



March 2014 Newsletter

Welcome

Once again Gunjur will rightly and prominently feature in this newsletter following the visit at the beginning of April by Nick Maurice and Richard King from St James' Place, the wealth management organisation based in Cirencester. Richard very quickly established his popularity not least among the children of Gunjur and became known in Gunjur as King Richard of St James' Palace..... if only!

But, as reported in the last newsletter we held a meeting with the All Party Parliamentary Group "Connecting Communities" and Justine Greening, Secretary of State for International Development, thanks to Claire Perry and her office who organised it for us. The meeting was chaired by Stephen O'Brien MP and we were delighted to see our patron and great supporter Lord Judd also there. Many members of the coalition BUILD (Building Understanding through International Links for Development) which grew out of the work of MBG and others concerned with the development of partnerships between communities in UK and in the Global South were also present.

We were pleased that our MBG trustee in waiting David Morley, recently retired as Ambassador to The Gambia was able to be present along with representatives of the Wales Africa Links, Scotland Malawi Partnership, UKOWLA, Tropical Health and Education Trust (THET), Children of Sudan and Commonwealth organisations. Peter Hullah onetime Bishop of Ramsbury and now Director of Women's Educational Partnership doing courageous work in Sudan and South Sudan was also present.



Justine Greening centre left David Morley centre right

Justine Greening was clearly interested in what we had to say about the impact that community partnerships are having not only on development in the South but in raising awareness of development issues in UK and we hope this is the start of a conversation with DFID about how they might support our work which we describe as requiring "small investment for big returns".

Annual MBG Lecture



The Annual MBG lecture was this year given by David Mepham, UK Director of Human Rights Watch. The lecture was chaired by Lord Judd who spoke passionately about MBG and the importance of the subject, human rights and the evening was introduced and "wound up" brilliantly by Lilli Loveday, an MBG 'graduate' who went on to work for two years in the field of women's rights in The Gambia with the international agency Tostan and now works for the international development agency Mokoro in Oxford.

David's lecture was stimulating and thought provoking and he started by stating very clearly that it is simply

- wrong to torture people or subject them to degrading treatment
- wrong to prevent them from expressing themselves freely or associating with other
- wrong to deny people fairness and equality before the law
- wrong to discriminate against them on grounds of gender, sexuality, ethnicity or disability
- wrong to deny people access to essential healthcare, educational opportunity and adequate food

He went on to state that his core argument is that the development struggle against poverty and want cannot be separated from the human rights struggle against tyranny, oppression and injustice - the two are inseparable!



Lilli Loveday, Patrick Hazlewood, David Mephram, Lord Judd, Anna Quarendon and Lamin Manjang (Kombo Sillah Association)

Fundraising

March was taken up with three fundraising events the MBG Quiz night, a wonderful piano recital by Charles Owen in our series "Brilliant Young Pianists in St Peter's Church" and the Swindon Choral Society's outstanding performance of Elgar's Dream of Gerontius conducted by Robin Nelson in Marlborough College Chapel. The latter raised over £1000 for MBG from a gift aided retiring collection. We are grateful to all our members and others for the support that they give to these events.

Colin Crockin Ambassador

On 21 March we were privileged to have a visit for a day from Colin Crockin the new Ambassador to The Gambia who takes up his post on 18 April.

It was an opportunity for us to brief him on our work in Gunjur which he clearly found interesting, as well as introducing him to the IB students at St John's Academy who had furthered their studies in Gunjur last Easter and then to a reception given by the Mayor and Town Council in the Town Hall in the presence of three Mayors who had spent time in Gunjur during their Mayoral year.

In an email following the visit he wrote "I found the series of meetings extremely useful and look forward to working closely with the MBG in the future. Please also pass on my thanks to the multitude of others who helped to make the day so informative."



Photos: Colin Crockin with ex Mayors of Marlborough Bryan Castle, Alexander Kirk-Wilson and Joyce White all of whom have visited Gunjur & Colin Crockin with IB students at St John's.

Gunjur Visit

And so back to Gunjur where Nick Maurice visited with Richard King from St James' Place (photo below left). The purpose of the visit was to explore the potential involvement by SJP in our work in Gunjur. The past three years have seen a total of nine groups from Lloyds getting involved in projects in Gunjur and there are opportunities for SJP to do the same. There is no question that the



opportunities that living with families in a Muslim community in West Africa, with its social wealth and yet comparative material poverty, can provide for teams of younger staff from private companies in terms of broadening their experience, team building and project support are immeasurable and it is good to be engaging with the private sector like this.

The children are the future and it is that future we are particularly concerned about not least as the employment opportunities in Gunjur and more widely are not good. So we were looking at how we might support business entrepreneurial activity not least with the opportunities that the arrival of electricity and piped water will now provide. There is a lot going on but more is needed in terms of training, mentoring and encouraging business development through grants and loans.



Ousman is making fuel efficient cooking stoves which use briquettes made from the husks of peanuts rather than firewood involving deforestation



Lamin is training young people as tailors



Ndey and Buba are working as hairdresser and barber and are training other young hairdressers



Kaddy is selling refrigerators now that Gunjur has electricity, Fasaikou is keeping bees and selling honey and wax candles, and Mariama and Fatou are learning the art of tie-dying

It might be said that Gunjur is already a “hive of activity”!

But, what of MBG's work with our partners TARUD?

Once again we were impressed with everything that is happening, from the wonderfully productive Fayunku garden where all manner of vegetables are being grown and sold in the local market and thanks are due to the Marlborough Gardening Association for their financial support and to the summer group of 2012 who financed and helped to construct the central market place in Gunjur.



And it was good to see the excellent fence around the garden built last autumn with support from the Lloyds groups, keeping out marauding cattle which, now at the height of the dry season (no rain at all now for five months), are getting hungry as fodder is less available. We are exploring the possibility of installing at a cost of £2,000 a borehole with a solar pump and distribution system to irrigate the gardens and save women the back-breaking and often dangerous task of drawing water from open wells which are 15 metres deep at this time of year.

The TARUD pre-school, supported so magnificently over so many years by Neil Griffiths is always a delight and this time children performed and sang for us in a wonderful display of exuberant dancing led by Mariatou who lived in Marlborough for a year and who trained in pre-school education at Swindon College back in the 1990s.

Once again it was an opportunity to raise the thorny question of sustainability, the need to raise funds locally and increase the school fees from the current £2 per term.

The TARUD health education team demonstrated a puppet show on the importance of hand washing to prevent diarrhoeal disease and also the importance of including disabled young people in the life of the community. A particularly powerful component of the show was the presentation by two 11 year old students who reinforced the messages publicly amongst their peers.



Likewise the installation of some 180 concrete pit latrines, thanks to a grant from the Waterloo Foundation, in households many of whose latrines collapsed during the heavy rains, has had a major impact on health and it was good to talk to the grateful beneficiaries. There is no doubt that the impact of our work with our partners is immense and as Claire Gent from St John's Academy discovered in her research, Gunjur is going to reach the millennium development goals by 2015 whereas The Gambia as a whole will not reach them all. If that isn't a tribute to the work of TARUD in collaboration with MBG I don't know what it is!



But there is a lot more to be done. We had discussions at the British Embassy with George Sherriff, Acting Ambassador about the potential for capital investment in fruit conservation, whether drying of bananas or mangos or the making of juices and jams. It is clear that there are opportunities for capital investment through EU funding and we need to investigate that.

We visited the Gambian Technical Training Institute (GTTI) and were very impressed with the courses that they offer at a cost of £100 per year for a City and Guilds certificate and £125 per year for a further two years diploma course. "Peanuts!" you might say in the greater scheme of things!

Students at GTTI undertaking computer studies, the construction of a groundnut planting machine and making bricks from compressed discarded plastic bags.



The visit was an opportunity to further develop our relations with the new excellent and ambitious Gunjur Community Link people and revise the Memorandum Of Understanding which we were finally able to sign with great satisfaction at the airport on the way home!



We also took the opportunity of having good meetings with the TARUD board of trustees to discuss how we might build their capacity as they become engaged in more development programmes not least with the new business strategy and the work that Disability Africa are undertaking in the community. We agreed to fund the further training for sixth months two days per week of Fatou the accounts manager.

We also met with the Task Force set up under the leadership of Lamin Janneh, the leading businessman in Gunjur, to discuss the business strategy which is in its final draft. We shared our concerns over its ambitious nature and over its management structures and we look forward to receiving the final draft based on those discussions.

One interesting outcome of those discussions was the response we received to the suggestions that money may be available from big business in The Gambia and that in order to make the programme more sustainable, it would be good for TARUD and the Task Force to approach Gambian businesses for support rather than constantly seeking funding from MBG and others.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a relatively new concept in The Gambia albeit well established in UK. We will be discussing with UK businesses who are leaders in CSR in the UK the potential for running a workshop on CSR for Gambian Business leaders possibly supported by the British Embassy. George Sheriff at the Embassy was interested and we will wait until Colin Crockan the new Ambassador has his "feet under the table" to take that conversation forward.

Staff Changes

We were very sorry to receive a letter of resignation from Lynne Mawby who has served MBG as Accounts Manager and more recently Office Manager for the past eight years. Lynne has been a rock on which MBG has grown for that time. She has been entirely dependable, efficient and we have always felt that MBG's accounts have been in the best of hands. We are really sad to see her go.



We have appointed with great pleasure Emma Henderson from Pewsey as our new Office and Accounts Manager. Emma comes from a background in administration and accounts management most recently with St John Ambulance and we are delighted to welcome her to the team.

Dates for your Diary

- **Ben Schoeman "Brilliant Young Pianists at St Peter's Church"** Sunday 11 May 2014, 7.30pm performing works by Bach, Schumann and Schubert.
- **Concert Katharine Gowers (Violin) Alasdair Beatson (Piano)** Sunday 22 June 2014, 7.30pm St Peter's Church Marlborough Tickets £10