

## **Progress Gambia & Sierra Leone Foundation Annual and Activity Report 2023**

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This is the first annual and activity 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 until the establishment of the Foundation in 2023. Gambia:**

In 2011, Nic drove via Gambia to Guinea Bissau by camper. As "3 boys and a girl," we drove 1000 kg of Ikea furniture to Guinea Bissau in a week for a Tinkebel campaign. In Gambia, at the Sea View Hotel, I met Bakary Keita, an ICT student at Lasting Solutions. He asked if we could help pay for his school fees.

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

Since 2014, we actively began supporting other young people in their (vocational) training and/or starting and guiding their businesses, now without the Mansakonko Foundation. Our approach is to do this sustainably, creating a structural change in the living conditions and future of these young people and their families or the families they have established. Coaching and guidance are crucial. Since 2020, we started paying only half of their school fees. They must pay the first half at the start. Later, we visit the school and pay our part. This method works for most, but 10-20% cannot manage due to more severe poverty and insufficient family support. After investigation, we pay the full tuition for these cases because they must also pay for books, uniforms, and transport. All families are visited before any money is sent. We now have a regular contact person in Gambia: Essa Jallow in Brikama.

### **Our Farm**

In 2018, we started building Our Farm in Sifoe. The land was purchased for 3000 euros. It includes a garden (60 x 60 m) and a learning center initially for three youths, now for two. Students from agricultural programs at Gambia College can gain practical experience and intern here. Our Farm has a building with four apartments and a full-length veranda. Each apartment has a bathroom with a toilet and shower. There are orange trees, bananas, cashew nuts, moringa trees, and palm trees. They grow onions, eggplants, okra, tomatoes, cassava, wonjo, and peanuts. From 2018 to 2023, 42000 euros have been invested, mostly by Nic, and also by friends and other involved parties. In recent years, the farmers themselves also contributed from their earnings and monthly rent. The boys pay monthly rent since the start: 500 Dalasi per apartment. Soto pays 500 Dalasi for his two apartments due to his studies until 2024. Soto and Janaiba now have two children and Soto's sister lives with them. Starting January 1, 2024, his rent is 1000 Dalasi as he has graduated from both secondary and higher agricultural school. (1 euro was 50 Dalasi in 2018, now in 2024: 73 Dalasi. This is advantageous for us, but very disadvantageous for Gambians as everything has become more expensive, especially imported goods). The rent is primarily for maintaining Our Farm and is managed by the residents. By

keeping monthly accounts, they gain insight, as do we. Interestingly, Nic met Soto at the Senegal border in 2017. Soto was figuring out how best to get to Europe. Nic cycled in from Pamplona and Dakar, Soto helped with a SIM card. Nic told him to stay in Gambia and build his future through education and work. He became the manager of Our Farm and has lived there with his family from the beginning.

### **Kafuta Farm**

In 2020, we started renting (4500 euros for ten years) 4 hectares of land, supporting farmer Ismaila Camara in Kafuta. From the start, Richard Blauw and Aldrik de Jongh have been actively involved. Up to 2023, 23000 euros have been invested (21000 by Nic, 1000 euros by Richard/Aldrik, and 1000 euros by an NH Church in Amsterdam). This funded fencing with wire and poles, a borehole with a pump, solar panels, and two water tanks. Ismaila began building a house for himself and/or his workers in 2022. Initially, there were three young men employed. One, the manager, was dismissed for stealing produce at night. The other two underperformed. Since 2023, four women have been employed. Of the 4 hectares, 2 hectares are used. Orange and banana trees have been planted. Ismaila grows watermelons, okra, peppers, and cucumbers. The farm is developing, and both the farmer and we are learning from this. Ismaila has agreed to sponsor some youths for vocational training if profits allow.

### **General**

Over the years, we have seen that the attitude of the youths is a crucial 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. If we (Dutch foundations) do not provide (financial) support, there is no 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.

### **Development since 2023**

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

Plans were made in 2023 for Our Farm in Sifoe and the 4-hectare farm in Kafuta. Soto Jobe and Salieu Jammeh at Our Farm plan to start with chickens in 2024. We are seeking funding for improved electricity supply, new batteries, a charge controller, and a fencing wall, with the condition that they finance part of it from their earnings and monthly rent paid to Our Farm for maintenance.

For Kafuta Farm, 1050 euros were invested in the roof of the house, funded by the solidarity fund of the Keizersgracht Church in Amsterdam. Additionally, plans were made in consultation with farmer Ismaila Camara. In 2024, we will search in the Netherlands for a Massey Ferguson tractor. The conditions for this are: 1500 euros of the 6500 euro tractor cost will be given as a loan, and a separate accounting will be maintained for the farm and the tractor to create a clear financial overview beneficial to the farmer. The tractor will be used for the 4 hectares and as a

contracting tractor for other farmers in the area, creating a good business model. More about this in the 2024 report.

Since 2020, we have supported a family in Banjulinding, starting with building a stone toilet facility with a shower in the compound. The family, with a deceased father, an elderly disabled mother, and one disabled child, was very pleased. Later, a stone room was added, serving as a kitchen and storage. Further maintenance is needed on the zinc roof, which causes problems during the rainy season.

In another compound in Banjulinding, the construction of a complete house was financially supported for part of the family. This house has a large plot of land. In 2023, a borehole with a pump was realized, providing water even during the long dry season. This has increased and stabilized the crop yields. The surrounding area can also use an extra tap point placed in an accessible location. The house also received a basic solar system, ensuring light availability.

### **Starting Entrepreneurs**

Entrepreneurship is a significant topic in guiding young people and farmers. An entrepreneurial attitude is essential to transition from a passive to a proactive stance. Rose Bartholomé from the Small Business Development Society has joined our activities. She will use her expertise to support starting entrepreneurs. Two young starters have been supported with a toolset for a beginning electrician and a bicycle for transportation. She has also begun financially supporting and guiding a young man with a tricycle motorbike, allowing him to set up and develop his transport business. More about this in the 2024 report.

### **School in Jalambang, Brikama WCR**

Since 2017, Gert Colenbrander has been supporting early childhood education at the AMHEN nursery school of Mr. Momodou Dansu. Jalambang is a relatively small community. Mr. Dansu has a school here for about 120 children between the ages of 3 and 5. There are 3 permanent teachers who do remarkable work. After this school, the children go to primary school. The education and resources available in Gambia are minimal.

It is a private school that raises funds through school fees and donations from third parties. The school is highly regarded in the region, and follow-up schools prefer to have children from here. In 2017, Gert started building a toilet so that there are now separate toilets for boys and girls. After that, there was a need for a water supply and a wall around the school building and the playground. This has since been realized. There is now a proper school building with sufficient facilities, although there is still much to improve by our standards. Due to COVID-19 and a worsening economy, some students had to drop out last year because they couldn't afford the school fees. Currently, there are about 80 children, and it would be great if we could expand this to 100. This simply requires additional funds to help poor families so their children can also attend school. Education is the best investment for a prosperous future in Gambia. We are actively looking for enthusiastic people and schools to help us with the necessary funds to continue this work. Sponsoring a child costs €80 per year. We are looking for solutions to help 20 children who otherwise cannot attend school. This school project by Gert Colenbrander has been part of the foundation since 2024.

### **Sierra Leone**

Through one of the activities in Gambia, Piet came into contact with a family in Sierra Leone in 2019, one of the poorest countries in Africa. Sierra Leone is much larger than Gambia, and the

rainy season lasts longer here. The poverty is dire, with many families living in very poor conditions without sanitary facilities, electricity, or clean water. The initial contact led to visits to Sierra Leone in the vicinity of the capital, Freetown.

Here, too, a stone toilet facility was started where previously only some zinc sheets were used. Furthermore, in this compound at Juba Hill, zinc roofs were renewed and reinforced. Several children can now attend primary school with support. Sierra Leone is still dealing with the aftermath of the civil war that took place here 15 to 20 years ago. Essential basic services are lacking for many people; there is enormous unemployment, and the prices of food, fuel, and transport have risen sharply in recent years.

In a valley 20 km from Freetown, a piece of land has been acquired through work done there. Over the past few years, a house with 4 bedrooms, a simple kitchen, shower, and toilet facilities has been built with support. There is also a connection to the electricity grid, enabling the water tank to be filled using a pump. A basic solar system has been installed at this house to ensure there is always lighting and the ability to charge phones. Last year, work focused on connecting the house to the main road. Other houses in the immediate vicinity also benefit greatly from this road connection, which was largely built by a group of men after a lot of digging and breaking work. The hilly environment mainly consists of rocky material. Most residents of this valley try to make ends meet with small jobs such as farming the land and breaking rocks and stones for road construction and concrete foundations and walls. Some money is also earned through small businesses and trading in palm oil, wood, and charcoal, and importing goods from Gambia to be resold. Due to rising transport costs, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a profit.

Education and good schooling are unfortunately not attainable for all children in Sierra Leone due to a lack of sufficient financial resources. For many families, survival is a daily struggle to secure enough food. The Foundation regularly provides extra food, especially rice, and sends packages with clothing, among other things, via Gambia.

In the coming years, we want to continue supporting several families from the Foundation so their children can also attend school. A good education always offers a better perspective for a better future.

### **Other Activities**

We regularly give lectures in the Netherlands about our projects, what we have achieved, and the problems we encounter. The title: "More money is not always the solution, development cooperation that works. Gambia, an example from practice." It is also discussed that through our interventions with young people, most no longer see the need to take the Back Way. With a good education and thus easier access to employment, they can build a life in their country. Over the past 10 years, of the 60 young people we supported, more than 20 planned to take the Back Way. The necessity for this has now disappeared. The lectures also discuss how interventions from Europe and China, such as agricultural exports from the EU, actually drive young people to flee.

In Gambia, we have held a Youth Conference every November since 2021. In 2023, there were 180 participants (in 2021: 60, in 2022: 90). This time we organized it together with the student union of the first-year students of the teacher training program at Gambia College. The agenda included: Interviews with several young entrepreneurs from both farms and others. They shared what they have achieved, the problems they face, and the message they have for the young

people in the audience. Irregular migration was another important topic. Contributions from an IOM employee and a young woman who experienced terrible things on her journey and returned were discussed. Especially with this topic, there were many reactions from the audience. A theater group with sketches and Spoken Word warned against irregular migration. The event concluded with a lecture and discussion on Climate Change.