

Friends of Si-Kunda

Newsletter no.42

July 2024



Chairs Report

July already, and the sun is shining! Since the last newsletter in January we have had another trip to Gambia, this time I was accompanied by my husband Gwyn, and for the very first time our granddaughter Daisy. Since she was very young, she has always shown an interest in what the charity has been doing so this time she went to see for herself. It was lovely for us to show her some of what the charity has been doing for the past 25 years or so; she took it all in her stride, helping out wherever she could and looks forward to going again. Anna, who worked for us as a schoolteacher at Si-Kunda School until last year now manages a drama group. Fortunately for us while we were in Si-Kunda she had organised an entertainments evening of music dance and drama, some students travelling quite a distance to attend. It was held in the school grounds and attended by many, I have never seen anything quite like it in Si-Kunda before so we were very lucky. This also coincided with a dance programme organised by the ladies in the village which was great fun for all, they also cooked a lovely meal of chicken yassa and rice for the compound we stay in to complete a wonderful evening.



We took a large supply of children's knitted clothing, and dozens of knitted hats... these were gratefully received by adults and children alike, all taking great delight in wearing them. We took them to Medina Fonkoi and Fonkoi Kunda villages, with the remainder distributed in Si-Kunda. Thank you so much to the ladies who spent so much of their time knitting them!

When travelling through the bush to Fonkoi Kunda school we saw what must have been at least a hundred baboons come charging across our path in front of us, some were just huge, some swinging through the trees... lovely for us to see such a sight but we could totally understand how the villagers dread them as they can do so much damage to their vegetable allotments and crops. Some now keep dogs hoping they will bark and scare them away if monkeys or baboons do decide to go near!



Enjoy the sunshine! Thank you all again for all your support! Kind regards, [Sue](#)

Si-Kunda School Update..

Well, this update starts with really good news, the school has now been approved for registration, which means they can apply for a grant from the government. We have been told that those who approved it found the school to be very well run and well equipped. New government owned schools usually start with just with a temporary building for classrooms and very little if any materials, so this is off to a very good start. We are so pleased, and that is down to everyone who has supported us all these years enabling us to keep the school open. We will continue to support the school as this is what the village and local education department want, though of course we are no longer responsible for it nor the salaries and overall management. As of writing there are now 200 pupils, the nursery classes take place in the morning, then the Grade one classes are in the afternoon from 1pm until 6pm. We have just provided the headmaster Mr Cham with a desk and chair, and also a bicycle so that he doesn't have to walk from Soma town to get there in the mornings! The first delivery of food since the handover arrived in February for school lunches, and I am really pleased to say that they have received deliveries since. We hope this will continue as up to February we had been providing the supplies ourselves so obviously this releases those funds for us to use in other ways.



On our last visit we took laminated A4 size photographs of the school past and present and some of staff and students, also a laminated history of the school from when it started until the present day, along with posters of the members of the SMC (School Management committee). The staff and committees were very happy to receive them for the school, particularly the history.

We have recently had all the blackboards repainted.

We have just heard that an American NGO (non-government organisation) has offered some sponsorship for some children in the school, again recognition for the school is really helping !

Soma Hospital

One evening a little boy was brought to Sankung while we were all sitting chatting outside. Apparently, he had been running and hit a tree, he had initially knocked himself out and was clearly concussed so accompanied by his mother and Sankung we went to the nearest hospital which is in Soma town a few miles away.

When waiting outside the room while he was being seen, I heard my name being shouted from down the corridor, and it was Lamarama... he is an ex student of ours and has worked in the hospital laboratory for quite a few years now since completing his education. Never one to miss an opportunity he asked me to go to the laboratory with him, it transpired that they were desperate for some tables and some height adjustable swivel chairs. After taking some details from Lamarama, I then went back to find that the little boy was much improved and being discharged after receiving some treatment. Certainly, the next day when I saw him he was running around quite happily in Si-Kunda!

During subsequent conversations we found that the hospital badly needed some forceps and some other small instruments, so several boxes of these have been purchased and delivered along with seven chairs and two tables. Two of the chairs will be used in the administration office.



Vegetable and Fruit Gardens

The Women's gardens in Si-Kunda and Medina Fonkoi are producing large crops of vegetables. Both gardens continue to improve every year! We have just supplied some fencing to replace a small area that had broken in Si-Kunda's garden.

Seedlings were supplied to both villages early in the season to supplement those that the women had already, and as in previous years they are selling any surplus produce in Si-Kunda village market, or for the women of Medina in the town of Soma.



The schools that we support also have good vegetable gardens, like this picture below right. These are so very important as not all the schools are receiving help with food supplies for the children's lunches. The children are encouraged to help with tending the gardens too!



Jabisa Village School



We received a wonderful welcome, the impression is given of being a very happy school. The teachers and headmaster are very dedicated, and although the school is very far from any road and receives little outside help, they certainly make the most of what they have. The garden and extended gardens were full of vegetables and fruit. The pump needed some minor repairs – nuts and bolts, and a T piece needed for the tap in the garden so they can run two hoses from one tap (*this has since been done*). We took with us a supply of exercise books, footballs, stationary including pens and pencils.

The students performed a play for us, then there were songs, the whole performance being finished with a young boy giving a speech on behalf of the school, which was very moving for everyone. We supply them twice a year with as much as we can regarding stationary, and also continue help with seedlings for the gardens. Sankung keeps regular contact with the headmaster to keep us updated on the school's progress.



Sulayman .. In May Sulayman started a Solar and Electrical Installation course at The Sterling Technical Training Centre which he is really enjoying. Early July he is going away on a practical as part of his course.

Fortunately, alongside this he is still able to continue playing football for a Gambia 2nd division team, we went to watch his team play on our last visit at a football stadium in Serrukunda.



Opi ..

This is Opi on a field trip to Guinea Bissau. Opi is now going to start writing up his project research based on crops. When he went on this trip, Opi went to places that included a seed store, Agro forestry centre, Horticultural Centre, Cashew production centre, and many others, he really enjoyed the whole experience. His chosen topic is “The effects of different organic manures, ie cow, goat, sheep, on the growth and yield on bitter tomato”. The bitter tomato is used in Gambian cooking (and delicious it is too!)

Paseedy .. Paseedy has gained A's in all his semester results for the Spring

term in his first year at Uni! In June, Paseedy heard that he his application for an internship had been successful, and has been accepted with the Government Public Health Department in Illinois, USA. Paseedy is loving his time at university and is as ever enthusiastic about all he does and now has a parttime job on the campus to help with his expenses. His achievements to date are impressive, we look forward to seeing what is next!

Afanseedy .. Afanseedy has now gained a place in September at college to begin the course for his HTC (Higher Teachers Certificate), well done Afanseedy!

My first trip to The Gambia by Daisy Jones



My 10 days in Gambia was a hot ten days but nevertheless one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life. I didn't prepare because I already had a good idea of what life in Gambia would look like, however with saying that I also learnt so much; being there was completely different to the picture I painted in my head. I'm not going to lie; I thought that people would be quite reserved when meeting them, but I quickly found that it was the complete opposite and felt like a celebrity more than anything. It felt like a home away from home... I even got proposed to 4 times! 😊

The way of living is obviously very different to the UK, no one ever complained, they do what they need to do but they have fun doing it, at least this is how it appeared to me. The smallest and most boring or difficult of tasks becomes a fun one, no matter what it is. I miss the spirit of



everyone in The Gambia. I didn't expect to make such close friends either but that's the part I loved the most. Sankung's son, Omar, was such a lovely person and welcomed me into the home with open arms. We had so many insightful conversations, how life is in the UK compared to Gambia, Music, religion, the list goes on Suwadou is also another I am so very pleased to have met, I was a little nervous to meet her, Grandma Sue had told me she can be a little reserved and quiet, but I never saw that side to her. I got on so well with her and I loved being seen as a sister, which she still calls me! We cooked together she painted my nails and did my makeup and we bonded over the girly things she would've never experienced. I still talk to them both nearly every day and they'll always be close to me. Everyone in the village were always seen with a smile on their face and every conversation ended in laughter. I loved being in the village... even though I couldn't get the hang of the greeting, they still tried their best to understand what I was saying and vice versa.

My all-time favourite place in the world is the Women's Gardens. I loved how safe I felt there and how it was a safe space for all the women and children. It was such a beautiful place to be and seeing all the women do what they do and the children helping was so lovely as you would never see that in the UK.

I know that the charity has done a lot for the people in The Gambia, as I've had my part in it but being out there and seeing what good the charity has done is very rewarding. When visiting the schools, we were always met with the children welcoming us and clapping for us. Jabisa school was a particular favourite of mine as they even put on a play for us upon our arrival. Seeing their schools put into perspective how lucky we are in the UK, and I am so grateful for being able to experience what it is like there. You can tell that they all love attending school and being able to learn, even if they don't have all of the supplies that are necessary, but they were definitely very excited over the footballs that we bought! Even if it was the smallest thing we gave them, they were all so grateful for it. We had lollipops to give out to people in the village and they all loved them... although they all gave them to me to open as they couldn't but if I'm being honest, I had to try my hardest because neither could !!! When we gave out hats, jumpers and teddies, everyone jumped on me to get one because they were so excited and that put into perspective for me how little they do have and how much everything we give them is always unbelievably appreciated. Everything that the charity does, whether it's big or small, makes such a difference to the people that the charity supports and how thankful everyone is to have the charity.

Overall, I have no words to explain the love I felt during my time in the Gambia.



Visiting the schools, the village, meeting everyone in Sankung's family and anyone along the way, there wasn't a moment I didn't have a smile on my face. I had the best time, and to spend 10 days with my grandparents was... interesting to say the least but we were always laughing, I wish I could show what I wrote in Grandma Sue's diary but she told me that I can't mention anything about her in my entry to the newsletter, she'll just get embarrassed. I also wish that everyone reading this could have seen my Grandad being carried by two men into a boat, me and Grandma were in stitches, and it was definitely a highlight of the trip;
I'm laughing about it just writing this!

My heart was and still is incredibly full since being there in February and am already looking forward to my next trip...whenever that may be!! *Daisy*



This photograph shows some flowers on one of the banana trees in Jabisa school garden.

Once the flowers bloom it then takes 3-5 months for the fruits to develop.

For more information about our charity, checkout the website: www.friendsosikunda.org
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