

Progress Gambia & Sierra Leone Foundation

Annual Report 2024
2025

Piet Sleeking / Nic van der Riet April

This is the 2nd annual report of the foundation, established on July 12, 2023. We have been active in Gambia since 2011 and in Sierra Leone since 2019.

Gambia:

In Gambia, we support 65 young people and their families. In Sierra Leone, we support a community in Freetown/Juba Hill and a community in Hamilton. Of these 65 young people in Gambia, 40 have completed their (vocational) education. Most have jobs or have started their own businesses, sometimes with our help and often with help from their families. Of these 35, more than 20 wanted to take the "Backway" (illegal migration route to Europe). For most, this is no longer important. The reasons were economic, and the necessity has disappeared. 4 did take the Backway to Europe. 2 are in Italy (one with a temporary permit who regularly returns to Gambia to visit his wife and 2 children). The family of another has not heard anything, and a girl who was in Algeria has returned with help from us and friends. However, almost weekly, rickety boats depart from Senegal and Gambia. Too often, this does not end well.

This means that our foundation is often confronted with young people who have left. At our annual Youth Empowerment Meeting in November, the Backway is an important theme. With the help of positive stories from other young people about (vocational) education, starting your own business, and maintaining motivation to make something of your life, we want to discourage young people from taking the Backway.

What follows is a report on the 2 farms, the young people at various schools and businesses that we support, and more. Since November 1, 2024, the regular group of young people we work with has established a Gambian foundation: Progress Gambia Youths. 2 other young people will join soon. A meeting will soon be held to agree on the purpose, mission, and working method, and who will form the board.

Salieu Jammeh has been our middleman in Gambia since February 1, 2025. He manages our money in Gambia. The previous middleman left for Europe due to personal circumstances. Everything has been properly concluded.

Our Farm

This is an educational farm of 0.36 ha, run by 3 young men. The vegetables and fruit are growing as expected. There was a plan to invest in chickens. Due to expected risks, this is still being considered. Particularly fruit, oranges, bananas, and papaya are now also sold to beach bars and lodges by the sea. Salieu, also a tour guide, is actively involved. Salieu and Soto need to have a job or business on the side. Our Farm is a garden of 60 x 60 m. Salieu is a tour guide and also manages the lodge "About Time" by the sea with his brother. He has his own apartment there, "The Wooden House," for rent. Soto is the farm manager and has completed agricultural college. For the past six months, he has had a job as an insurance agent in Brikama. Sam is on the board of Our Farm.

Developments at Our Farm:

- New fencing built. The old iron wires had disintegrated after 6 years. More and more animals were coming through. Now there's a wall. Cost: 4300 euros. 300 euros paid by Our Farm itself. 4000 euros by Henk van der Riet.
- Mixed Cropping: done to better use the soil and to keep insects away.
- Focus on growing more crops, sowing every 2 weeks, transplanting, and then also harvesting every 2 weeks after 2 or 3 months. Not every square meter is used yet, and not all grass and other weeds between plants are removed. The following crops are now grown: avocado, soursop, oranges, mango, lime, banana trees, palm trees, cabbage, onions, wonjo, carrots, tomatoes, bitter tomatoes, eggplants, cassava, moringa trees, cashew trees, beans, watermelons, lettuce, and okra. Products are sold at the market in Brikama and to various lodges by the sea. Partly also for personal use. With rental payments to the farm by themselves, maintenance is paid. Monthly financial overview comes, but with delay and still not on their own initiative. The plan is to have Our Farm fall under the Gambian Foundation "Progress Gambia Youths."

Kafuta Farm

This is a production farm of 4 ha. Part of Somi farms, in Kafuta and Somita. Since August 7, 2024, the Massey Ferguson tractor has arrived and is in operation. Shipping took more time and money than expected, with problems with customs clearance. The tractor is used for their own 4 ha and for other farmers as contract work. There is high demand. A plow is borrowed from another farmer. Meanwhile, a cart has been purchased from its own revenues. Separate financial statements are kept for the tractor and for the farm. The farm entrepreneur Ismaila Camara invested in a car a year ago to rent it out. Together with a friend, he started a car rental business. Since February 2025, Ismaila, in cooperation with Nic, has acquired a 2nd car for rental and for use by Nic in Gambia. The (half) net proceeds benefit the Foundation. Separate accounts are kept for the farm, tractor, and car. Meanwhile, Ismaila has repaid the 1000 euro loan for the tractor.

More improvements:

1. A 2nd borehole made, donated by a sponsor from the Netherlands.
2. Drip irrigation hoses and installation brought in for 1 ha.
3. The house is now 80% complete. Plastering, painting, plumbing, and electrical work still need to be done. This house will be used for the workers and for Ismaila Camara, the farmer. This will provide permanent supervision.
4. Now 3 permanent employees, 2 women and 1 man. (2 women who worked for shared profit have left).
5. Oranges have been harvested for the 1st time. Now a total of 200 orange trees.
6. 103 papaya trees planted.

7. 110 banana trees planted.
8. And several lime plants, cashew, avocado, guava, and passion fruits planted.

Vocational Education:

In total, we have supported or are still supporting 65 students in their studies, usually an MBO or HBO education (vocational or higher professional education). 40 have now completed their studies, and we are still working with 25. These are the educational institutions where they study and with which we have contact:

1. GTTI / USET. "Gambia Technical Training Institute / University of Science, Engineering and Technology" Currently 2 students here: construction and engineering. Previously completed: students in construction, electrical and mechanical engineering.
2. University. Now 3 students in Faraba. Development Studies. One student at the Open University: Mathematics.
3. Gambia College. 15 students supported here. Currently 6 students in ECD, PMT, HTC teacher training. One student in agricultural education. One student in ICT. Students who have completed: Higher agricultural education, Nursing, ECD, and various teacher training programs. All graduates have jobs.
4. MDI: "Management Development Institute" One student in HRM and Diplomacy and International Relations. Previously one student in Accountancy.
5. YMCA hotel school: 1-year cooking and hospitality training. Now 1 student here. Previously 4 students completed.
6. Insight Training. One student completed plumbing here. Now has temporary/flexible work.
7. Norwegian Skill Training Centre Gunjur. In 2024, one student completed Plumbing and several are still studying. Sponsorship is done in collaboration with the Smile 2 Gambia foundation.
8. Various students now and completed in ICT, Ittog (tourism education), hairdressing and beauty care, Sterling Technical training, and secondary school education.

ECD School, Jalembang

This is a private kindergarten, run by Momodou Danso and 3 teachers. Since 2024, this private school has been part of the foundation. In total, there are now 72 children, divided over 3 classes. Most pay the school fee of 3000 D per year. However, about 10 students do not pay or only pay part of this. Discussions have been held with Momodou Danso to make the school financially viable again, without the years of financial support from Gert Colenbrander. The plan is to have at least 100 students for the new school year in September 2025, all paying 3600 D per year. No new non-paying children will be admitted. These will then be kindly referred to nearby government schools. The school

is a 3-year ECD program. Conversations are being held with the parents of students who currently do not pay or pay too little. No students will be sent away. A 2nd plan is that particularly the salary of the head of the school, Momodou Danso, will be reduced, and those of the teachers somewhat. Both have been started since February 2025. A 3rd plan is for the head of the school to look for financial support from the (local) government.

Starting Entrepreneurs

Self-employment is an important form of employment in Gambia. Gambia has a large informal sector, where many entrepreneurs live 'hand to mouth.' Most of what they earn goes to food. Acquiring capital to invest is therefore a major challenge. As soon as someone earns more than they directly consume, (extended) family members expect them to share. This is a nice social custom, but it makes reserving for a future investment difficult.

Since 2023, Progress Gambia has entered into a collaboration with the Small Business Development Agency Foundation (Stichting kleinbedrijf Ontwikkelings Maatschappij). Rose Bartholomé supports several young people in this context with education and starting a business.

One young man has started training as an electrician and solar system installer. Once his training is completed, he will, with help and guidance from the KOM, start as an independent installer. A second young man has started as an electrician and installer of satellite dishes. He wants to consolidate his business and expand with a small shop in electrical materials. The KOM has sponsored half of the required inventory for the shop. He must contribute the rest himself. A third person, working in the tourism industry and therefore without work for at least six months, has been guided in starting a transport business with a tricycle (a three-wheeled motorcycle with a loading bay). He received intensive guidance in preparing a business plan. We were advised by the 'former' middleman, who once ran his own restaurant with help from the Foundation. The loan for the tricycle was given to the starting entrepreneur with an agreement that he would deposit the purchase price of 175,000 D into his own savings account over five years. After that, it would be discussed with him how he could reinvest the money. He started in May 2024. After a flying start, the rainy season put a spoke in the wheel. The business came to a standstill, along with much business activity, during the heavy rains. The plan included that during the tourist season, he would rent out the tricycle and resume his work in the lodge. That is going reasonably well. However, he has not fully repaid the repayments to the bank account but has reinvested in livestock. Nic van der Riet and Rose Bartholomé are now guiding him. Contact and information provision from this young man is inconsistent. Bank accounts and saving are still a challenge for many Gambians in the predominantly cash economy.

Support Group of Footballers and Their Clubs

One of our activities in Gambia is supporting five talented footballers who have secured a place in the first and second divisions. These boys are supported to maintain their position through contributions to housing, healthy nutrition, gym, and transport. The

footballers all come from the interior of Gambia, Basse. Their families also live there. Additional support is regularly provided there in the form of food but also in the installation of solar and a contribution to the realization of a borehole so that there is water available in the immediate vicinity for multiple families. The families live off the proceeds from farming and small shops and preparing simple meals for the local population. The clubs where the boys play also received some resources this year for the purchase of necessary materials such as footballs, goalkeeper gloves, linesman flags, and some first aid supplies. We also contributed to the realization of fencing at one of the farms in Basse to keep stray animals away from their vegetable gardens. Through the mediation of our Foundation, one of the boys was placed for some time at a football academy in Accra/Ghana, which we visited last year. This boy could be eligible for placement or mediation to a club that can also offer him a contract. For the realized home in Banjulinding, some extra investment is needed from time to time for maintenance and especially the zinc roof. Due to the heat and the stormy rainy season, the zinc gets damaged, and to prevent further damage to the home, parts sometimes need to be replaced. Finally, one of the trainers of the football club in Bakau, Lamin Saneh, received a contribution to start a so-called video room where anyone without a TV can watch football matches for a small fee. Part of the support was donated, and another part in the form of a loan has since been repaid.

Sierra Leone

For several years, two families and residents in their surroundings in Sierra Leone have also been supported. Initially, this concerned housing, electricity, solar, and water supply. The connection to the road network from the communities has also required the necessary effort and finances. The rainy season here lasts longer than in Gambia, which also regularly results in damage, particularly to the zinc roofs. Several young children are supported to attend school; school fees, teaching materials, and clothing always require attention. Employment is scarce and very poorly paid. Security, agricultural activities, small livestock farming, construction activities, and some trade contribute to existence in one of the poorest countries in Africa. Extra contributions are regularly made available for medical support; malaria continues to take its toll in this country, and many people die at a young age due to the lack of medicines and money to visit a doctor or hospital. The opportunities lie in setting up small businesses/shops and conducting trade between the countryside and the city. Many families are barely able to make ends meet financially, and even basic education is not always possible for many children. Attracting more tourist activities and strengthening agriculture can certainly provide relief to create more employment. Government programs are still lacking in this regard, and drug use and corruption form obstacles to healthy economic development. One of the boys who was previously supported for training in ICT has since found a job in Dubai and is trying to develop further from there and support his family in Freetown. The ultimate goal remains to help these young people build an independent existence in the longer term and to allow the children involved to complete their school education.

Other Activities

We regularly give lectures in the Netherlands about our projects, what we have achieved, and the problems we encounter. Title: "More money is not always the solution, development cooperation that DOES work. Gambia, an example from practice." It also addresses that through our interventions with young people, most no longer see the necessity to take the BackWay. After all, with a good education and thus easier to get work, they can build a life in their country. Over the past 10 years, of the 65 young people we have supported or are still supporting, more than 20 were planning to take the Back Way. The necessity for this has now disappeared. The lectures also address that due to interventions from Europe and China, including agricultural exports from the EU and overfishing off the coast by Chinese trawlers, young people are actually fleeing.

In Gambia, we have held a Youth Conference every year in November since 2021: Youth Empowerment Meeting. In 2024, there were 240 participants (in 2021: 60, in 2022: 90, in 2023: 180). For the 2nd time, we organized it together with the student union of the 1st-year students of the teacher training program at Gambia College (STA). On the agenda: Interviews with several young entrepreneurs, from both farms and others. They showed what they have achieved, what problems they face, and what message they have for the young people in the hall. Irregular migration was another important topic. Contributions from an IOM employee and from a young woman who experienced terrible things during her flight and has returned. Especially on this topic, there were many reactions from the audience. A theater group with sketches and Spoken Word warned against this irregular migration. The whole event was brightened up with a brass band and lots of cultural dance and music. Concluded with a presentation on Climate Change and a closing word by the organizing group.

Agri Industry Plan

We have made an initial effort for more industrial development in Gambia. We want to have agricultural machines made in China or India and have them assembled in Gambia. This would create employment in Gambia and provide farmers with agricultural machines. We have discussed this with the Minister of Agriculture. We have received a list of necessary machines, such as trailers, tricycles, plows, power tillers, harrows, motor hoes, sowing machines, harvesting machines, and more. The Ministry of Agriculture cannot invest but can facilitate: free land to build an assembly hall, no taxes, and a letter of recommendation. With this, we will go to factories and technical schools in China. More on this in the 2025 report.

Municipality of Amsterdam

At the request of the Municipality of Amsterdam, we have written a plan for the voluntary return of Gambians who cannot obtain asylum. For this purpose, we have set up a network in Gambia for coaching and guidance. All this in collaboration with VWN (Dutch Council for Refugees), Caritas, IOM, FTF (Future Tomorrow Foundation) in formation, Nidos, and DT&V. The Municipality of Amsterdam wants us to start with a pilot of 5 returnees and pays for it.

Compost Machine GTTI

Discussed with GTTI, Electric and Mechanical Engineering education, about building a compost machine by students. Technical drawings were provided for this. The head of this program, Mr. Lamin Drammeh, says he sees possibilities and will investigate this.

Finances

The necessary finances are contributed by a number of friends and family members, by Nic's regular Surinamese barber: Ritchy (a portion of each haircut goes into the pot), and by Piet and Nic themselves. Total invested/donated in 12 years: 165,000,- (of which 125,000,- by Piet and Nic, 40,000,- by others).