

THE GAMBIA AS A COLLABORATIVE COMMON

BY: ALAGIE JINKANG

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SUPERVISOR: *PROFESSOR UGO*

***MATTEI* (International University College of Turin, Italy, University of California, Hasting College of Law, US, University of Turin Italy) matteiu@uchastings.edu**

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ABSTRACT

I have asked myself why such a collaboration among Gambians in general and rural Gambians in particular. I had to find out whether or not was it intentional, culturally motivated or religiously. (Since is not unusual not to find references on The Gambia, my five year experience as a professional both as a teacher and as a journalist helped me to be almost the all-seer, all-narrator .) However, after adopting an action research, my questions were significantly directed to why such a response. I try to evaluate whether or not the indigenous Gambians are better off under such a collaborative system of local governance or otherwise should they follow the top-bottom approach of the modern governmental system. I checked if these people had obeyed the austerity measures offered many a times by outsiders, what would have been their faith by now. The collaborative commons land sharing structure under cultivation in The Gambia is a very interesting new economic paradigm. But this new economic culture was never dictated by any colonial or neo-colonial forces rather it is naturally the way of life of the people of The Gambia.

By adopting this action based research during my 5 years professional career both as a teacher and a journalist, I have toured every corner of the small country. While the illiterate majority knows a little good about austerity measures, this was enough for them to concentrate on local provisions to support their population. These communities organise and provide for each other through cooperation and solidarity thus the name “The Gambia as a collaborative common” was derived. I thought is the most suitable title for my thesis to summarise such a new economic culture under cultivation in a local community. My thesis will focus on one complex resources- the common land sharing¹. What is most uncommon of African countries is common of The Gambia². The indigenous population continue to

1 The very term “common property or resource” continue to be used either as a resource owned by the government or no one. Others used it to refer to a property owned by a community. However, since one needs to be clear enough to reach your theme(s) when talking about the commons, I basically give not definitive definition to what the “Commons” are, but rather prefer expressing and giving examples in the Gambian situation.

2 Many conflicts surviving in sub-Saharan Africa are over rights to land and other natural resources which is costly to the continent and seems to find no better and permanent solution. Many of these major conflicts have not only cause individual destructions, most importantly, it cut the fabric that hold different communities together. Millions are displaced in places like Somalia, Uganda, Nigeria, Niger, Guinea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan among many undermining development, devastating resources, misdirecting them and perpetuating tribulations for the locals. These conflicts are due to needs for farm land for growing crops and rearing of animals and lack of cooperation between the common users- the farmer and the herdsman-fuels a lot of social conflicts. Conflicts can also arise between displaced people and the new occupants over their homelands. In efforts to solve such problems, the

organise themselves into political and economic movements to challenge the status quo-centralised political and economic institutions or what Ugo Mattei will call counter hegemony. After much collaboration and support from each other, the locals begin to achieve more relief and success dropping out of the centralized or formal government economy and politics. This as a result gave a sense of belonging to them and thus boom their local economics and politics and serves as an alternative to capitalism³.

government do serve but naturally cause more problems than finding solution in terms of compensations or better negotiations according to <http://www.focusonland.com/land-pressures-driving-farmerherder-conflicts-in-mali/> February 2011.

³ Edella Schlager and Elinor Ostrom 1992, see the term common-property resource as glaring example of a term that is repeatedly used by political economists to refer to varying empirical situations including: (1) property owned by a government (2) property owned by no one (3) property owned and defended by a community of resource users. My thesis here is referring to the third system of ownership. In as much as I devote time not to miss my targeted meaning of the commons, I will interchangeably use it with “open access” as prominent authors like Johnson and Libecap 1982, 1005, Angello and Donnelly 1975; Bell, 1955; Scott and Christy 1965; Smith, Weber, and Wiesmeth 1991; Sinn 1988).

1. INTRODUCTION

The Gambia is the smallest country in both population and size in Africa. It has however, a lot to be learnt from considering its local environmental management systems.⁴ The economic crises and other social vices dictates another pathway in this small country. The majority of the population are significantly poor living below 1.25 dollar a day and many confronted in health problems cannot seek for proper treatment making life more difficult for them⁵. Life expectancy is said to be low compared to her neighbouring country like Senegal⁶.

The 2008 economic crises had left many worried and confused, the bomb that was set by the US housing bubble affected seriously South Europe (Red Cross 2013) but I will add also The Gambia at least indirectly⁷. This capitalist crises speedup the rate of unemployment, the magnitude of rural-urban poverty, poor sanitary and primary healthcare services, homeless individuals and social conflicts from time to time (UNDP, AfDB, OECD)⁸. The same crises led to social exclusion and continuous migration internally and externally seeking for better life. Just as the 2008 crises led to homelessness and unemployment in Spain and Greece and other social instabilities (Eurostat, 2014, Stoukas & El Madany, 2013 and Red Cross 2013), also it has not left Africa's smallest country at ease.

My thesis will focus a part on the recent economic crises beginning from 2008 and thus follows all my arguments. I observed that "the commons" (land sharing in the centre of this argument) of The Gambia assume even more importance after this devastating human suffering scenario. While capitalism seem to be an ultimatum for many developed countries as well as developing ones, an underdeveloped country like The Gambia began to think otherwise against capitalism⁹. They sharpen their relationships and become more collaborative against the dictating capitalist rhythm. They work more and rest a little. They try to import less and cultivate more. Slogans like "eat what you grow and grow what you eat", "fish what you eat and eat what you eat" etcetera were embraced and chanted daily. Multinational companies were seen as evil and more space and encouragement were given to the locals. Local movements speedup against international movements for home growth and consumption. As Harvey, 2014 rightly put it; as much incorporation of human tragedy increases, crises of this nature are obvious in a capitalist system and also important for its metamorphosis. Although this is true of capitalism as a system but also it manifests that it is bad for the majority especially those in less privilege parts of the world like The Gambia .

4 <http://www.wtgonline.com/country/gm/gen.html>

5 UNICEF, 2013, World Bank, 2013.

6 Gamble, David P. The Gambia. Oxford: Clio Press, 1988. Sallah, Tijan M. Wolof. New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 1996, Zimmermann, Robert. The Gambia. Chicago: Children's Press, 1994.

Read more: <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Gambians.html#ixzz3nKThq7UP>

7 <http://www.africanet.com/africanet/country/gambia/>

8 <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/>

9 I personally believe that the traditional way of thinking about the land tenure system in The Gambia have help to promote sharing on common grounds. However, it is constantly under threats constrained by economic hardship and political atmospheres. The data shows that majority of the rural people are illiterate and 'ignorant' which to me continue to help them conserve their cultural land tenure systems without much difficulties.

Meanwhile the frustration and suffering it (capitalism) induces¹⁰, completely cultivates another mental understanding against itself at least for what I honestly observed in The Gambian situation. Capitalism against Capitalism, Michel Albert 1993. People are once again by experience made to embrace the old system of sharing land and bringing up basic necessities which promotes and strengthens the commons but this time in a more collaborative system. If Gambians were conscious of the importance of conserving their commons, the economic crises crafted by capitalism made them rather super conscious that their commons (particularly the land) must be conserved at all levels for the common and general good of all. Societies and communities have their local or primitive system of land ownership contrary to the formal written constitution.

The small nation that got its independence from Britain in 1965-02-18 has undergone a self-division into 7 regions. However, all these regions have their own ways and means of reserving their common resources primarily the land¹¹.

Professor Ali Mazrui in his 1979 Rieth Lectures, clearly put it that capitalism as a system is not that bad for Africa. I will like to add if capitalism as a system heeds to the common structure of the locals, then it is not bad at all but were it does not, it becomes completely bad especially for underdeveloped countries like The Gambia. Since capitalism is completely not an African thing according to Prof. Ali Mazrui, the locals continue to observe their culture of sharing their commons particularly water and land generating a new system of grass root sharing economy¹².

Huge inequalities in access to land breeds conflicts, political instability, social alienation and exclusion, and are a barrier to national economic development.¹³

2. THE COMMONS IN THE GAMBIA

For more than four decades, Africa's smallest country lives to serve and protect its 'commons'. Since time immemorial, The Gambia not yet born, was ever a common environment¹⁴. It lives

10 Benjamin Powell, *Making Poor Nations Rich*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2008, pp, 1-4.

11 <http://www.statoids.com/ugm.html>

12 Looking from the origin of many of these conflicts, population growth compared to limited land, increase in the value of land, bad and weak land tenure system and the growing availability of other natural resources imbedded in land make it very essential a discourse among locals. However, land is not scarce in The Gambia and much problems that surrounds it are strange to the locals.

13 Kathmandu Declaration, 23th April 2009, part of article 4. I vehemently believe, vices of such are uncommon in The Gambia most probably because of the good traditional common land ownership.

14 According to the Department of AAOA, *The Empires of Western Sudan: Mali Empire*, In Heilbrum Timeline of Art History; New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000_. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mali/hd_mali.htm (October 2000); The empires which The Gambia was part of, were very much culturally solidified and attached to each other. They share their lands and agriculture was the predominant living pillar.

it and protect it. After colonialism which plunder almost every area of her 'commons'¹⁵, the smallest African country still thinks and vehemently believes that there is no better future without 'the commons'. In this thesis, one major and fundamental common will be discussed which is the common land sharing system. There is no doubt that land is the commonest source of life to every people since people are not aquatic. The major economic source for the people of The Gambia is from their land through agriculture according to the Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS).

The Gambia might be small in terms of square kilometres but not when it comes to her diverse developing commons. The country that is in the interim of Sahelian area of sub Saharan West Africa, has a total area of 11,300 square Kilometres according to The Gambia Bureau of Statistics (from hereon GBoS). Of this, more than 19% is described as wetland. A river that crosses across the country serves as a source of life for plants, animals and people. Daily activities could be hardly run without this blessing- The River Gambia. It is probably one of the most prominent commons still in full existence at the mercy of her public.

The geography of the River Gambia makes it so particular for significant explorations. It is 25 to 50km wide and about 300 km long running from the east to the west further dividing the small country. The Gambia with 820 km of total boundary length with a coastline of 80 km has its major water source from "Futa Jallon" in Guinea and extends 1,600 km to the sea.

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Fertile land can be found throughout The Gambia making it easy for the majority of the poor. In just 4-30 metres below the ground level even the poor majority could cater water for themselves for either agriculture or direct consumption like in drinking, washing, etcetera. The depth of the water depends on the area and the distribution of rainfall, surface geology and land usage¹⁷. However, compared to most parts of Senegal, The Gambia is enjoying a natural privilege in both land and water. But what really make it persist is that its people share their land as commons and therefore provides an opportunity for every local either into agriculture or other related areas.

What is more interesting about The Gambia is that nearly every part is habitable and this is typically one major reason why many herdsmen migrate internally from one place to another as they like without any conflict. This is typical of some ethnic groups like the Fula, Wolof and Jola who migrate all year around. It is common to find small villages in every part of the country because people easily find habitable land everywhere without any form of bureaucracy. They could cultivate and harvest easily¹⁸.

15 Ugo Mattei and Laura Nader, *Plunder, When the Rule of Law is Illegal*, Blackwell Publishing, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA, 2008, pp 20-21.

16 <http://www.accessgambia.com/information/coastline.html>

17 Howard Humphreys and Sons, 1974; Chow, 1964), and Njie 2002.

18 Ethnic groups like the Fula, and the Wolof, migrate often to find a better place for cultivation and rearing of animals. They will move when the land goes unfertile due to many

The natural environment of this small country has majorly Guinea woodland savannah with mangroves(essential typical Gambian trees) and Sahelian scrub with mangroves concentrated near the estuary of The River Gambia and its banks and “bolongs”(small lakes or water channels connecting rivers or waters). The land ownership system until now is completely traditional and collective. People could collectively own lands, they could borrow lands and be given land by relatives and friends. The usage of these lands is local and perfectly based on negotiations without personal economic benefits of any sort.

The land that is arable all over makes farming possible for 75% of her population according to Access Gambia website. They could traditionally seek land from each other and graze where they wanted openly.

The Gambia has a lot of commons so much so that everything is nearly recognised as a common. A typical common saying: “The child belongs to the community and must be shown the right path.” This common ideology has almost every Gambian directed to a common goal- the good of the society¹⁹. Imagine a child born to a different party could be disciplined in the street by another unknown parent for the good of the child and that of the society as a whole. In most Gambian communities, the child is seen as a common and it’s everyone’s responsibility for his/her upbringing and like in many other things. This is how to demonstrate how deeply rooted is communing in The Gambia. As the ecologist 1993 rightly put it, “the creation of empires and states, business conglomerates and civic dictatorships- whether in pre-colonial times or in the modern era- has only been possible through dismantling the commons and harnessing the fragments, deprived of their old significance, to build up new economic and social patterns that are responsive to the interests of a dominant minority”²⁰. Sharing this idea of the development of enclosures, I believe in this way, the labour of the poor majority is under exploitation by big companies as sources of global economy. This capitalist system has replaced the traditional agricultural system for the modern and the local commons replaced by multinational industries which all increase the suffering of the poor and their dependence on capitalism as a dominant faith.

Basically, the common land sharing is the fundamental common in this thesis as every other living system in The Gambia moves around it.

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years of usage or because their former place is populated making it hard for rearing animals without much inconveniences. They settle wherever they think their objectives could be realised.

19 Proverbs are used to illustrate ideas, reinforce arguments and deliver messages of inspirations, consolation, celebration and advice in The Gambia as in many African societies. Chinua Achebe once wrote, in his record breaking book, *Things Fall Apart*; “proverbs are palm oil with which words are eaten”. The collaborative common system in The Gambia is largely successful also because of its proverbs which they conceive sacred.

Land ownership and regulations are stipulated in the constitution of The Gambia but the reality on the ground dictates completely a different thing²¹. Land ownership is culturally and traditionally rooted in such a way that constitutional governance play part only in severe land conflicts and often only in the densely populated urban settlements. Communal land tenure system is collective and solidarity based. It is not business oriented, however, urban centres have already begin commodifying their lands and thus breed social conflict among family members. There is nearly 0% business on land in rural Gambia since everyone strongly hold to land as a common and thus cannot be sold²². The fundamental Land Laws of The Gambia are as below;

1. THE STATE LANDS ACT – 1991
2. THE MORTGAGES ACT – 1992
3. THE GAMBIA TOURISM AUTHORITY ACT - 2001
4. LAND (REGISTRATION OF DEEDS) ACT

Majority of The Gambians live in rural areas and mostly illiterate and poor according to GBoS. They completely dependent on their commons-the land and the water(s). Their cultures are stronger than those in the urban areas. Their landownership is purely traditional and not financially motivated as oppose to the urban areas. They freely give lands for habitation, agriculture, and education. They believe in using land to fight poverty and reduce inequality thus accessibility is open. They know little about the constitution but do not follow it. They do not sell or rent land because they regard it uncultured and land is seen as a common. Even though every clan, household or family have a proportion of land, outsiders are easily accommodated and given land based on negotiations²³.

This typical open common land ownership based on solidarity, has made it easy for everyone to become a farmer. More importantly, the herdsmen could graze miles without problems and could settle easily where they wanted following droughts and other problems. Without this culture, herdsmen in some part of The Gambia will find it difficult to openly graze. As a compensation to the community, herdsmen usually give sacrificial animals when the need be. As part of their responsibility, they take good care of their grazing lands and community forests part of which they are both security men/women and leaders at the same time. They give information for the betterment of the lands such as when and where there is bushfire.

20 The ecologist(1993): Whose Common Future. Reclaiming the Commons. London: Earthscan Publications.

21 A Paper Delivered by Dr. Henry D.R. Carrol, the Solicitor General and Legal Secretary, at the Gambia Tourism Authority Workshop at the Senegambia Beach Hotel, on Thursday 7th June 2007.

22 International Workshop On: Women's Access, Control and Tenure of Land, Property and Settlement: Gavle, Sweden, 9-11 October 1995 <https://books.google.it/books?id=jb2Euwp7d9AC&pg=PA189&lpg=PA189&dq=land+in+the+gambian+constitution&source=bl&ots=p7->

[bi_J9nJ&sig=45X0KN7GlymilLhye8MKvEQix2k&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0CD4Q6AEwA2oVChMI68H4kd28yAIVhVwaCh103wVD#v=onepage&q=land%20in%20the%20gambian%20constitution&f=false](https://books.google.it/books?id=jb2Euwp7d9AC&pg=PA189&lpg=PA189&dq=land+in+the+gambian+constitution&source=bl&ots=p7-bi_J9nJ&sig=45X0KN7GlymilLhye8MKvEQix2k&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0CD4Q6AEwA2oVChMI68H4kd28yAIVhVwaCh103wVD#v=onepage&q=land%20in%20the%20gambian%20constitution&f=false)

23 Ibid

Volunteering to combat bushfires is essential since the police force and the fire brigades are very fragile to do better and this had made the locals more watchful to maintain their common lands from extension. They give information against deforestation. They themselves communicate and solicit help from the general community against invaders. In short, they inevitably become watchdogs either for the common good of the society or for their own existence.

Non-herdsmen like those who primitively work on the land, have also their part to play. They first make sure that land is available to all for cultivation. They promote the Kathmandu Declaration. To make this objective realisable, they collaborate via crop rotation, mix farming and bush fallowing all based on the common land sharing mechanism. They collaborate to see that their lands are enriched in fertility thereby inevitably sharing land with herdsmen for grazing and for rearing as well. They fight together to avoid vices like over cultivation, over harvesting, bush fires and deforestation which are all enemies to their collaboration. As part of this collaboration, tree planting and open grazing are fundamental for the upkeep of the fertility of the soil which they both collaboratively do²⁴. Here the herdsman and the maize grower are never enemies and must collaborate for their own survival.

It could be argued that under this atmosphere, introducing a formal land ownership under a capitalist regime where one man/woman independently owns some pieces of land for his/her solo use against the rest will never succeed. This common system of land ownership bridges the ground between the poor people themselves and between the poor and the rich, and between the rich themselves. The customary land ownership has allowed unity and speed up local economies according to the African Development Bank Group and African Economic Outlook. However, in their recent research 2015, figures present a great decline in the growth rate of the local economy from 4.3% in 2013 to -0.7% in 2014 due to low and delayed rainfalls, and Ebola outbreak in the sub-region and continued microeconomic policy changes.

3. THE GOVERNABILITY OF THE COMMON LAND OWNERSHIP

Many believe that our modern-day bureaucracy is the standard mechanism in life for coercing people to comply with the top-down priorities of institutions, especially corporations and government, this is untrue not only politically but economically as well. Anyone concerned with the commons, therefore, must eventually address the realities of bureaucratic power(s) and the feasible alternatives. Is there a more human, participatory alternative that can actually work? Looking at the collaborative mechanism in operation in one of the smallest and less developed countries in the world, The Gambia, there is really hope that counter hegemony in the real terms of Prof. Ugo Mattei could work perfectly and most efficiently in managing the commons and reviving our lost commons to the neoliberal capitalists.

²⁴ According to the Global Hands in The Gambia, community tree planting will effectively support farmers and herdsmen all together towards a common goal for the upkeep of the ecology.

In his most influential and thought provoking book, *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi importantly make it clear that the modern state capitalism would not have succeeded without breaking into the fabric of the society. ‘Custom, law, magic and religion cooperated in inducing the individual to comply with rules of behaviour, which eventually ensured his functioning in the economic system’ (Karl Polanyi; 1944: 55). Neo-classical reiterates that religion, custom, tradition, moral among many which govern the pre-modern society must break off for modernity to have space and having succeeded in this breakage, a new market system gave way. The market system that separate the locals from their social relations and beliefs and a fundamental tragic alienation was formed²⁵.

According to Prof. Ugo Mattei(co-author of *The Ecology of Law*) rightly clears out our doubts that we will not survive if the whole world have to live a life style like those in the West. In his words, “we would need 6 planets to live like how people in the US are doing”. We are told clearly that we need a system of inclusive governance of all to regenerate our few commons and revive those lost²⁶.

My thesis looks at the failures with which the new system(capitalism) brought. Where with the introduction of venture capitalists into the social cohesive fabric, things have fallen apart with the rural and the urban seeing each other as different systems. The seeing of land as a business commodity undermines the reality of solidarity on land. The poor are compelled to sell their lands and look for white-colour jobs in the urban areas that are unsustainable and therefore prone them more to poverty.

The good news is that in The Gambia, among the world’s smallest and poorest countries in land and population is pioneering(even though it was in existence long since the coming of colonialism) a new paradigm of municipal governance that demonstrates the possibility of grassroots level leadership. The local leadership in The Gambia is now a substitute to officialdom. In the Gambia, community property rights could be at menace because of the lack of support from the written constitution. The presence of an organized land allocation system and an absence of authority figures who adhere to the rule of law or the constitution to ensure land is ‘rightfully’ bestowed to the capitalists has help the locals sustain their common land and improve their cohesiveness. Much context relating to this issue could be expounded through a deep look of the history of the country and the development of its laws²⁷. The small

25 Michel Albert, *Capitalism against Capitalism*,(Whurr Publishers Ltd, 19B Compton Terrance London N1 2UN, UK) 1993 pp7.

26 Fritjof Capra and Ugo Mattei, *The Ecology of Law, Toward a Legal System in Tune with Nature and Community*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.1333 Broadway, Suite 1000 Oakland, CA 94612-192, Pp7-8.

27 According to Victoria Nasreen on Diplomatic Courier(A Global Affaires Media Network),May 15, 2014; “Gambia is comprised of 35 districts with a governor heading each division. Following changes in the national constitution, the president now appoints each governor. Prior to these changes, each governor inherited their positions through familial

country that was colonized by the British, introduced two forms of governments; the direct rule system and the indirect rule system. Through the two systems, the small country was further divided into two; the colony and the protectorate. The colony was the areas nearest to the capital (Bathurst now Banjul) and were directly ruled by British while the protectorate those outside the colony, were under the indirect rule system of their own chiefs and village heads (“Alkalos”) who adhered to their cultures and traditions of land ownership through sharing.

The Gambian legal system on land varies from time to time and from rural to urban. Sometimes it harbours the colonial common law system but most of the times Islamic and customary law. “The constitution of the Republic of the Gambia and laws of the Gambia are two statutory doctrines regulating land rights and transactions.”²⁸

4. THE COMMON THAT SOLIDIFIES A SOCIETY

It starts by regarding the community as a collaborative social ecosystem. Instead of seeing the country simply as an inventory of resources to be administered by politicians and bureaucratic experts. In The Gambia, a lot of structures and institutions at the local level sees residents or locals as resourceful, imaginative agents in their own rights and therefore needs a stronger collaboration rather than disassociating themselves from politics. In their mosques, churches and public gatherings they built a good unison to govern themselves using their own resources and land in particular. Citizen initiative and collaboration are regarded as under-leveraged energies that with suitable government, assistance can be recognized and given space to work. Government is re-imagined as a hosting infrastructure for countless self-organized commons. They see that for the common land sharing system to work, the society

bloodlines and nepotism. Division governors are the link between the central governor and the regions, and are responsible for five to seven districts with their respective divisions. A District Authority exists in each district; a regional administrator oversees the regions; and a “Seyfo”, or Chief, who is appointed to oversee traditional administration and judicial functions also heads the districts. The Gambian village is headed by an Alkalo, or a traditional leader whom visitors should greet with a bag of kola nuts when first entering a Gambian village. Alkalos work with Area Councils to process land transaction documentation.

In each province there is a district authority, which manages and regulates the use of land, and these elected Area Councils “charge land rates collection, refuse collection, provide municipal maintenance while the physical planning unit issues clearances for plots of land purchase as well as building permits and occupation clearance.”

<http://www.diplomaticourier.com/>

must first be in order and co-participate in their own welfare. These people are united by the land.

The lives of these people that could be defined as not been accidental lies behind their own consciousness about their humanity through solidarity. Looking at how they do it on their ways, by sharing land among each other, there are formal bottom-up-approach system that puts it into three general categories: they live together, collaborative services, growing together, co-venture and working together, co-production...etcetera are the fundamentals pillars that keep the Gambian society active and productive.

What makes Gambia admirable is that, her people love each other and work on the principle of sharing. They construct their own wells, schools, mosques, churches, markets, roads, hospitals, conserve their lands etc. via communing. Collaboration here matters in protecting the common ecosystem. The 'project' that is both cultural and traditional has also found roots in the religious lives of these people where land is seen as sacred and belongs to all²⁹.

The Gambia's self-declared ambition to become a "society of collaboration" has deep roots in its culture. It has long favoured decentralized political authority and encouraged active citizen participation. The Gambia relies upon common assets and social relationships which holds from the common land ownership from families to families, neighbours to neighbours, villages to villages etcetera but it is also a country based on communal human rights and duties which are all strongly sacred. Her traditions as a community have been based on collaboration from the land to other matters in building a better sharing economy.

Contrasting so many politicians who remain committed to tight, centralized control, common governance in The Gambia understand the virtues of decentralized participation: The less that central administration is doing, the more things are working. Like has already been discuss, land sharing in most of the places are based on cultures and traditions that are not stipulated in the constitution as done by the people.

Everybody needs to have power to do something for their lives. In this, a venerable Gambian community meets up with sensitization yielding a new model of society management via collaborative commons.

The Gambia that is as small as any modern city is quite serious about becoming a society of collaborative commons. Officials regard it as a unifying vision, and almost a brand identity. The culture of sharing land as a common for protecting it through cultivation and passing it to the new generations as Prof. Ugo and Capra argued out in their newest co-authored book *The Ecology of Law*. According to the authors, man should not be only concern about harvesting the commons but should also be more concern about its regenerative means. Developing

²⁹ These people strongly belief that land is sacred and will forever remain so. They said they are created from the soil and will certainly return back to it and God(Allah) will judge them base on how they utilize their lands.

logos of communality also develop unity and common development does means mitigating individual inequality at least at the level of the ecosystem. In their new book, Ugo Mattei with Capra said we are undergoing an ecological crises that could be solve by a stronger collaboration and I will add that if there is supposed to be any better collaboration to tackle this crises, it must first come from among the locals via a bottom-up approach.

The Gambian system explained that community development model “goes back to the real meaning of community”. We need a collaborative ecosystem – a new way of living and working together. A whole rethinking and redefinition of nature.³⁰” The Gambia hopes to create a national and international network of collaborative networks that could serve to promote and reclaim the commons. Like in many cities and villages regulations have been adopted and in function to protect the ecosystem for the common good.

Of course, it’s not as easy as passing a new system all over, but trying to underline some of our greatest mistakes or misbehaviours towards our own ecosystem is a great stating. What The Gambia understands is really in need for a new cultural orientation and cultivation of new social practices and obviously such a paradigm takes time and a much more collaborative efforts and commitments. They knew first of all to achieve their goals, they must wear their cultural and traditional attires of common solidarity and resist all formal bureaucrats towards a decentralise local governing system. They realised the rigidity of their local relationships and informal processes.

Becoming a “collaborative community” requires more than ranging from having various stakeholders to finding new ways of working together, moving beyond political cards play and bureaucratic manoeuvring to making all participate in reclaiming the commons or regenerating the commons via land sharing. Starting from local farmers, teachers, students and government officials to all others, for a better regeneration of the commons The Gambian experience shows that all must be willing to put a durable and tangible commitments for any such success. Inescapably and most importantly, any city will have to do its own experimentation and adaptation to learn how to make collaboration work for them.

This progression, however, has the divergent advantage of limiting political problems and ideological differences among many. Since goals are mutually set and programs co-designed, everyone's focus is more on working collaboratively through differences than on trying to score political points against each other. Also because the process is very transparent, that helps a lot to call the attention of the centralize government to participate together with them.

30 Fritjof Capra and Ugo Mattei, *The Ecology of Law, Toward a Legal System in Tune with Nature and Community*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.1333 Broadway, Suite 1000 Oakland, CA 94612-192, Pp 28-29.

Through this system, Gambians have learnt how to win government support and avoid bureaucracy and make everyone participate to making a better society. Consolutions are better done and information easily disseminated without much cost.

The Gambian system is not only a traditional or cultural but an attempt to mimic the social dynamics of open common source – like the “Ubuntu State,” as commonly known it. “Ubuntu” is a South African Bantu term that literally means “human-ness,” but more broadly means, “the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.

The impression has almost gotten to the fabric of almost every Gambian household and its successes signifies that most support it.

The new paradigm that *The Ecology of Law* is yearning for is under practise here and serves for the locals that a better welfare is under a common ecological system. We must aim to regenerate and conserve the commons more than just mere extractions it shows. They teach that capitalism is illicit and cannot unite the poor and the reach to build a nearly equalitarian society.

5. THE PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE GAMBIAN COMMON LAND OWNERSHIP

Commons are facing problems everywhere and The Gambia is not an exclusion. However, this thesis will discuss those affecting the common land ownership/sharing in The Gambia.

Firstly, the majority of the people who adopted this system in The Gambia takes it more as a culture and tradition rather than a way of self-maintenance against the totalitarian system of governments that may ruin their significant common. They share their lands on the bases of their relationships and religions which regards such practise sacred rather than seeing it from the perspective of a fight against capitalism and neoliberal market systems and ideologies. Though the indigenous are consciously and unconsciously getting educated by the continuous tribulations that they combat every day, they now saw how importance their land sharing is and how messy life for them will turn to be without this common land ownership.

Secondly, the formal rules are contrary to both the sacred traditions, morals and cultures as well as the religions of the indigenous. Thus this pose numerous constrains to the survival of the predominant land sharing system in The Gambia. Majority of the local farmers are illiterate and non-participants of the central political system apart from exercising their franchise every five years in which they proved to be more conscious objectors. They are easily hoodwink by the politicians contrary to their(farmer’s) own objectives. Neither do they understand their own colonial constitution that was crafted against the commons nor do they comprehend why their constitution does not stipulate any sacred religion for The Gambia. This has fuelled many difficulties for the ignorant commoners. Their non-participation in decision making, makes it tremendously difficult for them to make better resistant policies against the opposing powers of the commons. Farmers and land owners in The Gambia(the commoners) are hardly informed on any matter regarding their lives or their relationships to the land that they use.

Thirdly, rural-urban migration is a great source of the fragility into the Gambian communing. The lands in the rural areas are being abandoned for settlement in the congested urban areas and the government does little to maintain rural dwellers who form the major part of this system of communing and land sharing. Because of this momentum, lands in the urban areas are drastically commodified for a market. Rural dwellers who wish to settle in the metropolitan cities must first buy a common land and abandon the former means of leaving collaboratively in their former settlements. Fighting for white-colour jobs and abandoning farming or agriculturally related activities supports industrialists and government(s) into changing common lands to private or government property. This pattern has changed many common lands into private or government properties and continue to slap both the rural and urban dwellers many conflicts.

Fourthly, though poverty is predominant in the Gambia and farming is perceived a way of living for the poor, it has also caused many poor people to sell their lands in the urban areas and leave few lands for sharing. Venture capitalists had baffled many people to abandon their culture of collaboration and land sharing and had succeeded in putting many common lands at the centre of the market. This practise continues to break the strong ancestral fabric that connects the locals together and now compels many to live individually.

Last but not least, co-operation. Most of the times, consciousness is not a big problem among the local commoners without the intervention of the government, however, where problems prevail they go very far into breaking the social fabric. Deforestation, bush-fires, implementing forest covers, overgrazing, over-cultivation etcetera are big obstacles in the collaborative communing over land in The Gambia. Sometimes it is difficult for an informal administration to administer and confront certain misbehaviours and institute rules and regulations to perfection over common lands. This might go far into ignorance of the perpetrators or selfishness for others. Since participation here is voluntary, motivation is sometimes a big question mark. When spirituality among locals are lacking many orders are easily neglected. Modernity has destroyed many social relations or orders among the locals and a journey for a strange culture has already begun and this might woefully lead to a successful cry to reclaim the common land ownership.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Seeing clearly from all angles whether economic or social cohesion, the traditional system of the commons regarding land ownership in the Gambia is a step in the right direction. There are of course loopholes that need improvement such as equal access to land for women. However, I vehemently believe that providing secure access to land as a common in The Gambia will promote the living standards of its people, reduce poverty and promote unity. It shall reduce if not totally eradicate rural poverty, hunger and conflicts.

Besides grassroots activism in the mainstream, politics is the best beginning and the start of a success story. Since capitalism overweigh individual capabilities of the poor and local people, collaboration is a better alternative to fight against it through direct participation. "Communism has collapsed. Capitalism has rid itself of the competition on which it thrives. But though now victorious, capitalism has become a threat. Our future will be shaped by the outcome the conflict capitalism as victor and capitalism as threat. Not only in Europe, but also in the USA and Japan- and no doubt shortly in the eastern countries too- the great debate is capitalism against capitalism," Michel Albert 1993. As the formal and central economy starts dwindling and its support begin to weaken increasingly many people, a parallel collaborative economy begins to develop that is founded on principles of social and ecological values, participation and cooperation for any better Gambia, neglecting and throwing this collaborative system out will be the worst of all beginnings and a total extinction of its land sharing economy and other surviving commons at the end. And this will also breed more conflicts and perpetuate poverty.

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