

# Friends of Si-Kunda

Newsletter no.43

February 2025



Marje and Popo



**Chairs Report** Apologies for this newsletter being a bit later than usual.

First of all, I have to let you know that my sister Marje passed away just after Christmas. Although we knew how ill she was, it still comes as an awful shock. I have to pay tribute to her here as apart from being my amazing sister, she was such an important part of this charity. Her support and enthusiasm from day one has been invaluable, as soon as I said what I wanted to do she was there and has been ever since. Marje not only fundraised, gave talks, and collected supplies, she went on many visits to Sikunda and the surrounding villages. Since 2006 she has also been our treasurer and did a brilliant job. She is going to be missed by so many, not least by the people of Si-Kunda, everyone there remembers and loved her for her kindness and sense of fun.

I have just come back from Gambia, along with my husband Gwyn, and Glöz. We had a good trip, though a bit emotional at times, but got everything done that we wanted to... it all went according to plan (we can't always say that! 😊). Some of which on the next few pages.



While there we had two benches made for the Si-kunda Women's



Gardens as a memorial to Marje and as something that the ladies who work there will enjoy. The ladies are so happy with them and they will be well looked after by Sankung and Abdou.

At their request one is placed under an orange tree and the other is near one of the wells. They were made locally by a carpenter, and a local artist .. who is also a teacher at Toniataba School, did the artwork.



Sankung wanted something commemorative to go on the Market Place in Si-Kunda, so Marje's husband had a plaque made which we took with us. She won't be easily forgotten! Sue



**Si-Kunda School Update..** The new headmistress Jainaba Jallow gave us a wonderful welcome. The new school building is making good progress. The borehole was completed a few months ago, and it is hoped they move into the new buildings later this year.

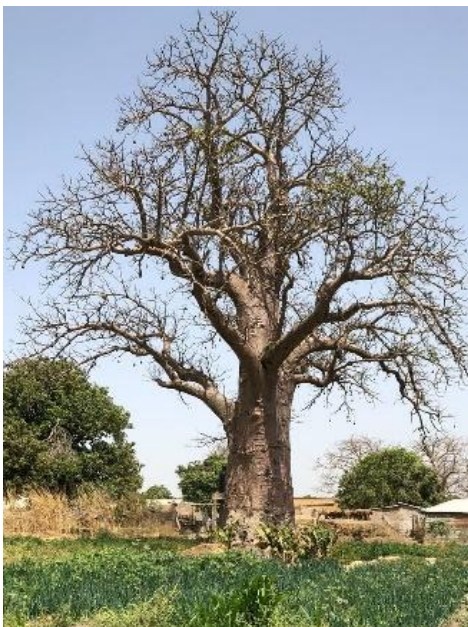


We still help with stationary, and various other items needed, also we are going to source shorts and tshirts for when they do interschool sports days, black shorts and red shirts are the required colours!

Once the building work has finished, we will reposition the swings for them, as currently they had to be moved from where they were as the new storeroom is being built on that area.



## The Baobab Tree



A common tree in the Gambia is the Baobab and holds much fascination to all of us

who visit. Native to Africa with some species in Asia and Australia, these amazing trees can live up to 3,000 years, grow up to 100 ft and gain a diameter of 33 – 45 ft. Legend has it that the Gods thought they were too proud, so they threw them into the ground upside down and is often called the upside down tree, as indeed the short stubby branches can resemble roots. These trees are valued as a food source and have health remedies. Their trunks are grey and quite smooth. They lose their leaves in the dry season and can be without them for eight months. The flowers are large and white and can bloom in both the dry and wet seasons, these appear late afternoon and flower throughout the night, after which they die.

The Baobab trees store around 100,000 litres of water even in harsh drought conditions, it gathers in the spongy centre of the trunk, this makes them a vital source of water in dry regions. The fruit which grows on the end of long stems, can supply vitamins, minerals such as magnesium, potassium, iron and zinc and can help reduce inflammation, the powder can balance blood sugar levels. Leaves contain calcium and proteins that can be digested easily. Seeds are high in fibre, fat, calcium and iron. There are numerous other benefits too.

No wonder the Baobab is known as the tree of life!

## Fonkoi Kunda Lower Basic School

A new headmaster... all the schools seem to have had a change of staff. We have supplied all the schools we support with exercise books as they receive none, plus pens and pencils etc., We could see that the blackboards needed attention, so these are being done as I write this. The school seemed well organized.

The cooks were in the kitchens busy preparing lunch when we arrived, it was good to see that they are getting a regular supply now of rice and oil, so that is a great improvement.



We could see that in the school garden that the reservoir to store water had a big crack in it so they were unable to use it, so we are having this repaired as it is so important to them. The onions in the garden won't be ready till the next term and they are almost out them, 2 sacks will keep them going till then...so the next time we went to the market in the nearest town Soma we got some for them



**Si-Kunda Market Place** is a vital part of the community and was definitely worth creating.

Visitors to the market can find an array of colourful stalls filled with fruits, vegetables, and other locally grown produce.

The market is not just a place for buying and selling goods but also a space where people come together to share news, stories, and the latest happenings in the village, it is shady and has plenty of places to sit and chat.



## Sareh Maudu Water Project

Sareh Maudu is a few miles from Si-Kunda, on the far side of Soma town. For the last 7 months there has been no water, the pump for the borehole had broken and the people in this area have really struggled fetching water from a long distance. Which meant their goats and donkeys have also been suffering too as they really struggled to get water for them.



They appealed to Sankung having heard of us, so we have now repaired the pump. We went to visit them on 8<sup>th</sup> February, and they were ecstatic, the women were singing and dancing when we arrived and took us to see the pump.

The chief Alikilo of the region was there too, and you could see how much it meant to them all. The women and children kept breaking out into dance they said they were so happy!

**Katakilly's garden** – this is Abdou's mother, she is rightly proud of all her hard work, she has



17 plots of onions, plus lots of other produce.

Here she is with her little granddaughter, Abdou and Aisha's first child, Zaineab.



## Jabisa Lower Basic School

Well, this was the day that reaffirmed to me why we continue to do what we do. Kumbah the headmistress made us so welcome as did all the staff, the pupils and the women's committee. They have very little but work so hard to make the most of what they have. What an amazing headmistress, so much energy and passion for her school, it was obvious how it was rubbing off on her staff and pupils, they all love her.

They have to combine Grade 1 and 2, and also the ECD (early child development) classes are combined as they are not given enough staff to have a teacher for each. Class grades 3 – 6 do have a teacher for each class. We all crowded into the headmistress's small office, with speeches by the deputy first of all, then another couple of teachers, the head of the women's committee then spoke as did the headmistress. They all spoke glowingly of Kumbah, she is certainly a very caring clever lady. The picture on the right is the teaching staff.



The gardens are just amazing, the extra fencing they are pleased with that we had done recently. They are growing so much and have a banana and orange tree area. The far end of the garden cannot be reached by hoses, so they really need another tap in that area. We have installed extra, but another would be welcomed. A teacher who was knowledgeable about most things going on at the school said how important it was that the children learn about agriculture at an early age. The gardens are immaculate, and they are taught how to take care of them and share the responsibility of the progress, The parents lend a hand too. Any surplus is taken to Soma to sell, Gloz asked how they got there to take them, he said by foot... that is miles away. The schools' needs are many as they receive little help

from elsewhere, they live so far from any town or road. Once you leave the road it is 20 minutes in a car on rough sandy dirt tracks through the bush, you wonder if you are going to get there with the vehicle in one piece, somehow we did. But most people who are from the village would have to walk if they don't have a bike, its many miles to the nearest town. There are frequent bush fires now, and this can make it a more hazardous a journey, as it can in the rainy season when the village often gets cut off completely.

We delivered large mats for the ECD classes, stationary, blackboard chalk and two large boxes of first aid supplies.





Their biggest priority would be to convert a small building in the school grounds to be a dining area for the children to have lunch. We want to renovate and extend it, then tile the floor. Currently the children sit on the ground outside to eat, not ideal. Especially when it is like it was when we were there, very dusty and windy, or in the rainy season it would be impossible.

So, we are in the process of finding out how much this will be and hopefully this will be our next project, more news on that next time.

**Back from upcountry** we visit Abdou's compound, he is working At Five Star Security company as head of HR.

Abdou and Ismaila's wives cooked us a lovely meal... Gloz is pretending to help and look useful ... 😊



**Thankyou to you all for your continued support, it all goes towards helping us to do all of this and more!!**



Pictures from the village of Si-Kunda and surrounding areas



Baobabs in Medina Fonkoi village



Collecting firewood



Village shop

Our feathered friend  
on the right kept Gwyn  
awake at night! 😊



For more information about our charity, checkout the website: [www.friendsofsikunda.org](http://www.friendsofsikunda.org)  
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