



**Marlborough Brandt Group**  
*Linking people for a fairer world*

**April 2016**

### **Welcome**

We are very pleased to introduce our new MBG Director, Karen Bulsara, who joined MBG on the 1<sup>st</sup> February this year. As you know from our website, Karen has been consulting in International Development for some 20 years, having lived in India, South Africa and Uganda; she is a local resident of Great Bedwyn. She will be bringing some new thinking into MBG, coming as she does, from outside the organisation, while at the same time honouring the work of Dr Nick Maurice and all those involved over the last 30 years.

### **Director's Report - Karen Bulsara**

At the moment I'm busy getting to grips with everything in the Manton Office and getting up to speed with the help of the regulars on the office team: Sarah, Emma, Caroline, Steve, Anita and Steph, and of course, Theresa, our essential and ever-helpful trustee treasurer. My plan is to spend some time meeting with people involved with the organisation past and present. I feel it is important to focus the charity's efforts, in this climate of belt-tightening austerity, to make sure that we build on its strengths as we take it forward.



I felt very fortunate to get an early visit to Gambia with the Teachers' Study Visit in February. It was somewhat unannounced which meant I was able to get a Gunjur experience without the pomp and ceremony of the new director role. It was great for me to meet Gunjurians there and see Gunjur so early into my new role. The Imam of Gunjur talked of the great progress for the town's 25,000 population, better education and housing. He was also keen to stress Gambians' religious tolerance and disassociation from extremist Muslim groups. The Gunjur Community Link also stressed how happy they were to be working with a new director and seeing how they can proactively improve our working relationship which was very encouraging.

Whilst in The Gambia, I was keen to meet with the British Ambassador to hear about the political situation in the country, from the FCO perspective on the ground. The issue of Gambia's economic decline since 2014 was discussed – with Gambia having suffered drought, the threat of ebola in the region and many young people leaving the country as economic migrants. Currently, the prospects are very poor for economic development in Gambia, with low wages and rice prices increasing. The main tourist industry took a big hit with the feared ebola crisis spreading, and although it did not reach Gambia, the country is still recovering. The terrorist threat in the region was

discussed, following on from the attacks in Mali and Burkina Faso. The Ambassador stated that The Gambia is "safer than the UK" right now and perceived no radicalisation presence in the country or threats from ISIS or other African fundamentalist groups.

The refusal of UK visas to Gambians, which affects the MBG Link programme, was also discussed. Currently there is a 63% refusal rate, which sounds high, but the Ambassador was keen to suggest that there are still opportunities for travel to the UK, since 27% of visa applicants are successful if they can prove that they have a job, savings and family to return to. This gives local Gunjurians and MBG hope for a way forward. Clearly, the country is facing economic hardships, which lends more urgency to the work of MBG in supporting Gunjur.

*There is much work for the new Director to do and so this is a brief edition of the newsletter. Dr Nick Maurice will be joining Karen for an official hand-over in Gunjur in the summer.*

## **Lent Lecture**



The Lent Lecture was held in March, with Harriet Lamb, the guest speaker, seen here with Karen Bulsara, Lord Joffe and Nick Maurice. Harriet was previously a Director of the Fairtrade Foundation and spoke passionately about Marlborough being awarded Fair Trade Town status. As the new Director of International Alert, she gave an informative speech about the challenging, painstaking work in peace building in which IA are involved, often working with individuals and groups on a very small scale.

We raised £790 for MBG and International Alert.

Read Marlborough News Online article [Working on the road to peace with "The long slow walk of the snail"](#).

## **Fairtrade Marlborough**

Congratulations to Marlborough being officially awarded Fairtrade Town status in March. MBG is proud to be on the Fairtrade Town steering group, led by Alison Burden.

## **WGEC Teacher Study Visit**



In February half term, Caroline led another successful visit to Gunjur with teachers from 4 schools, all first-time visitors with established primary school links. The week's varied programme culminated in a workshop for international linking, well attended by over 30 teachers from schools in and around Gunjur. Sarah Lively was also on the trip – it was her first time too, having been with MBG for 3 1/2 years. Here are her first impressions.

## **Study Visit 2016 - a reflection by Sarah Lively**

After 3 years of sifting through photos and personal accounts of trips (some going back 30 yrs), I finally get to see for myself what it is all about. It was



surreal at times, visiting places I was already so familiar with, but it didn't take long to feel genuinely welcome and at home in a place that has been in my psyche since childhood.



The first night was predictably a bit nerve racking, although the experienced host families took it all in their stride and the busy schedule for the week ahead does gear you towards just getting on with things. Toilets and food were the main topic of conversation on the first morning (and indeed for the rest of the week). We had a range of toilets from very basic to positively luxurious, I wonder if the Gunjur Link Committee (GLC) intuitively know who should be placed where in regards to personal challenges and development?

Read in full [on our website](#).

### **Other Wiltshire Global Education Centre (WGEC) Activity**

Caroline and Steve are now hard at work planning new programmes after a very successful round of proposal writing which brought in 3 new educational grants. *Trade Roots* is a primary school programme looking at the global connections of Swindon's industries and the people who have come to the town to work in them; *the WGEC Global Entrepreneur Challenge* is aimed at secondary schools and invites teams to devise a new environmentally friendly business for Gunjur; and after school *Commonwealth Clubs* are being run in 5

schools on the Salisbury Plain with high numbers of military families, to teach children about the importance of the Commonwealth and its values. Many interesting brainstorming sessions and ideas are being heard bouncing round the office at the moment!

### **Youth & Business Development Project**

Darren Bew is managing MBG's biggest programme focusing on preventing young people taking the 'back way' to Europe, funded by St James' Place. Up to 70% of young Gambian men are said to be unemployed and in 2015 over 11,000 Gambians sought asylum in the EU, the majority of whom were under 34. MBG is supporting a loan programme for local entrepreneurs to expand their business; at the same time, young students are being funded to take up places at the local technical college to learn trades which can assist them to set up in business for themselves. The students are progressing well in their courses and the loans are being repaid on time and in full, thus enabling a revolving fund to be created.

### **St John's Summer Visit**



Preparations are well under way for a 4 week visit of St John's students to Gunjur in their summer holidays. Anita has been helping the 13 Year 12s plan and fundraise for the trip, including a well-attended and very entertaining quiz night in February. The students will be working on for a classroom extension to a pre-school.

### **Please Join Us**

We need your help and support if you have any time to spare. We would welcome support in fundraising and in overseeing any programmes of interest. Please get in touch and come and have a chat to learn more – Karen would love to meet you.

## Dates for your Diary

- **21 April** Summer Group Harry Potter Spoof – A Very Potter Musical
- **27 April** 7pm - MBG Quiz Night - St John's Academy - [Tickets £10](#)
- **29 April** 7pm Summer Group Race Night - St John's Academy - Tickets £7.50 contact [mbgevents2016@gmail.com](mailto:mbgevents2016@gmail.com)
- **15 May** Brilliant Young Pianists - Ashley Fripp - St Peter's Church, Marlborough. [Ticket £10/£8 MBG members](#)
- **20 June** 6.30pm Marlborough Brandt Group AGM - Town Hall Marlborough

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**Our mailing address is:**

Marlborough Brandt Group  
The Upper Office, Dutch Barn  
Manton  
Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 1PS  
United Kingdom