



## February 2014 Newsletter

### Welcome

Most of this newsletter will rightly be taken up by reports on recent visits to Gunjur by our Chair Anna Quarendon, Sussex University student Rosie Carter and occupational therapist Maryanne Cook. Gordon Morris who has volunteered to work in Gunjur for the past seven weeks has been supporting the development of the business strategy that was started last October but is now complete, as promised by the end of February. We are delighted that Richard King from St James' Place is accompanying Nick to Gunjur at the beginning of April to explore the potential of SJP working with MBG and TARUD to support the development of the community not least in the field of business entrepreneurship.

### Kenyan ...

But lest you run away with the idea that MBG operates in isolation in two small market towns in Wiltshire and Gambia our impact is much wider. Using the 30 years of experience of the link, Nick has been working recently with the Kenyan diaspora in the UK managing the visit for a week by the Governor and four of his Ministers from Homa Bay County exploring the opportunities that different organisations in London and the South might bring to Homa Bay as one of the 47 Kenyan counties to which Government has been devolved from Nairobi. This means that the Homa Bay county is now responsible for health care, early childhood education, agriculture and fisheries development etc. Our meetings in London included the all party Parliamentary Group for Kenya, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Commonwealth Foundation, and important meetings with Essex County Councillors and Anglia Ruskin University discussing the potential for partnerships between them and Homa Bay. All this was possible as a result of the respect that MBG commands from the work it has been doing and the experience gained for all those years.

### Justine Greening MP meeting with MBG

Likewise thanks to Claire Perry we have a meeting with the Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening at the end of March in the House of Commons at which we shall be discussing the potential for developing a partnership agreement between BUILD and DFID to encourage more partnerships like ours across the UK and the Commonwealth.

The solid work that so many MBG employees, volunteers and supporters have done for all these years really has, and is continuing to contribute to making the world a more just, safer and peaceful place. To quote the anthropologist Margaret Mead once again "Never doubt that a small group of concerned intelligent individuals can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has!"

## David Morley to become MBG Trustee

In the meantime we are delighted that David Morley until recently High Commissioner to The Gambia has agreed to become a trustee of MBG and also that his successor Colin Crorkin who takes up his post in April is coming to join us in Marlborough in March for a day, for us to give him a briefing on our work and we are grateful to the Mayor and Town Council for welcoming him officially to the town. During his time with us he will be visiting St John's to meet the IB students who spent ten days in Gunjur last Easter to hear about the impact that that visit had on them and their studies.

## Donation from Marlborough Garden Association



For the last five years the Marlborough Garden Association (MGA) have supported the Fayunku Women's Garden in Gunjur. The garden covers an area of 4.2 hectares, has 25 wells with 215 gardening there. They grow a variety of crops including Tomato, Aubergine, Lettuce, Onion, Bitter Tomato, Mint and Parsley. The women market their crops in the local area, using the money to educate their children, feed the family and support their husbands with the family budget.

This year the MGA donated £300 to the garden, the women decided that half the money should be spent now on fertilizer, the rest has been deposited into their bank account so they can buy seeds later in the year for sowing October/November for next year's crop.

The women are always very appreciative of the Marlborough Garden Associations continued support and say a huge thank to all the people who contribute over the year.

## Anna Quarendon Gunjur Diary Extract – Tuesday 18 February

We walked down to Fayounka Garden, passing women and girls already coming back after their early morning work bearing, on their heads, produce in coloured plastic bowls. Many more were still hard at work tending to the plants being grown in the 200 or so plots parcelled out to members of the eight different Kabillos (community groups) that make up the village. Bent from the waist they harvested their tomatoes, aubergine and onions destined for the local markets, and drew water from the several wells having abandoned the pump which stood rusting and silent.



Anita, who oversees the activity of the women there, told of the garden's history and the most recent replacing of some of the fencing to prevent the invasion of animals which wander in and trample the crops. This was done with the help of last year's summer group of students from Marlborough.

Then back into the village past Jalisut where we were shown by Fasaikou around the bee keeping project. With evident knowledge and understanding of beekeeping he told us all about the workers and, as he put it, the "drone-es" and showed us the grass baskets that were originally used for hives but have now largely been replaced by those made from wooden slats and sometimes concrete.



Ankle deep in dead leaves and fallen oranges we stood in slants of sunlight under the trees while he explained the workings of the apiary and then headed home, with a few bars of the honey soap he makes along with wax candles and body cream.

The rest of the group was then heading off to Brikhama and the craft market but, with meetings lined up for the afternoon, I stayed behind to lunch on fish and peanut sauce eventually at 3pm, only then to learn that, forever Gambia, the meetings had all moved without consultation, which impressed me not at all.



Anita saved the day by suggesting I joined Neil's trip also to Brikhama and, meeting them at Tarud, I did. In town I bought a few bits – a small length of material for 50 d (less than a pound) so that I could pay Waba to make a little dress for my great niece. She is learning to sew – though still has a way to go I think before many would pay for her work. Meanwhile teachers were buying lengths of cloth that more practised tailors would turn into outfits for the children in their classes.

I bought a big bag of oranges and took them back home with me to the compound where the habit is to peel them, cut them in half and then suck out the juice. And because I found Mbanding's husband, Abdoulie, there from Kartong to see me, I abandoned my plan to join the trip to listen to drumming at the Gunjur Project and instead stayed to chat and eat the supper that I hadn't been expecting but which appeared.

The frustrations of life in The Gambia were evident today. The lack of time keeping can drive me crazy along with the total disregard for any implications that all this chopping and changing might have on the plans of others. These things I know but sometimes the reminders are powerful and annoying. So I was glad to climb into the oasis of my bed and the world inside my mosquito net, wrapped in my towel and coat to keep out the unexpected chill.

You can read Anna's diary in full on the MBG website blog <http://www.mbg.org/blog/118-gunjur-diary-february-2014-by-anna-quarendon-mbg-chair>.

## Rosie Carter Gunjur Research Theses

Rosie Carter is studying International Development at Sussex University and has recently spent a month in Gunjur over Christmas conducting research. Rosie reflects on her time:

Having now been to Gunjur twice before, my third visit was very different. From late December I spent a month in Gunjur carrying out research for my Anthropology and International Development theses, part of my degree at the University of Sussex. It was my first trip to Gunjur, where I had worked as a volunteer teacher for three months, which had taken me down this academic route. I then led the summer group in 2012 and have now come full circle, finishing my degree based on research carried out in the village.

The trip was independent from the link, which in itself is - somewhat ironically- a testament to the strength of this connection and the friendships made. It was through my Grandmother that I became involved with MBG and the family friendships have survived to this day. It is a bizarrely brilliant thing to arrive in an unknown village in West Africa to be confronted with photographs of myself as a baby, hear family anecdotes and feel suddenly so comfortable in an otherwise unfamiliar setting.

As one interviewee told me, ***"the link was not a change, but a revolution"***. It is not only the obvious and immediate impact of tangible projects, or even the social changes that have happened to those directly involved with the link but the snowballing effect, which cannot be underestimated. Another part of my research focused on the development experiences of minority groups, religious and ethnic.

**It became clear that, although for some, there is progress yet to be made, MBG's work has had a dynamic, cohesive impact on the community.**

Part of my research was focused on the development experiences of migrants, interviewing people who had migrated to Gunjur as well as those who had returned from Europe and America. The most striking factor about all this movement, so different to my own transnational perspective, was the importance of home. And it's not hard to see why. I love everything about being in Gunjur, and feel very much 'at home' piling into bush taxis, finding my way around the sandy back alleys by moonlight or watching as people pass by in their Friday best. I doubt this will be my last trip to Gunjur.

## **Maryanne Cook Occupational Therapist**

Maryanne Cook has also just spent some time in Gunjur as a volunteer supporting Disability Africa's Gunjur Inclusion Project. She writes:

I'd been back in Gunjur one day and it felt like I'd never been away, though my last visit was 3 years ago. My host Manlafi Jammeh and his family have given me a warm welcome to their compound as usual, and 12 days of my 4 weeks have passed in a heartbeat. I am very fortunate to be here under the wing of Anita Bew, a well known figure in Gunjur, who is fondly greeted by everyone we meet as we walk around the village.

Read Maryanne's report in full on the MBG Website blog <http://www.mbg.org/blog/113-occupational-therapist-maryanne-cook-in-gunjur>

## **Dates for your Diary**

- **MBG Quiz and Cheese Supper** - Wednesday 26 March, 7pm, St John's Academy, Teams 4- 6 players £12 person/ £8 under 18's
- **Ben Schoeman "Brilliant Young Pianists at St Peter's Church"** – Sunday 11 May 7.30pm performing works by Bach, Schumann and Schubert.