



Changing people's lives

October 2013 Newsletter

The main focus of this October newsletter inevitably will be on the recent visit to Gunjur led by Caroline Harmer, with Nick Maurice, Dr Lesley Spencer Head of IB, Sam Shields Science technician and Jamie Turnbull PE teacher all at St John's international Academy and Alys Langdale and David Armitage from Marlborough College. Sarah Adams from Peatmoor Primary school in Swindon was also with us securing her link with a primary school in Pirang.

The primary purpose of the visit was to explore the educational opportunities that Gunjur and The Gambia might have for young people from our Marlborough schools and to that end we covered a lot of ground.



TARUD Puppet Show

But we were lucky to have an old friend of MBG and our partner NGO TARUD (Trust Agency for Rural Development) with us, Petra Rohr Rouendaal who has had a wealth

of experience in health education in Africa and was "refreshing" the TARUD health education team in their puppet making skills and their puppeteering.



Handmade Puppets from Petra's Workshop

The performance by the puppets on our final evening was extraordinary in front of an audience of 300 people when they acted out the issues of teenage pregnancy, malaria and disability with great skill and a certain degree of humour but nevertheless imparting vital messages to the audience.



Disability Africa

We also had Ric Law, Director of Disability Africa with us and it was an opportunity to

observe his remarkable band of volunteers working with children with disabilities.

We were, perhaps understandably a little anxious about the new Gunjur Community Link and whether they would live up to the high standards that had been set by their predecessors, the Gunjur Link Committee who have given us so much support over the past 25 years. Our anxiety was completely misplaced and the new committee of eight highly effective people including two women, one from



The new Gunjur Community Link Committee

a minority Christian group the Karaninkas, did a magnificent job from meeting us at the airport and putting on the most overwhelming welcome in Gunjur with hundreds of people out on the streets, waving and cheering, to arranging hosts with whom we were to stay (some had never hosted before), to meeting us daily to arrange our programme for the day and finally laying on a leaving party the dancing at which was to have gone on until 3.00am. Some of us faded away a little earlier. They could not have been more generous in their care for us.

But what of our programme?

The tradition of buying a kilo of kola nuts as a mark of respect and presenting them to the

Alikali (Mayor) and the Imam (Religious leader), the Nyansimba (head of the Women's organisations) and the Seyfo (Chief of the District) was upheld.



Traditional presentation to the Alikali & others



We visited the many projects that we have been supporting through TARUD for the teachers to gain an understanding of development at community level. These included:-

The TARUD Pre-School



Lesley Spencer discussing Reading Skills



The Women's Garden which is bringing income to many households in the community



Informative visit to Women's Garden

The latrine programme which has now seen the construction of some 170 well constructed household latrines replacing many of the privately built latrines that have been destroyed through heavy rains.



New latrines replace flood damaged blocks

We also visited micro business enterprises managed by women including tie dyeing,



Hairdressing

the making of neem cream as an insect repellent and hairdressing and a very impressive and successful beekeeping project.



We all felt that Gunjur is a hive (excuse the pun) of activity particularly for women and there is no question that the arrival of electricity in the town has really made a significant difference. Already women are using refrigerators to freeze locally made fruit drinks to sell in plastic bags for a couple of delasis to passing children on their way to school.

But what about the men?

We have been concerned about unemployment amongst young men for some time and with the arrival of electricity and next month piped water, as evidence the extraordinary water treatment centre and the standpipes now visible on the street corners, there is a real opportunity to address this problem through the encouragement of new businesses.



Construction of Water Treatment Centre The Italian and Saudi water engineers revealed that they had made great use of the water engineering study that MBG had commissioned the British engineers Lewin and Fryer to undertake at a cost of £30,000 back in 1997!

Discussion with different people in the community revealed that only 10-15% of young



Standpipes ready to receive piped water in Gunjur

men are in employment five years after leaving school; the ambition of the majority is to leave the Gambia and get to Europe. And yet there are some great examples of men in Gunjur who have started up successful businesses. One of these, Lamin Janneh, underwent business training in Gunjur, funded by MBG through Comic Relief in the late 1990s. He ran the TARUD microcredit programme and then came to UK for further training. He is now running a highly successful business including a petrol station on the new road at Gunjur and three mini markets with a turnover of over 1m Delasis (£20,000) per year. So it's possible....!



Paul O'Hagan & Lamin Janneh in TARUD Conference Centre

With this in mind we called a meeting of the leaders of the community including the Village Development Committee, the Gunjur Community Link, our partners in development, TARUD, representatives of the elders and the women's organisations, the Association of Gambian NGOs (TANGO), Lamin Janneh and

the one time Director Concern Universal Paul O'Hagan to discuss how we can deal with the issue of unemployment amongst young men in Gunjur.

Nick Maurice as a "neutral" outsider was asked to Chair the meeting. All were agreed that the meeting had been very useful in that it had brought everyone together, many of whom had been at loggerheads during the upheavals in the summer, to discuss a vital issue facing the community of Gunjur. But as importantly, Lamin was asked to bring together a small group of people from the meeting **to develop a business strategy for the community over the next four months**. We have agreed that MBG will support this strategy as it moves forward. We feel excited at the prospect!

Meanwhile back to the teachers!



Off to James Island

A seven hour round trip by boat to James Island in the middle of the Gambia River provided an opportunity to explore the history of enslavement including visiting the slave houses on the island where they were



Slave Houses on James Island

incarcerated under unspeakable conditions for two weeks before being shipped to the Caribbean or the Southern States in the US with 30% of people dying on the journey, the bodies being chucked overboard.

Visits to the thriving local radio station in Gunjur - Janneh Koto FM which was started up 4 years ago and which is already playing a vital and popular communication role in Gunjur



Alys Langdale, Marlborough College broadcasting live

provided opportunities both to discuss how we might undertake joint radio programmes with young people from Marlborough and Gunjur discussing different aspects of their lives as well as discussing the purpose of our visit and some of the problems we are facing, not least the issues of obtaining visas for young Gambians to come to Marlborough and unemployment among young men in the community.

One day was spent in Banjul where we met with the Chief Secretary to the Ministry of Education to discuss international school partnerships and the role that they can play in bringing a global dimension into the teaching of school children; on to the UK High Commission where George Sherriff, Deputy High Commissioner discussed with us the sad withdrawal of the Gambia from the Commonwealth making it clear that the Commonwealth would lose out from The

Gambia's absence and that it meant that there would no longer be opportunities for young professionals from the Commonwealth to take advantage of Commonwealth scholarships. He also reinforced the new UK Borders Agency policy of applying a risk assessment to those seeking visas from e.g. Africa and Asia and that it would be well nigh impossible for any young Gambian without a well stocked bank account and strong professional commitments in The Gambia to obtain a visa.

We were privileged to have a discussion with the Manager of the Senegambia Hotel about the central role of tourism in the country although we were a little distracted by the troupes of monkeys clambering through the trees and onto the roof of our meeting place!



Senegambia Hotel & monkey!

We visited Khartong where a very impressive women's cooperative from the Christian minority Karaninka tribal group are running an oyster farming project. They entertained us to their dancing and singing and we were



Women's Co-op at Khartong

able to make a donation of three life jackets to support them while farming their oysters

standing waist deep in water amongst the mangroves.

The farewell party on our last evening was brilliant with dancing to a superb local band, a performance by drummers and the greets and of course the speeches! Without exception we all came home invigorated and with a feeling of real optimism that we had witnessed and are witnessing development at its best through partnership with MBG.

The work now needs to start in exploring how, in a more formal sense we can embed all the learning that we gained into the curriculum of the two schools in Marlborough so that our young people are educated to understand at a very personal level something of the global context in which we all live and they will work.

“Brilliant Young Pianists in St Peter’s Church”



Pianist Anna Zassimova

The next recital in this series is being given on Sunday November 10 by the Russian born pianist Anna Zassimova who is flying in from Germany especially to support MBG.

Dates for your Diary

MBG Christmas Party

Wednesday 19 December, 7pm

42 London Road, Marlborough, SN8 2AA

Anna Zassimova (from Russia)

Sunday 10 November 2013, 7.30pm

Performing works by Chopin, Brahms, Schumann, Catoire and Debussy

“An Evening with Johann Sebastian Bach and Robert Schumann”

Saturday 30 November, 7.30pm

Memorial Hall, Marlborough College, Tickets £10



Simone Dinnerstein & Stephan Loges

“Brilliant Young Pianists in St Peter’s Church 2013/14”



Gunel Mirzayeva

Sunday 26 January 2014, 7.30pm

Performing works by Gubaidulina, Bach, Schubert and Prokofiev



Charles Owen

Sunday 9 March 2014, 7.30pm

Performing works by Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bartok and Schubert



Ben Schoeman Sunday 11 May 2014, 7.30pm

Performing works by Bach, Schumann and Schubert