 50 women at the inauguration, five from each of the 10 associations represented at the search conference. The group reviewed and adopted the constitution, and elected the interim steering committee to continue as the first executive officers of the apex. The participants decided on the amounts for subscription fees for different kinds of membership. Remarkably, on the spot, leaders from six of the 10 associations settled both their entrance and half-yearly subscription fees. Evidently, they had come prepared, a gesture of their commitment to the success of the apex organization. In addition, a one-year calendar of activities was developed, which included fund-raising, training members, and pursuing the establishment of the wholesale market. From January to August none of the organizing constituency had mentioned media coverage for our activities, the norm for similar government-sponsored activities. However, at inauguration, the leadership of *WONAAKOR* decided they were ready to hold a televised forum and a radio program to introduce their organization to the nation.

The leadership of *WONAAKOR* continued organizing within their respective constituencies. The search and the relational meetings Saits and I coordinated were merely catalysts for what is most certainly a continuous process that will take a life of its own as time progresses. Our role as organizers was to build the leadership and the coalitions, which we did by bringing the groups together. We abided by the golden

rule of organizers not to do for people what they can do for themselves. It will be up to the membership of the organization to continue to mobilize, define its agenda, and take the necessary actions. That self-direction will be the yardstick to measure the effectiveness of our efforts. The leadership has developed the organizing capabilities needed to mobilize their members. They have the knowledge and experiences of their constituencies. I believe the leadership and membership of WONA AKOR are building the capacities that would enable them to plan, direct, organize, and coordinate the organization's affairs. The lessons learned since the start of the organizing process should facilitate eventual replication in other parts of the country.

Closing Thoughts. My intention in providing such a detailed description of the organizing process was to give the reader a sense of the excitement that characterized our group interaction. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to convey the substance of the interactive collaboration and learnings with my research partners in this phase of the action research. It has been difficult to recount on paper how I felt "in the moment" of all the activities, but especially in my work with the women farmers. As I wrote this chapter, I constantly replayed the videotapes of the search conference to refresh my memory and recapture some of those feelings. Still, finding the words to express them without suggesting a sense of self-importance was difficult. In addition, the detailed description of the organizing was also a means for me to understand why I adopted such an approach in the first place. When I explained the multiple roles I played in the study in Chapter Two, they converged into the ultimate role of an educator. Upon reflection on my stance and practices in the action research, and notably in the direct action organizing reported in this chapter, I found the following assertion to offer a compelling explanation:

Because the struggle for knowledge and power is foundational to practice we have to see our practice as political and therefore strategic, not simply technical or facilitative in terms of shaping who should benefit. And once we

see such foundational struggle defining the terrain of practice we have to see the brokering of knowledge and power as central in such practice. (Wilson & Cervero, 2000: 269)

5. EMERGENT PERSPECTIVES ON CRAFTING PARTNERSHIP AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The introductory chapter presented an overview of the concept of partnership and its rationale, drawn mainly from the scholarly literature. The synopsis noted that partnership is progressively more advocated as an alternative form of engagement among agricultural development actors. The driving expectation is that partnership forms of relationships, comparatively more horizontal and democratic in principle, would lead to more effective decision making, planning, and interventions that would enhance agricultural performance. As also stated, interest in partnership has been fuelled by a general disenchantment with the perceived shortcomings of the dominant paradigm and practice of transfer of technology. Technology transfer, as described by a research participant in Chapter Three, has tended to reinforce a vertical relationship between and among policymakers, agricultural researchers, extension agents, and farmers. Much criticism has been directed at such hierarchical relationships for their propensity toward decision-making processes that exclude voices of key stakeholders, but especially that of farmers. Farmer Jobe, for all practical purposes the chief guide of my action research journey, differentiated the practice and consequences of partnership and transfer of technology in his comparison of the relationship between farmers and trainers in The Gambia and Senegal.

Reflecting on the conversations shared in the previous chapters, the reader could envision that a change from vertical to horizontal forms of relationships might not be so spontaneous. Possible reasons for the difficulty have been insinuated in the narratives of the partners engaged in the action research, most significantly that actors expected to adopt and adapt to horizontal partnership relationship are characterized by different motivations, agendas, organizational structures, and processes and, more

important, by power asymmetry. But since the cost of inaction would be too high, one must be optimistic that a transformation could eventuate, albeit through a gradual process of change. On the other hand, it would have to be facilitated through a preliminary process, a foundational phase whereby the defining modalities of current relational arrangements would have to be “disorganized” and then “reorganized” in order to enable actors to build the capacity to engage in desirable partnerships. The reader may recall that the question which anchored the action research was how to promote a change from vertical relationships to horizontal modes based on the principles of partnership among urban agriculture stakeholders in The Gambia. I would persuasively claim that my dissertation fieldwork, in its entirety, stirred things up, contributing to the building of a foundation for the requisite reorganization that would nurture partnership relationships.

Although the focus of the action research was on “how to” craft partnership, the question would be incomplete just by itself. For a more comprehensive treatment, it ought to be coupled with, maybe even preceded by, questions of why partnerships are essential. Why don’t [better] partnerships exist? Why do partnerships matter? In other words, what kinds of benefits can partnerships uniquely achieve that can’t be otherwise achieved? Additionally, who needs to engage in partnership relationships, and when and where should partnership occur along the complex web of agricultural development? In the first place, what does partnership mean, and what are its parameters? Undeniably, these questions make up the flesh and blood of the mechanistic “how-to” question, and probably deserved to be discussed in the very early chapters of the dissertation, to justify the quest for design principles on forming partnerships.

However, I decided to postpone such discussion until the last chapter so that the reader would gain a better contextual understanding of the why questions. For, by

now the reader should have seen that these flesh-and-blood questions were the underlying stimuli for the inquiry. The previous chapters recounted experiential stories from my research partners and me, all of which are permeated with clear justifications for why stakeholders across the continuum of agricultural development should endeavor to build relationships based on partnership. They also provided the rationale for the action research journey into the quest for how to achieve such change.

In Chapter Five, I pull together and critically reflect on emergent perspectives about crafting partnerships, linking the discussion with the “why” questions outlined above. I begin by exploring understandings about what partnership means and what constitutes its parameters. Keeping with the convention of previous chapters, I offer the presentation as a dialogue between research participants and the relevant literature, using the latter to clarify, confirm, or disconfirm empirical discoveries. Interweaving the experiential and practical knowings of research participants with the propositional knowings from the scholarly writing on partnership yields what Heron and Reason (2001) described as an extended epistemology of learning about a research problem and justification for methods used to construct knowledge. Such integrative interpretation further serves to enhance the credibility of the findings from the study and any warrants for knowledge made.

Turning next to queries of why partnerships matter, the discussion again takes a critically reflective angle. Instead of pat straight answers, the narrative starts by revisiting the overarching research question, that is, how we create partnership. I then delineate who the “we” asking the question are. Moving on, I re-examine the deficit practice that compelled the question, situating it within the professional domains of the “we.” Last, I reflect on key attributes of the alternative practice—partnership—that “we” aspire to, and why the question about how to change has had to be posed in the first instance. From this process of clarifying my own learnings, I end the chapter with

lessons learned from the action research and implications of the findings for agricultural development in The Gambia and for my scholarly discipline of Extension.

There's one final point I should make before moving into the reflection. Throughout this chapter, I make reference to questions posed by my Graduate Special Committee during my defense or B-Exam. I consider the committee members as fellow travelers on, and the defense a significant part of, the dissertation research journey. Naturally, the final revision of my dissertation incorporated their valuable suggestions—in compliance with the contract that would validate my work. More important, committee members also posed specific questions whose answers did not fit any place other than in the final chapter, which one member described as the hand-off. And so wherever applicable in the discussion, I have indicated a particular defense question and my response to it.

5.2 What is Partnership? Meanings and Parameters

Similar to urban agriculture, the systemic setting of the inquiry described in Chapter Two, variations abound in the definitions and qualifications of partnership depending, it seems, on the context and purpose of the user. Variations in concepts associated with human relationships are worthy of note. In the case of partnership, if only because of its implications for the mental framework that would guide its practice in a complex, multi-layered, and power-defined arena such as agricultural development. The case of explicitness is elegantly captured in a critique Nour-Eddine Sellamna (1999) made about participation, a theoretical concept popular in agricultural development discourse, also the subject of much debate, and a cornerstone of partnership. Sellamna's caution is therefore applicable to partnership:

With such a politically loaded notion as participation, one cannot use such concepts without impunity. Concepts carry models (political, economic, cultural models) which, although they may by no means be clear-cut, need to

be made explicit if one is to engage into meaningful debate or make statements on “good” or “bad” practice. (p. 5)

So, what does partnership mean? In addition to definitions offered in Chapter One, the following are representative of gleanings from the literature.

Two or more organizations with complementary areas of expertise committing resources and working together to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome that would have been difficult to reach alone. (The Organizational Change Program for the CGIAR Centers, TRG, Inc., 2001)

Partnerships are cooperative relationships; ones that are ongoing, maybe not forever but not matters just of convenience; and where parties are not subordinate to one another. It is important to attach some definite limits on the term if it is to have meaning for us working in [rural] development. In a partnership, the parties have a stake in each other’s well being, where they will even make some sacrifices for one another. (Uphoff, 2000)

Placed side by side with viewpoints from study participants, the defining parameters of reciprocity, mutuality, and empathy are equally emphasized. The next two quotes were offered by my research partners.

Well, in my view partnerships involves groups coming together for various reasons, not necessarily mutually exclusive, but more so mutually reinforcing. Because you can have different objectives in a partnership but you are coming together to be better able to achieve something which otherwise would have been more difficult or would not have occurred at all. So really there is some mutually beneficial relationship going on here; you are bringing something, someone else is bringing something. Your objectives are probably not the same, but really the outcome that you are looking for, pushing for . . . you collaborate with another person or institutions to achieve that outcome. There is something you are looking for in a partnership. We may have divergent interests but working for mutual benefits. We are essentially adding value; everyone knows what’s going on, what each one is doing. It is about adding value, advocating, advocacy, and brokering for each other.

Yes, I think this is a very pertinent question, partnership between, among research, extension, and farmers, and this is one of the issues that is being addressed in other forums, like partnership between NGOs and research, knowing that NGOs are working with farmers and farmer organizations. One thing I would like to say as a preamble before going into this is, what the best

principles are when we talk about partnerships. That would entail work together toward defined goals, have a shared understanding of the problem, and know what each is doing. That is, research should know what extension is doing; extension also knows what research is doing since they are all working towards lifting the livelihood of the farmer. And strengthen the performance of each other, have a defined power and equity relationship, have explicit decision-making process and lastly develop mutual accountability. And partners must be ready, partners must be ready to share, ready to collaborate, and be prepared to strengthen each other. In the absence of these then there will be no partnership, the relationship won't work.

I found the second speaker's idea of partnership as a means to "strengthen each other" quite appealing, especially in the research context where people were concerned about their weakening relationships. Intrigued by his statements, I probed into the conditions that would enable the fine principles he outlined to be put into practice. My research partner responded by giving a practical example of a partnership between a local non-governmental organization, an international NGO, and a community-based organization.

For example we have a partnership between [three NGOs: A is international; B and C are local]. It is called the farming systems training program. [A] is mobilizing resources, we [B and C] provide the training. The partnership at the beginning had some problems because the local NGOs saw [A], the international NGO as the muscle, which should not have been the case. We all brought something to the table, but there were certain things that were not transparent, things we did not see and did not even think of asking. Towards the end, we realized through one of the international donors supporting the project, when they said "we are not sending our money for them [A] we are sending our money for you [B&C]." Then we knew we are all equal. We became more confident to question [A]. After this the partnership was successful. Because each has something to offer that's different, and we need to put it all together to make the project successful. But money is the problem, and that's the only difficulty we encountered, the availability of requisite funds.

As with any new idea lacking precision in its interpretation, partnership has its skeptics—interestingly, among its very proponents (Crawford, 2003; Krishna, 2003; Tandon, 1990). Notably, the caveat is that partnership could potentially be used as a

guise for actors at one level, usually the more resource-endowed, to continue to exercise power over others, likely the resource-limited. The last quote illustrated a case in point. Power asymmetry has implications for agricultural development but has not always been factored into its discourse. Yet, power is central to all social relationships, as evident in the narratives reported earlier. To substantiate the perspectives of research participants, Sutherland (1999) noted that besides differences in knowledge, interests, and status, differential power—or perceptions thereof—represent a potential barrier to stronger relationships among farmers and other agency stakeholders. Barriers to adoption of partnership practice might arise from a feeling of threat to the status quo and resistance to change, as Collion and Rondot (1998) corroborated. No doubt if partnership is to depart from business as usual in agricultural development, issues of authority and control must be accounted for. A reversal of power relations might conceivably be the key and weak link to building a partnership culture in agricultural development. This was the basis for including in the first chapter the question of how to avert the misuse of power in partnership.

The conceptual difficulties associated with promoting partnership under current institutional contexts for agricultural development are conveyed in the passage below from one of my research partners. The individual was a veteran of the Gambian national agricultural research and extension system who had also spent more than a decade working in the international agricultural development community. Perhaps such broad experience explained the note of pessimism when I asked his perspectives on partnership, which the previous speaker's example did nothing to mitigate. He argued:

Partnership is a buzzword but people fail to define its parameters. Who partners whom? If you are getting married who is marrying whom? Am I partnering with the farmer or is the farmer partnering with me? So where is the partnership coming from? It's a critical issue for how the partnership will work. Who initiates it and for what reason, why do you want to partner, what

does it entail, who does what? Once you answer these questions your partnership will work. Oftentimes people say I have money you don't have money so I want to partner with you. You are not my partner; in fact I'm buying you. I have the money I buy you; you do what I say. That's not a partnership. I'll take the money, when it runs out, it ends. Oftentimes the World Bank talks about partnership, like I have the money, you do as I say, and we are going to work with you, partner with you then they tell you what to do because they have the money. That's not a partnership . . . when the money runs out it ends. So you have to define what a partnership is, our stake in the partnership. I have a stake in this, you have a stake in this; together we work; everybody has a stake in it. The stakes determine the partnership. Then we can work out how to be partners—who does what. At the end of the day, it will continue because we are partners. But that's a question nobody wants to answer and discuss. Maybe that's an issue you may want to reflect on and put some arguments forward in your dissertation: how partnership is structured; how it is organized.

Some in the scholarly community are in agreement with the last speaker regarding the ambiguity in the notion of partnership. In the following passage Uphoff (2000: 2) concedes to what Tandon (1990) argued was a flawed disposition toward viewing partnership as an intellectual camaraderie or convergence of ideas or frameworks, but which it is not. Uphoff recognized,

I consider most partnerships in rural development to be *aspirations* more than facts, and as aspirations they can direct our efforts to higher planes of endeavor. When we use the term, we should know that most rural people will not be fooled by it. They will know that most relationships with outside agencies, whether government, university, research institute, private sector, or NGO, are very one-sided in terms of power and security. Activities are not mutually determined, but more likely assented to, more or less freely. This does not make the activities invalid or without value. It does mean they fall short of real partnership. Also, rural people are acutely conscious that most activities initiated from outside or depending on outside support are for some fixed term, not ongoing. From our side, we should enter into relationships that we think of as partnerships with rural people, we should be striving to make them more *mutual* over time, and also continuing. Otherwise, the term “partnership” is only rhetoric.

The potential risk of partnership becoming rhetorical was conveyed above in the practical example of the partnership between the local and international NGO and

the community-based organization. Moreover, Uphoff's assertion that rural people are not fooled by the term "partnership" is quite insightful, because it surfaces a peculiar phenomena of feigned deference and manipulation in farmer-external stakeholder relationships insinuated in several places: Farmer Jobe's narrative in the first chapter, in the recount of my experience with the rural home gardening project in Chapter Two, and in other narratives shared throughout the dissertation. Unfortunately, a discussion on this important theme is beyond the scope of this dissertation—it is a whole research report of its own.

By nature, whenever I encounter ambiguity around some concept, I tend to seek clarity among the lone voices of negation struggling to be heard telling what it is not rather than what it is. I believe that negation sometimes leads to clearer understanding of a contested concept, which in turn might result in better practice. This penchant may account for the appeal I found in Rajesh Tandon's (1990: 97) admonition about the euphoria over partnership:

Partnership is not merely an instrumental concept which helps us accomplish some results which we otherwise would not have been able to achieve; partnership in social development [evaluation] is fundamentally linked to our philosophy of development. If our philosophy of development puts people at the center, if we believe that development cannot be done from the outside but can only be sustained and elaborated by a group of people on their own, with external support, and if we believe that development is not merely a series of events but a combination of qualitative processes, organizations, and people spread over time, then we have to see that partnership is fundamental to any such social development effort. (p. 97)

The take-home message from Tandon supports my earlier argument that engaging in partnership entails much more than a mere re-labeling of current practice, without substantive changes in institutional contexts as well as cognitive and behavioral transformations within people negotiating such alliances. Furthermore, Tandon cautions that partnership in development is not a spontaneous event that

would occur in an epistemological vacuum. Partnership should be interpreted within the context of the meaning given to a specific development activity under which it is proposed. In the case of agricultural development, this would require actors making explicit the philosophical framework underpinning related activities such as agricultural research and extension. Otherwise, there is the risk of a misapplication of a sound idea, leading to its dishonor and discard even before the ingredients needed to nurture and sustain the concept in practice are fully understood.

5.3 Partnership: Why It Matters

5.3.1 Revisiting the Focus Question

Every journey has a purpose, whether implicitly or explicitly defined. More important and however framed, that purpose suggests an underlying need to learn something new—about the traveler or about the place and its inhabitants. The purpose of my action research journey was to learn about human relationships, specifically about how to improve the interaction among people engaged within the innovation system of urban agriculture in The Gambia. Obviously, the objective of seeking improvement would suggest a deficiency, an uncontested fact the reader, having read thus far, would agree with. Befitting the language of an academic dissertation, I rephrased the purpose into a more elegant research question: How do we create and sustain democratic and reciprocal partnerships among urban agriculture stakeholders that are mutually powering? A qualification was made, asking specifically how partnership could be created such that farmers have an audible, not muted, voice in decision-making processes for agricultural development; Farmer Jobe’s guiding script offered sufficient justification of this particular criterion.

Incidentally, I had earlier encountered a question similar to the one posed by the study. It was during a graduate course; the professor gave the class an assignment to write a reflective essay on the question “how do we advance democratic practice in

community education and development?” The class then understood “we” to mean students and scholars based in the university. Juxtaposed, the question for the academic assignment and the one posed two years later in my dissertation fieldwork have many parallels. Indeed, I’d argue they are one and the same; both aspire to a professional practice based on mutuality and democratic relationships among actors.

The significance of placing the two questions side by side is to show that concern with democratic practice has become of widespread interest for program implementation within higher education, community development, and in agricultural development. These are three intricately linked domains of learning of professional relevance within the discipline of Extension Education which, as stated in Chapter Two, represents my scholarly field. Agricultural development entails the variety of interventions aimed at improving the art and science of animal and crop production and associated activities in order to yield some useful outcome. As both the formative or shaping ground of future field practitioners and the place of continuing study for scholars, higher education is integral to agricultural development. Moreover, the boundary between community development and agricultural development is arbitrary, almost seamless, to the degree that community refers to real people, and if presumed that some people depend on agriculture, partially or fully, for their development. This interrelationship makes the question of democratic practice even more compelling, especially as it impacts farmers.

5.3.2 Who are the “We” Asking the Question?

In the first draft of the dissertation submitted for my defense, the plural “we” was used a lot, without much clarification. Not surprisingly, one of the first questions asked by a committee member was who “we” meant. As explained in the first chapter, I used the pronoun to deal with the paradox of writing up a study conducted with people, alone; in other words, to compensate for not being able to identify my research

partners by name because of confidentiality considerations. But the “we” also refers to a much broader constituency, as will be dissected in this section.

From the way in which I have interwoven the literature and the voices of the partners in the inquiry, it is obvious the “we” would fall into two categories. One camp would comprise the diverse community I’d label as field practitioners. This would include farmers, agricultural researchers or scientists, extension agents, government policymakers, and officials of donor agencies and NGOs. The community of inquirers I engaged with in my dissertation fieldwork comprised representatives from each one of the above practitioner groups. The other group posing the question, in a more or less academic manner, might be labeled as scholars affiliated in some manner with universities or other institutions of higher learning. Suffice it to say that scholars and practitioners both are asking and seeking answers to the question regarding democratic practice in their respective domains for reasons discussed later. But while I have made what seems to be a scholar-practitioner distinction, this is not to imply that they are not interconnected. Indeed, as will become clear, strong linkages exist between them.

Having read about my multiple roles in the study as described in Chapter Two, the reader might be wondering in which camp I belong. It is a question I, too, struggled with as I wrote this report. In response, I would consider myself as straddling the scholar-practitioner continuum; at least for now, during the dissertation journey. Being a hybrid scholar-practitioner could be a tricky position to find oneself in, as I’m sure the reader would concur. On the other hand, it offers me a clear vantage point from which to reflect on the two relational practices of concern to both scholars and field practitioners in Extension Education and thus enables me to make relevant recommendations from the action research.

5.3.3 The Deficit Practice

The question about changes in the nature of stakeholder relationships would presume a deficiency in a current practice. From the way the questions have been framed, with the notion of democracy so prominently embedded, the key deficiency appears to be a lack of voice for a group (or groups) that ought to have that voice. One could term such a group as the “de-voiced.” An exploration of the deficient practice within the practitioner and scholar communities, respectively, will reveal a major similarity in the “de-voiced” group.

With reference to the practitioner community relevant to this dissertation, the deficient practice could best be described as the inclination toward centralized planning and decision making for agricultural development. The first chapter dissected this problem in great detail, linking the explanation to the philosophical framework of transfer of technology that reinforces such a process. Under centralized planning processes, the de-voiced group is generally sidelined, absent at the planning table where the agenda is set for agricultural development. I can, however, imagine the reader, no doubt based on the stories heard in prior chapters of the dissertation, wondering whether there is only one planning table. As a matter of fact, there are multiple planning tables, vertically stacked one on top of the other, within the complex arena of agricultural development with its diversity of stakeholders.

One of the higher planning tables might consist of governmental policymakers deciding national agricultural priorities. In the case of The Gambia, the absence of the devoiced at this level was illustrated by Farmer Jobe’s reprimand of the government “sitting in Banjul” planning alone, prompting his advice for them to come down and discuss with farmers. A critical appendage of the policy planning table is the one where policies are translated into practice, that is, the instrumental table. I am here referring especially to research and extension officers, whom Farmer Jobe referred to

as “one agriculture” in Chapter Three. At this table also, the de-voiced are often absent in determining the ways and means by which policies are transformed into actions. All of the conversations in the previous two chapters provide evidence that it is usually upon completion of the planning and decision-making process that the de-voiced are invited into the implementation process. It is thus no coincidence that one of my farmer research partners stated that they were treated as “slaves” by those at the planning tables from which they are often excluded.

During my defense, a committee member asked me why I had omitted donors from the discussion of planning tables. The omission was noted. I agree that one cannot discuss relationships among agricultural development stakeholders, whatever the guiding framework—transfer of technology or partnership—and ignore the donor dimension, conceivably the most exclusive planning table. Donor organizations represent a critical constituency because they provide financing for agricultural development projects, and as such belong to the practitioner category. Ironically, at this exclusive and generally invisible table, the de-voiced group is in fact more diverse. Whereas I’d accept the argument that governmental policymakers must surely be represented at this planning table, it is conceivably after a prior planning table from which they were absent. Along this line of argument, the statement from one of my research partners about beggars having no choice could refer to most groups within the practitioner community—so that, effectively, the state of being de-voiced or voicelessness among agricultural development stakeholders would seem to take the shape of a funnel, with farmers located at the bottom having the least voice. Farmer Jobe claimed as much. What is apparent from the foregoing discussion is that farmers are the common denominator in all three practitioner planning tables in terms of being the de-voiced. Some reasons for what is undoubtedly an unfortunate situation were advanced in Chapter One.

The scholar camp is similarly interested in changing an exclusionary practice but of another form. Particularly in universities, the practice has traditionally set them off from the “outside community” beyond the walls of academia. The scholar community is concerned with democratic practice in response to a challenge to engage with and utilize their knowledge, expertise, and financial and physical resources to address real-life social and economic problems that exist in the outside community (Peters, 2004). Notably, community-university partnerships respond to the allegation that universities have abdicated their social and political responsibilities, and are instead operating under a default program of instrumental individualism, which emphasizes research and the dissemination of knowledge and skills as tools for economic development (Sullivan, 2000). The call to universities is for them reach out especially to the poor and marginalized within the communities where they are located, because they have an obligation to use their resources and expertise to do so.

Knowledge and the instruments for its construction are among the key resources universities are privileged with. Their usage has, however, attracted some of the harshest criticisms leveled against scholars, prompting the interest in the democratic practice question (Peters, 2004; Wilson & Cervero, 1997). The demand for civic engagement is intended to change the prevalent inclination to treat the outside community as objects from and on which to construct knowledge that may or may not have practical relevance to the studied objects (Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000; Kellogg, 1999). Moreover, during the research process, scholars’ knowledge is privileged over the local knowledge of the outside community, and the results are generally more geared to the scholar’s usage, for example, for personal professional development or advancement in academia. The prevalent deficient practice contrasts with scholars receiving the “de-voiced” community as subjects with whom to generate knowledge responsive and practical to mutual interests. No doubt relationships under

the deficient practice would differ from the democratic practice being strongly advocated as an alternative. Certainly, the alternative practice would suggest a different set of instruments for knowledge construction.

What the foregoing analysis reveals are obvious commonalities between the deficient practice in the practitioner and scholar camp. Of most relevance to the discussion is the knowledge factor. The argument was made in Chapter One that in the agricultural development arena, the struggle has been over whose and what kind of knowledge counts. The tension between the value given different kinds of knowledge is also experienced in the scholarly community. Within both scholar and practitioner communities, theoretical and practical knowledge are not equally valued. The impact of this shortsightedness compelled the interest in relationships that would enable synergizing expert professional knowledge gained through methodical scientific inquiry with the local experiential knowledge gained through daily confrontation with realities. Farmer Jobe's opening proverb as well as his entire narrative made such a demand. Incidentally, Farmer Jobe would constitute a representative of the outside community of the scholar.

The fact that Farmer Jobe could represent the de-voiced within both the scholar and the practitioner domain shows an important connection between the two. Again, during my defense, I was asked a question about the professional peers and reference groups of agricultural researchers and extensionists. My response was that practitioner agricultural researchers considered other scientists in similar research institutions and university-based scientists as peers—not extension agents, and certainly not farmers in the field. Likewise, extensionists looked to other extensionists, sometimes to agricultural researchers, as peers, and not to farmers. Here again, the common denominator is that farmers are not considered professional peers of either researchers or extensionists. The foregoing analysis establishes a clear linkage between scholar

and practitioner, on which basis they both fit into the category of trainers, as defined by Farmer Jobe in the introductory chapter. This was, after all, the reason for qualifying the overarching research question to focus on giving farmers audible, not muted, voice.

5.3.4 The Desired Alternative and Why We Have to Ask How To

Proponents of partnership argue it has plenty to offer in agricultural development; ergo the aspiration to institutionalize its practice. Contrary to the deficient practice described above, partnership is grounded in a moral philosophy which recognizes that people directly affected by a problem should not be excluded from the processes of thinking about it and acting on it for resolution. The basis of such reasoning is that people live their problems so it must be assumed they would know something about them that others might not. Some of the underlying contexts might not be so visible to the outside observer; Farmer Jobe conveyed this possibility in the Wollof proverb that opened his narrative. This essentially leads to the sensible claim that stakeholders experiencing a problem ought to engage together as equals to define the constituents of the problem, think through alternative options to choose the optimal solution, take the necessary actions, and evaluate the outcomes of the actions. Through such an interactive and democratic process, engaged partners generate understandings that would lead to more and better action in the future, either to avert similar problems or to deal with other components of the problem as priorities change.

This philosophical grounding is the essence of democratic practice, and the foundation on which the various definitions of partnership earlier reported are based. Under democratic practice, people are treated as strategic agents or subjects using their innate capacities, or agency, to act on challenges with which they are confronted (Freire, 1990; Sen, 2000). The immediate differences between the rationality of partnership practice and the technical rationality of the deficient practice which tends

to treat people more as instrumental objects rather than agents of personal change are immediately obvious.

Scholar and practitioner advocates of partnership seem to be consistent in their faith in its promise to improve overall programming in agricultural development and in community development (Biggs & Smith, 1998; Byerlee, 1998; Castillo, 1997; Crawford, 2003; Krishna, 2003; Uphoff, 2000; Tandon, 1990). Better outcomes are anticipated from the interactive engagement processes enabled by democratic practice. This expectation is derived from the recognition that since each relevant stakeholder potentially holds a piece of the problematic puzzle, democratic practice would more likely enable stakeholder to more effectively mobilize, capitalize, and take comparative advantage of their diverse resources and strengths. Such a process would be contained within a structure ruled by interaction, appreciation of interdependency, open communication, respect, and appreciation of the value of what each of the engaged partners could contribute. The expected result is greater commitment that would ensure the intervention's success. One could surmise that the system of problems in the Gambian urban agriculture system, as described in Chapter Two, would profit from an interactive approach to finding solutions.

So, if democratic practice makes sense, couldn't it simply be practiced? Why couldn't we easily change from the deficient to the desired alternative? Why do we have to pose the question of, and seek answers to, how to advance democratic partnership for agricultural development, community development, and education? One answer might be provided by the characteristics of the actors that make up the "we" categories delineated above. It is to be expected that operationalizing democratic practice within the specific confines of scholars and practitioners, taking into consideration inevitable differences in their organizations, resource capacities, but most of all in their disparate motives and agendas, while desirable, might not be so

easy. Consequently, not only does the question of “how to” have to be rhetorically posed, but practical answers need to be sought in reality.

5.4 Lessons Learned and Implications

My dissertation research was essentially a mission to learn about change, that is, the moving from a less desirable state to one more so. The journey turned out to be a lesson not only about the process of change itself, or the situation or system for the intended change but, perhaps more important, my place in the whole scheme of change. The inquiry yielded many lessons about the process of change. Foremost among them was that, perhaps as with any other endeavor, there were forces for and against change, such favorable or constraining factors contingent upon individual motivations. The conversations in Chapter Three, from agricultural researchers and extensionists, provide relevant insights on how self-interest could influence change, in this case from dysfunctional hierarchical relationships to more horizontal partnerships. Individual motivations determine whether people want to change and their commitment to make that change happen.

That said, however, it would appear that most of the time people who need to change might not even be aware something was amiss with the status quo to warrant changing it. Such unconsciousness may account for why we simply accept the problematic situation for what it is, and get on with our lives as best as we can. As the study showed, though, if people are challenged or steered by a stimulus, they could at least begin to think about making desirable changes. Yet, the active changes as may be needed do not happen overnight; more likely, they are continuously approached. Wisely enough, I never harbored any illusions that in merely eleven months of fieldwork I was going to immediately change the perceptions farmers, researchers, and extension agents have of one another and which defined their relationships. My interventions were mere beginnings.

Another important lesson learned was that change is multidirectional—not a linear transmission process. By this I mean that effecting change might entail some amount of negotiation and agreement by the involved parties. For example, with respect to the research context, supposing the government declares its intent to change from a dictating to a partnership approach, as reported in Chapter Three, effective change might occur only if and when the people it has been dictating to prepared for the change. The difficulties that could result in the absence of a dialogue were illustrated by the struggles between research and extension regarding who should work directly with farmers. So, yes, change does require some shared sense of the need for it.

Additionally, I learned about change at another level. Both my research partners and I realized that interacting with one another in a partnership relationship demanded changes first from within. By this I mean internal transformations would have to occur within our respective institutional structures, as well as cognitively and behaviorally inside the people who create and act within those structures. In the third chapter, my research and extension colleagues mentioned the creation of an entity and the setting of policies that would force them toward working more collaboratively. However, if policies are in place, and even when they are enforced, but people are not committed to the change, what then is to be done? Surely, change might be more successful when people transform their own perspectives about a situation. Change comes at a cost, to our status, our identities, and to our roles, so that without critical reflection on the assumptions, beliefs, and values that underlie our views of the world, change proposed by external stimuli might be met with stiff resistance. Critical reflection at the individual level results in the transformational learning (Mezirow, 1990) so essential for effecting change in structures at the societal level.

The organizing project so exhaustively analyzed in Chapter Four represents an example of effecting change at both the structural and personal levels. The research partners engaged in that activity sought to create a framework that would allow the actors, especially farmers, to make the necessary internal changes that then would enable them to change the rules of engagement with others. These examples of change at the research-extension-farmer levels are intended to show that change is a gradual, continuous learning process of reflection and action; it does not happen overnight. For the partners engaged in the action research, changes would come through a gradual structural and cultural renewal process, as one participant stated: “I don’t know if the structure can change but the culture, meaning the rules and norms of expected behavior, those can change. The question is where the pressure for change would come from.”

While learning about change in the outside environment, there were lessons at a personal level, about myself as a scholar-practitioner engaged in promoting change. As earlier mentioned, I wore two hats in the action research: I was simultaneously a university-affiliated action researcher—the scholar hat—and a practitioner action researcher, one vested in the urban agriculture setting of the study. It was interesting to note that while my research partners recognized the importance of my dissertation, their primary concern was in what I, as a practitioner, could contribute to resolving the problems explored in the study. A major lesson, thus, was learning to balance the two positionalities, not to privilege one over the other.

While engaged in doing action research, I learned about the excitement, the angst, and the pitfalls of democratic research with a community experiencing a problematic situation. Prior to embarking on the study, and even during the research journey, I had read plenty of action research handbooks and other relevant literature. My field experiences confirmed some of what I had read; I also encountered situations

textbooks couldn't teach you. For instance, try to convene a meeting with people supposedly experiencing the same problem but who have different priorities, yet all of whom want to have the common problem solved, without the convener having a healthy dose of patience, tact, and humor. Not to mention humility and the knack for negotiating and exploiting the differences to find solutions to the problem. I learned to play the "idealistic diplomat," as one of my partners described himself. Furthermore, I learned about the endless deliberations and power sharing necessary to decide on what to do and how to do it. Above all else, I discovered that if you have no belief in yourself or in the people you are working with, and if they have none in you, the amount of learning that will occur for both parties would not justify the effort. People share their inner thoughts and feelings only when there is mutual trust between them. Belief and trust are two concepts I reflect on more deeply in the concluding chapter.

Last, and even more significant, I gained new knowledge about what drives me personally as an Extension Education professional who is both a scholar and a practitioner. The experience I gained from learning to be a scholar-practitioner action researcher convinced me of the usefulness of research, its process, and its outcomes to contribute to social change. The use of participatory action research enabled the learning process that my research partners and I experienced to achieve the modest beginnings that we did. Participatory action research allowed for broad-based engagement, interactive collaboration, collective reflection, and respect for what each had to offer. The tangible and intangible outcomes from the study might not have been easily achieved without the emotional and intellectual energy that the flexible, yet structured, process of action research enabled. On a personal note, the reason I chose to conduct my dissertation research within an action research framework was simply that since I was bothered by the lack of voice it was only ethical that I model the desired behavior in a research process intended to bring about a change.

5.4.1 Implications for Urban Agriculture Practice in The Gambia

As my research partners and I engaged together in the action research through various interactive group processes, we learned there was a prelude to partnership. While working in partnership may be desirable and sensible, its practice requires the capacity to engage in such a presumed egalitarian relationship where mutuality would be the standard credo. The capacities in question range from financial, managerial, technical, and organizational, to also include the more affective capacities of caring and having respect for other people's abilities. These capacities exist in differential amounts among the various stakeholder categories and their institutions within which partnership relationship is sought. The narratives shared in this dissertation confirm that the prelude toward relationships that would qualify as democratic partnerships entails building the requisite capacities and strengthening organizational integrity within respective stakeholder groups.

Changes in the research and extension systems that would accommodate partnership relationships would have to be gradual. The challenges that surfaced throughout the conversations in the third chapter would take time to address and resolve. I harbored no pretensions that my study would lead to immediate changes; but I hope the dialogue it opened up will continue. I agree with my research and extension colleagues that we might begin with modifying the culture within the two organizations to make it more favorable for collaborative engagement. The recommendations from my colleagues were stated in Chapter Three. There seemed to be a consensus around the need for a liaison officer, a sort of a partnership office that would facilitate interaction between the organizations. However, a bridge connecting the two institutions is unlikely to stay upright if the foundations of the houses supporting it at either end are crumbling. So, while I concur that a parallel structure, policies, and incentives are all important parts of the change process, eventual success

will depend on the transformations that need to happen in the heads, hearts, and minds of the actors that ultimately perform the functions.

In my original proposal I had planned a search conference with officers of both agencies, but it could not materialize. Instead, we were brought together at the forum for urban agriculture. I would recommend a series of multi-stakeholder search conferences across the various levels of the system, where people can deliberate candidly and honestly in order to face the facts about their existence, the challenges and the opportunities, and to commit to taking the necessary steps. A search is more conducive to addressing the problem of tenuous actor relationships because it is a way of organizing people, compared with the more commonly used focus group, which is more a way of organizing a problem. The officers I engaged with were ready and willing to accept self-criticism, and a search would provide the safety to accept criticism of self and other. It would be a start in what my research and extension colleagues identified as a need to overhaul the system.

Urban agriculture producers recognized the need and took action to create an identifiable organizational framework among that constituency. Without an institutional support system, the chances of entering into genuine partnership or democratic relationships with other stakeholders with influential interests in the system would be mere palliative, just another name given to a skewed relationship. Stressing the importance of an institutional identity for the horticulture sector, the SIMI consultant, a veteran economist, offered this truism: “You don’t get what you deserve, but what you negotiate.” A collective structure might allow for more favorable negotiation, especially because the other influential stakeholders often do not deal with individual actors, as explained earlier. Our actions through the research were intermediate but indispensable steps in the long road to change.

The most disturbing finding from this action research may yet turn out to be a good opportunity for extension practice in The Gambia. The controversy over whether or not the extension service should continue to exist as presently constituted and mandated is not a trivial matter in a technology development system where researchers are supposed to work with or through extension to disseminate results of their research to farmers. Chapter Three revealed an increasing preference to dismantle the vertical system and to pave the way for research to work directly with farmers in the technology development process. The trend to sideline extension is not unique to The Gambia, as evident in the literature promoting partnerships between research and farmer organization (Biggs & Smith, 1998; Castillo, 1999; Hall & Nahdy, 1999). The dispute becomes more complex considering that public extension systems, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have been criticized for being inefficient, over-staffed, and under-trained (Anderson & van Crowder, 2000). Under what are clearly trying times the onus falls on extension to carve out a niche for itself; otherwise, it might end up dying the natural death predicted by some of the participants heard earlier.

One opportunity may be offered by the avid interest shown in farmers' organizations: "Farmers are not organized"; "Extension had no interest in creating strong farmer organizations because if they did they'll go out of job"; "Extension had a longer history working closely with farmers and they wanted to retain that link." That history, I believe, provides a unique chance for extension to broaden its role and position itself at the forefront of the movement to support farmers in organizing strong and "powered" (Chambers, 2003) organizations. This will require a major reorientation in the training extension agents receive. Rather than privileging technical, agronomic subjects, their education should equally emphasize communication techniques, providing extension agents with the soft skills essential for recognizing and drawing forth the inherent capabilities of farmers. Such training

would prepare extension agents not to build their self-image on their power over farmers, because that is not constructive. This is what Farmer Jobe meant when he said trainers should reduce their pride and desires, and work with the people.

It should be noted, however, that organizing work contrasts with the technical programming work extension is accustomed to. Moreover “organized farmers” mean more than the mere registration of farmers’ associations as legal entities. Our organizing project demonstrated the importance of allowing leadership to reveal itself; it also proved extension agents were capable of enabling that leadership to flourish. However, for extension agents to take on the role of organizers the major challenge would present in answering a key question: Who does extension work for? Organizing work is premised on a belief that people should have a voice in deciding how a particular program is planned and implemented. Would extension agents employed by the public sector or by NGOs confront their employers when interventions are inadequate to address the root cause of problems farmers are faced with? These are topics for further study.

Such a role, clearly, posits extension agents as negotiators, a far cry from their traditional functions of technology disseminators and instruments for imposing government’s agenda on farmers. It is a role extension could play in reality. But only with the support of farmers, who also must recognize the political nature of agricultural development and understand that they and their organizations are political entities that should have a voice in how the politics of agricultural development is played. But then again, for farmers to [re] take this stance, to play a *proactive role* in agricultural development, they must build *organizations* of power—with *organized* leadership, conscious membership, and solid finances—with the political and economic clout to engage in strategic partnerships with and hold accountable other agricultural development stakeholders. What is clear is that extension agents and

farmers should renew the vows that have bound them together for a long time, in so doing strengthening their symbiotic relationship.

5.4.2 Implications for Extension Education

It may be hackneyed, but the phrase “we teach as we were taught” holds some truth. The way we interact with others, especially in the educating process, tends to be a reconstruction of our previous educational experiences. The preparatory grounds for agricultural professionals are universities and other institutions of higher education. Consider the dominant tools most in use during this formative period. We teach within a relationship of superior and subordinate; the teacher has knowledge that the teacher transfers to the student; the teacher knows, the taught knows not, or his or her knowledge has to be bracketed out while the teacher is teaching. This transfer-dominated process of educating is what we usually take into the field. We are conditioned to believe that what we know is superior to that of the person who has not been through our educational experience. If we are used to a top-down, teacher-centered style of education it will be difficult not only for the “formed” teacher to adopt a different style, but even the taught will be uncomfortable with a more engaging and interactive mode of learning. It does sound, doesn’t it, like we are trapped in a seemingly self-perpetuating system.

Therefore, the question becomes, how do we create a relationship during the preparatory, educational stage that reverses the dominant model? The root of the word education is “educere,” which means “to elicit.” So, how do we educate, and keep educating, the knowledge of both teacher and taught so that we have a continuous and reciprocal learning process? How do we overcome feeling threatened in our positions of authority and our so-called expert knowledge? How can we improve the environment within the classroom to create a space for educating and learning that does not place the student in a deficit position? Finally, how do we as Extension educators

emancipate ourselves from the mental bondage that makes us feel threatened when we come into contact with other forms of knowledge, within and outside the academy? I do not pretend to have answers from doing only this piece of research. These are areas for further inquiry. However, the two approaches that guided my research, action research and educational organizing, would seem to offer some potential for Extension Education to regain its organizing roots, starting with offering more courses on these subjects, and also practicing them in the field.

6. CONCLUSION

At the end of my dissertation defense, the inevitable question came up: So what does your research tell us about how to do development? The committee member asked, Given the element of skepticism about participatory practice in development, what were the lessons learned that would inform us to do things better in the future? The whole dissertation communicates a different way of thinking and working that should begin with an internal transformation. It is about an attitude to development that comes from the heart. The question about how to create partnership, understood as a democratic practice, in agricultural development, in community development, and in education should be approached from a standpoint of hard heads, soft hearts. To move the ideals of democratic practice—engagement, deliberation, and open dialogue—from rhetoric to reality requires the head and heart working in tandem, as a partnership. This would be my oversimplified answer.

For close to two decades, I have pondered questions around advancing democratic practice in agricultural development, a condition I believe begins with democratic relationships among farmers, policymakers, researchers, extensionists, and international donor agencies. The source for such a change has been particularly puzzling: Could we expect the necessary transformations to come from the top, or would they have to be spearheaded from the bottom up? Real change may require mutual agreement, a concerted action by all concerned to demand and give voice in how things ought to be.

While this dissertation focused on the specific domain of agricultural development, the question about democratic practice is universally applicable. Its universality means that as within this narrow domain, a microcosm of the broader society, democratic practice needs to be redefined and re-introduced into the entire

economic, political, and socioeconomic fabric of society. Paulo Freire, whose scholarship on democratic education contributed to the conceptual framework of my dissertation, wrote about democracy in these terms:

Before it becomes a political form, democracy is a form of life characterized above all by a strong component of transitive consciousness. Such transitivity can neither appear nor develop except as men are launched into debate, participating in the examination of common problems.

I am strongly convinced that for true democracy to take hold, people must believe in themselves and in others. People must have confidence in their capacity to determine their lives. They cannot afford to be passive onlookers, expecting democracy to be handed down on the proverbial platter. Democracy is not a thing to be packaged and delivered; it is an attitude first, then manifested in the structures that enforce it. True democracy calls for a faith in people, for a belief that each has knowledge, skills, and other capacities that count. People construct the life-world as they would like it, establishing its cultural, economic, political, and social dimensions. We configure the world, our individual world, as a collective world. To make the worlds, we must learn to anticipate and to have expectations, of our individual selves, of public officials, and the society at large with which we interact. We must be critical, meaning we should simultaneously feel entitled, have expectations, yet be discerning in our interactions. This is the critical consciousness Freire advocates, without which we cannot project our inner selves onto the outer world as we should.

To the extent that we have such critical consciousness we must live life with a certain amount of resistance, resistance that is not necessarily violence or open indignation. Resistance is both a state of mind and a process in which we make the highest demands of our individual and collective worlds through constant anticipation and evaluation of consequences before we acquiesce to anything. We must strive for the freedom to or power to as opposed to surrendering to freedom over or power over.

Democratic practice in agricultural development, community development, and education requires people to envision themselves as having a voice that should demand, and that deserves, to be heard in all arenas of life, the private and the public, two spheres that are intricately intertwined. The practice we aspire to does not happen in a vacuum; it is situated in and influenced by the complex structures of society. Our sense of who we are is fundamental to how we act out or act on the practice. So that if we do not know who we are, if we do not believe in ourselves, then we will always be short-changed, denied the full measure of what we deserve. As long as we present ourselves as passive, uncritical recipients of all and anything that we are given, then others will continue to make decisions for us.

If one central concept anchored the manner in which my dissertation research was conducted, it is the idea of belief in oneself and in others. I have a deep faith in people, that regardless of who and what you are there is something you know that others do not and therefore you have something worthwhile to contribute to the dialogue. Each and every one of us holds a piece of the puzzle of life. It is important to recognize this in ourselves and in others and to refuse to be reduced by labels placed on us by others. From my perspective, a belief in self and the capacity of the self to act is foundational in our engagement, exchange, and interaction with others. With belief we shed the tainted cloaks of “expert-ism” and ignorance that we use as armors to shield us from ourselves and from others. It is as Paulo Freire argues: “there is no such thing as absolute ignorance or absolute wisdom” (Freire, 1990, p. 43). With belief, we can have expectations and make demands, we can engage with others in democratic, peer relationships to seek mutual goals, recognizing one another’s worth and the value each one brings into the interaction. The point I’m making is that democratic practice within the three domains of learning specified in this dissertation, agricultural

development, community development, and education, will remain an illusion unless people engaged in the process regain true belief in themselves and in each other.

But how do we regain belief when for so long most of us have been conditioned and so inclined to disbelieve? To reiterate, overcoming the natural fear of changing status, vis-à-vis that of others, requires some working through, happens in gradual steps. Relative to the problem posed by the action research, the “dictator” and the “dictated to” should work on changing gears to the partnership mode both aspire to, starting at the individual level. We must believe that one person can make a difference. The responsibility to change rests on me as an individual.

Back in Chapter Two, I recounted one formative experience from my agricultural development career, the story about the rural home gardening project supported by an NGO, as a preamble to a discussion of the values and beliefs that informed my roles and practice in the action research. That experience more than 15 years ago strengthened my resolve that the thrust of my agricultural development career should be to help, to enable people re-believe in their inherent capacities. The part of the story I told exposed the inclination toward unilateral decision making, often concentrated at the upper echelons, so pervasive within the development field. Later narratives from my research partners as well as the scholarly literature substantiated my claim. And while I placed the blame then on the NGO, it has to be argued that the communities, too, were guilty of a failure to expect and demand to be included in the decision-making process to reflect their expressed needs. (Although they got it anyway, albeit circuitously! Quiet resistance at work.) But there is another side of that story which is pertinent to the present discussion about believing in oneself and in others. It is a narrative that epitomizes popular development practice in a global sense. It also responds to an observation made by a committee member during my defense

that whereas the issue I was dealing with was global, I had cut that aspect out, and needed to bring it back in.

My counterpart in the rural gardening project was a Scottish volunteer. Whenever we would visit the project sites, I noticed what I could only describe as a deferential, even submissive, manner in which villagers acted toward this individual. This may sound harsh, but it was as if when this person and I were around, their (the villagers) brains took a leave of absence, rendering them incapable of forming an opinion on even the most elementary things or making the simplest decisions about the project activities they were implementing. But hopefully that was just a survival strategy? manipulation? I don't know. Strange, but most of the time, I was not acknowledged; I guess I was just one of them; the knowledge of the Scottish volunteer was more valued. Or was it something else? Surprisingly, I don't remember feeling any anger at being marginalized. Instead I felt sorry for the communities, for the Scottish volunteer and for myself—especially for the volunteer, because by accepting the deference showed, she deprived herself of a unique opportunity to learn from the communities she was working with. In later years, I would recognize the technical rationality of her approach: she was out to get a job done according to a predetermined plan. Drawing forth the knowledge of the farmers she was working with and learning from them was not her mission. I thought then, as now, what a great loss that was.

I used this story as an illustration of the conditioning to disbelieve in ourselves. In the case of the rural communities, such conditioning had led to a mental disfranchisement to such a degree they no longer recognized their worth. For here was a situation where farmers who had been farming all their lives failed to acknowledge the value of their knowledge in the presence of outsiders with less knowledge about their contexts and experiences. Should we then blame formally educated agricultural research scientists and extension agents for their poor attitudes toward the knowledge

of farmers when the latter lack belief in the value of their own knowledge? Why do farmers fail to assert their *Métis*, the term James C. Scott (1998) applies to the wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence used in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment? Why do they suppress *Métis* in the face of the privileged scientific knowledge? It is indeed a loss that scientific knowledge also fails to recognize the value of *Métis* enough to incorporate it into its own.

Throughout my practice as an agricultural development professional, I have often strived to avoid such loss by humbling myself, listening and learning from others to enrich my own learning. I have a learning style that prefers to build relationships in which each side calls forth and reinforces the best in the other. Whenever I have encountered a situation where I was perceived as the “expert” the onus has been on me to rouse the public I engaged with out of the stupor of false ignorance they had conditioned themselves to believe. Acknowledging that we can learn from one another, I have been fortunate to be emancipated from the mental bondage that would make me feel threatened in the presence of other forms of knowledge. The reader should concur that my entire dissertation research was conducted on this premise. This freedom, moreover, accounted for the reason I used action research and organizing to learn how to advance partnership among urban agriculture stakeholders in The Gambia.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that Extension Education should regain its organizing roots and that extension agents should take on the role of organizers. I’ll now reflect on the elements necessary to rework the role of extension. Organizing is more encompassing than the traditional focus on technical programming. It goes beyond resolving everyday technical problems to bringing people to understand the root causes and nature of a particular problem, empowering them to believe they can do something about the problem. To organize is to deal with issues at a deeper level.

Unlike programming, the effects of organizing need not be immediately obvious because the purpose of organizing is transformation of the consciousness; this is a gradual process. The results of organizing are long-lasting, taking on a life of their own and evolving to reflect changing circumstances. Extension as organizing would seek to leave a lasting legacy in the communities its agents work in: a legacy where people are in charge and able to continue to do for themselves. This is critical considering we don't remain in the communities forever. The iron rule of the organizing tradition is not to do for people what they can do for themselves (Chambers, 2003).

But to organize is to respect the people one is organizing, according to M.P. Payne (1995). The respect is manifested in enabling people to explore their own problems in order to determine solutions suited to their contexts. It is not about imposing ideas, but allowing them the freedom to think about and through their lived experiences to generate learnings. Organizing is about capitalizing on peoples' experiences to arrive at workable solutions. Organizing in agricultural extension requires more than what Robert Chambers (1997) called a new professionalism of handing over the stick instead of holding the stick, which is actually an either-or situation. Organizing in Extension Education is both; a sharing of the stick. An organizing role calls us to talk about techniques of planting crops, ways of marketing them: to build or boost psychological morale so people may rediscover and reconceptualize who they are. I personally believe that it requires having "faith that people who believe in themselves are capable of extraordinary acts, or better, of acts that seem extraordinary to us precisely because we have such an impoverished sense of the capabilities of ordinary people" (Payne, 1995). Organizing need not be overt; it can be subtle, values and issues infused into all of our actions, however minor, during

the course of extension work. Above all else, organizing is allowing the voices of farmers to be heard, making the invisible visible.

Perhaps the reader is eager to know whether, after having gone through the experience of the action research and organizing, I have a shopping list for how to create partnership or democratic practice for agricultural and community development and education? I can only reiterate the concepts that guided my dissertation research, in which I tried to model the very relationship I sought to promote. Engagement, participation, and respect for different kinds of knowledge were key guiding principles. Allow that you cannot do everything yourself. Allow the people to express themselves. Bring people together to talk, debate, dialogue, and deliberate to arrive at mutual outcomes. Make decisions with them, not for them. Farmers, other people too, are not averse to having outsiders work with them as long as the outsider shows them the respect humans deserve. Believe in yourself so that you can help others believe in themselves. Last, listen to people tell their stories, in song, word, or deeds. We all need to believe so that we can be mentally emancipated to make progress in our lives through democratic practice. These are the ideals I aimed for in my dissertation. In this endeavor I found usefulness in the instruments of action research and organizing.

I will end my dissertation with the following passage, which sums up my perspectives on democratic practice as envisaged in relationships based on partnership. It is taken from Michael P. Payne's book, *I Got The Light of Freedom*.

Over the long term, whether a community achieved this or that tactical objective was likely a matter less than whether the people in it came to see themselves as having the right and the capacity to have some say-so in their own lives. Getting people to feel that way requires participatory political and educational activities, in which the people themselves have a part in defining the problems—"Start where the people are"—and solving them. Not even organizations founded in the name of the poor can be relied upon. In the end the people have to learn to rely on themselves. (Payne, 1995, p. 68)

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