

FRIENDS OF BOAT VISIT TO THE GAMBIA
December 2012

In early December a group of eleven Friends of BOAT (FOB) made a private visit to The Gambia to learn more about the country, its people, and its agriculture, as well as to make contact with former trainees who had attended the 6 week BOAT “Institutional Management and Business Planning – International” residential course at Bicton College. We also wanted to get some sun!

The Gambia is a small country of 1.85m people surrounded by Senegal and dominated by the River Gambia which flows East-West through its entire length. The rainy season is from June to September when the predominant crop is groundnut. Much of the year is dry and there is a growing use of groundwater supplies for dry season irrigation for vegetable production and some farmers, with the help of loans, are making use of solar energy to pump water from wells and boreholes. Tourism is a major contributor to the economy.

Our one week FOB visit itinerary was developed with the help of Burang Danjo (Project Manager, Capacity Building & Governance) and Paul Joof (GiG) both of whom worked for Concern Universal (CU), Gambia and who both attended the 2011 Bicton course. CU also helped by allowing us to hire two 4WD vehicles and lending us the services of Samuel Demba (Production Manager) as a guide.

Concern Universal, an international NGO, is involved in a range of projects to make lasting improvements to food security and sustainable livelihoods. In The Gambia, CU works through 8-10 partner organisations particularly concentrating on capacity building in technical, financial and M&E areas. Umbrella groups now focus on Disaster Risk Reduction, Community Preparation & Resilience, and Improved Livelihoods. It has also established a horticultural business “Gambia is Good - GiG” as a market outlet and distribution channel for small scale Gambian farmers who are growing a wide range of vegetables including onions, tomatoes, sweet and hot peppers, aubergines and cabbage as well as some fruits. Much of this produce is collected by GiG for sale to tourist hotels along the coast and other urban centres. GiG is now linked commercially with Haygrove UK.

After briefing by CU in Banjul, we took a ferry across the 3-mile wide mouth of the Gambia River to the North Bank where we visited a number of small irrigated gardens on our way to our main objective, the National Agricultural Training Centre (NATC) at Njawara established with his own funds in 1990 by Badara Jobe (a trainee on our 1995 BOAT course) to help his village. He was determined to change the Gambian mindset of “Farming = Failure” and to reverse urban drift. Although Badara has recently retired as its Director, his wife Sainabou (2004 course) continues on the staff. Many of the small farmers we visited had received training at the NATC which has received support from a number of NGOs and USAID over the years and which is presently assisted by two VSOs. The students are residential and spend six months at the institute interspersed with three months practical training in their own villages. The broad based course includes soil fertility management, horticultural and small animal husbandry, beekeeping and basic accounting. The training has been accredited with changing dry season vegetable production from “womens’ work” to serious agriculture undertaken by men and women. The NATC is acknowledged as a leading farmer training institution in The Gambia with more than 1,500 students from over 300 villages completing the course, and Badara’s personal efforts have been recognised by the award of “Promising International Business Entrepreneur” by the prestigious World Bank Ashoka Society.

Our tour of the North Bank included a visit to Juffureh Village, reputed ancestral home of Kunta Kinte of Alex Haley’s “Roots” book, as well as the Slave Museum at Albreda. Continuing on to Farafenni, we re-crossed the River Gambia at Bambatenda and travelled along the South Bank visiting the Dumbutu Village Project, a communal garden for 135 mainly women established with the support of the Woodbury Salterton-Dumbutu Link, a charity based in East Devon, and with training in organisation and vegetable growing delivered by CU.

Our final visit was to the GiG operated Sifoe Kafo Farm, 33km from Serrekunda, the commercial capital, and close to Brikama. This is a demonstration, training and research unit for growing vegetables, as well as demonstrating the use of solar energy for pumping water, cooking and biogas. Sifoe Farm is also the home of Gambia's Bee Keeping Association.

Our most grateful thanks go to Burang Danjo, Paul Joof and the Director and staff of Concern Universal for their excellent organisation, assistance and most generous hospitality, as well as to Badara, Sainabou and staff at the NATC for showing us their work, looking after us and organising a most wonderful evening of traditional village drumming. A memorable week much enjoyed by all of our group.

Michael Pash and David Wendover.
January 2013.



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- 1 Badara Jobe holding his 1995 BOAT Bicton course Certificate
- 2 A smallholder farmer trained at Njawara NATC
- 3 The Friends of BOAT group with Concern Universal colleagues at their HQ in Banjul
- 4 Badara beside the Njawara NATC lake