

## **Progress Gambia & Sierra Leone Foundation**

### **Annual and Activities Report 2023 Piet Sleeking / Nic van der Riet June 2024**

This is the first annual and activities report of the foundation, established on July 12, 2023. However, we have been active in Gambia since 2013 and in Sierra Leone since 2019.

#### **History Leading to the Establishment of the Foundation in 2023**

##### **Gambia:**

In 2011, Nic traveled by camper from Gambia to Guinea-Bissau. As "3 boys and a girl," we drove 1,000 kg of Ikea furniture to Guinea-Bissau in a week for a Tinkebel initiative. In Gambia, at the Sea View Hotel, I met Bakary Keita, an ICT student at Lasting Solutions, who asked if we could help pay his school fees.

In 2013, Nic was invited to join the board of the Mansakonko Foundation. This Dutch foundation, with a Gambian chairman, was dedicated to establishing the GTTI (Gambia Technical Training Institute) school building in Soma, an annex of GTTI/USET in Kanifing. This was achieved with the help of an architecture class from the ROC of Amsterdam, a Dutch contractor, GTTI students, and a German NGO. We started sponsoring 50 students for electrical, automotive, and construction training. Ten of these students wanted to take the Back Way (migrate irregularly to Europe). Three actually went, one arrived in Italy, and two were never heard from again. This was our first encounter with irregular migration.

Since 2014, we have been actively supporting other youths with their (vocational) training and/or starting and guiding them in their businesses, independently of the Mansakonko Foundation. Our goal is to do this sustainably, creating a structural change in the living conditions and future of these youths and potentially their families. Coaching and guidance are crucial factors. Since 2020, we have started paying only half of their school fees, making them responsible for paying the first half. Later, we visit the school and pay our part. This approach works for most, though 10-20% cannot be sufficiently supported by their families. After investigation, we pay the full school fees for these students. Besides school fees, they also have to pay for books, uniforms, and transport. All families are visited before any money is transferred. We now have a permanent contact in Gambia: Essa Jallow in Brikama.

##### **Our Farm**

In 2018, we started building Our Farm in Sifoe. The land was purchased for 3,000 euros. It is a garden (60 x 60 m), a learning center initially for three youths, now for two. Students from the agricultural programs at Gambia College can gain practical experience and do their internships here. Our farm has a building with four apartments and a veranda along the entire length. Each apartment has a bathroom with a toilet and shower. The farm grows oranges, bananas, cashews, moringa trees, and palm trees, and cultivates onions, eggplants, okra, tomatoes, cassava, wonjo, and peanuts. From 2018 to 2023, 42,000 euros have been invested, mostly by Nic, but also by friends and other involved parties. In recent years, the farmers themselves have also contributed from their earnings and monthly rent. The boys have paid rent from the start: 500 Dalasi per apartment. Soto, for his two apartments, also paid 500 Dalasi due to his studies until 2024. Soto and Janaiba now have two children, and Soto's sister lives with them. As of January 1, 2024, his rent will be 1,000 Dalasi. He has now

graduated from secondary and higher agricultural school. (1 euro was 50 Dalasi in 2018, now 73 Dalasi in 2024. This benefits us, but is very disadvantageous for Gambians as everything has become more expensive, especially imported goods).

The rental income is primarily for the maintenance of Our Farm and is managed by the tenants themselves. By keeping monthly accounts, they and we gain insight. It is worth mentioning that Nic met Soto in 2017 at the Senegal border, where Soto was exploring ways to reach Europe. Nic, cycling from Pamplona and Dakar, was helped by Soto with a SIM card. Nic advised him to stay in Gambia and build a future through education and work. Soto became the manager of Our Farm and has lived there with his family from the beginning.

### **Kafuta Farm**

In 2020, we started renting (4,500 euros for 10 years) 4 hectares of land and supporting the farmer Ismaila Camara in Kafuta. From the beginning, Richard Blauw and Aldrik de Jongh have been actively involved. Up to 2023, 23,000 euros have been invested (21,000 by Nic, 1,000 euros by Richard/Aldrik, and 1,000 euros by a Reformed Church in Amsterdam). This money funded fencing with wire and posts, a borehole with a pump, solar panels, and two water tanks. Ismaila began building a house in 2022 for himself and/or his workers. Initially, there were three (young) men employed, one of whom was fired for stealing produce. The other two were insufficient. Since 2023, four women have been employed. Of the 4 hectares, 2 are used. Orange and banana trees have been planted. Ismaila grows watermelons, okra, peppers, and cucumbers. The farm is developing. The farmer and we are learning from this experience. Ismaila has agreed that, with sufficient profit, he will sponsor some youths for vocational training.

### **General**

Over the years, we have seen that the attitude of youths is a key factor in overcoming poverty. Their effort and/or financial contribution is essential for success. Many Gambian youths lack work ethic and fail to keep commitments. Without (financial) support from us (Dutch foundations), there is little progress for many. However, if we give too much and they bear no financial responsibility, there is even less progress. Our attitude is also crucial for their sustainable development.

### **Developments Since 2023:**

In Gambia, we supported 40 youths and their families in 2023. We maintain contact with all schools and visit them once a year. These are mainly vocational and higher education institutions like GTTI (USET), MDI, YMCA Hotel School, Taku Leggaye Hotel School, Gambia College (teacher, agricultural, and nursing programs), Hadigala Nursing, Norw Skillcenter, Insight Training, and the University. Additionally, a few Junior and Senior Colleges. Three young footballers are supported in their careers, one at a football academy in Ghana.

Plans for the farms Our Farm in Sifoe and the 4-hectare farm in Kafuta were made in 2023. At Our Farm, Soto Jobe and Salieu Jammeh want to start with chickens in 2024. We are seeking funding for improving the electricity supply, new batteries, a charge controller, and a fencing wall. They must partially finance these improvements from their earnings and monthly rent paid to Our Farm for maintenance.

For Kafuta Farm, 1,050 euros were invested in the house roof, paid by the Keizersgracht Church's solidarity fund in Amsterdam. Plans have also been made, in consultation with Ismaila Camara. For 2024, we will look for a Massey Ferguson tractor in the Netherlands. The conditions are: 1,500 euros of the tractor's cost (6,500 euros) will be given as a loan, and separate accounts will be kept for the farm and the tractor to ensure clear financial oversight for the farmer's benefit. The tractor will be used for the 4 hectares and as a contract tractor for other farmers in the area. A profitable model. More on this in the 2024 report.

Since 2020, a family in Banjulinding has been supported. It started with building a stone toilet facility with a shower in the compound. The family, with a deceased father, an elderly disabled mother, and a disabled child, was very happy. Later, a stone room was added for cooking and storage. More maintenance is needed for the zinc roof, which causes problems during the rainy season.

Another compound in Banjulinding had a house built with financial support, where part of the family lives. This house has a large piece of land. In 2023, a borehole with a pump was funded by the foundation, ensuring a stable water supply even during the dry season. This increased and stabilized crop yields. The surrounding community can also use an extra tap placed in an accessible spot. The house also received a basic solar system for consistent lighting.

## **Sierra Leone**

In 2019, through one of the activities in Gambia, Piet contacted a family in Sierra Leone, one of Africa's poorest countries. Sierra Leone is much larger than Gambia and has a longer rainy season. Poverty is severe, with many families living in poor conditions without sanitation, electricity, or clean water. The first contact led to visits to Sierra Leone near the capital, Freetown.

A stone toilet facility was built in Juba Hill, replacing zinc sheets. Roofs were renewed and reinforced. Several children now receive support for primary school. Sierra Leone still suffers from the aftermath of the civil war 15-20 years ago. Basic amenities are missing for many people, unemployment is high, and prices for food, fuel, and transport have risen sharply.

A piece of land was acquired in a valley 20 km from Freetown, where a house with four bedrooms, a simple kitchen, shower, and toilet was built with support. Electricity was connected, enabling a water tank to be filled with a pump. In the garden, cassava, yams, and mango trees are grown. This house is a safety net for the family in Freetown and others in the country.

## **Conclusion and Plans for the Future**

In the coming years, we aim to enhance the sustainability of our projects, with an emphasis on vocational training and agricultural development. We plan to:

1. Increase the number of supported youths by 20% annually.
2. Develop partnerships with local businesses and educational institutions to improve job placements.
3. Expand our agricultural projects to include more diverse crops and livestock.
4. Continue improving the infrastructure of our farms and supported families' homes.

5. Monitor and evaluate our projects regularly to ensure effectiveness and sustainability.

This report reflects our commitment to supporting youths and families in Gambia and Sierra Leone, creating a sustainable impact on their lives and communities.