

Friends of Si-Kunda

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Chairs Report

- Referring to the little girl and the red hat in the photograph on the front page, a friend said ... “Looks like fashion choices are universally difficult to get right!” I guess she preferred the white ones. These beanies are hugely popular by children and adults alike and knitted for us to take on trips.

We have recently returned from The Gambia, another successful trip..... it all went to plan, we can't always say that! Gloz, Gary and I travelled to Gambia on 6th January, and we were pleased to be greeted on arrival with a wonderful meal of Chicken Yassa cooked by Oumie. Once settled in we caught up with Sankung's family, always a joy to see the children again .. some grown up now of course as it's a long time since we first met Sankung and his family, 30 years ago.



Before going upcountry to Si-Kunda we managed to get together with a few of our current students along with Lamin who was also on a visit to progress his projects. We all went out together for lunch, not something they normally do, so a treat for us all to be together, and share news.

Left to right: Sulayman, Suwado, Lamin, Aminata, Opi and Omar

Sulayman had some exciting news to tell us .. he had been invited to go abroad for a 6-month period football training, and was leaving a few days

later, we are looking forward to hearing about his experiences! His job is safe to come back too so he was very happy! Suwado is now in Grade 11, Aminata is in Nursery Grade3 and loving school earning an excellent school report end of last term. Opi is in his first year at university, for his BSc in Agricultural Economics. He was sworn in as an executive student leader on 25th January, there are 900 + students and 21 of those were chosen to be student representatives for the year. He hopes to get on the council again next year too! Omar is enjoying his first of two years at the Management Development Institute in the Department of Banking & Finance.



The following day we travelled to Si-Kunda, it was much hotter upcountry, and very humid. A busy few days was spent visiting schools in Sikunda, Fonkoi Kunda and Jabisa villages, the hospital in Soma, and the women's gardens we created in Medina Fonkoi and Si-Kunda. It was great to see the new school buildings in Si-Kunda and to see how happy the staff and children are. There is still more to be done, but great progress is being made. We have provided exercise books and school materials as always to Sikunda, Fonkoi Kunda and Jabisa schools over the last year. Our nights can be quite noisy, there were a lot of goats and donkeys in the compound where we stay and they do like to be quite vocal at times, last year it was the cockerels! 😊 We sit outside in the evenings drinking Ataya tea, chatting and just enjoying the atmosphere, there is always someone brewing Ataya ... we never refuse! Many thanks again to you all for your ongoing support, whether by donations, taking part in the Bonus Ball, knitting hats, supplies for schools, fund raising and so much more, thankyou!! Regards, Sue

Water Project

Sarreh Maudou, Soma

As reported in the last newsletter we were in the middle of constructing a new borehole. It was built with proceeds from donations given in memory of Marje and has now been completed. The community are so happy with it, it has made an enormous difference to them, making life just a little easier. This photo shows just some of the ladies who are making use of it.



Jabisa Village School

This is the first time we have been able to visit the school since the dining room was completed and we arrived just as the children were finishing their lunch, it was great to see it in use and being well looked after! We had quite a few school supplies with us for the school and went to see the school garden which is flourishing. They could really do with another water tap at the far end, so we are investigating that and will get that done.



Si-Kunda Village

This is Suwado, Sankung's mother. She loves to sit and sew in the afternoons, so Gloz made sure she has plenty of silks, cottons and a small pair of scissors to last her a long time yet!



Here below is a little shop in the village, it sells cooking oil, rice, and a few other basics. Outside of it is what is called a Bantaba, which is a meeting place where people will sit and chat, brew Ataya, and chat some more. Because the existing seating was falling apart we brought some cement, and while we were there some of those that use it made 90 blocks, which will be dried for two weeks then laid, and tiles will be put on top



Buying and selling at the Market Place in the centre of the village, every day this market is used, a great asset for the village



The boys just love football - Jacob gave us some football shirts and kits to take with us, and here are some of them just about to start their game. They play in bare feet but that doesn't stop them !

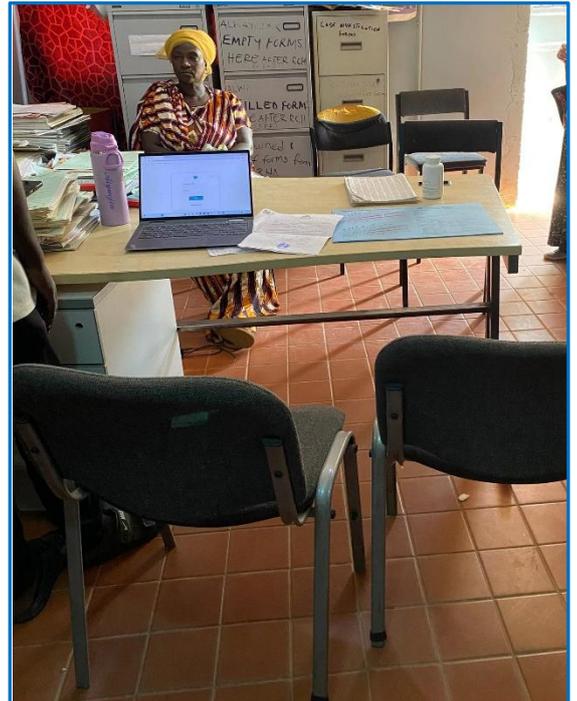


Our next projects....

Soma Hospital

Over the past few months, we have provided more chairs for the laboratory, and also the chairs for the Maternity Clinic as they had none for the ladies waiting for their appointments. Also buckets and cleaning materials which were needed in the outpatients' areas. On this visit we discussed the need for toilets in the A&E, outpatients and laboratory area of the school. There is just one toilet for patients and one for staff to cover all these areas, both are in a bad state of repair, and the doors falling off. Totally inadequate, unhygienic and they are in desperate need. So this will be our next project once we have the costs – we are investigating exactly what the need is – we are at the moment thinking about repairing the two they have and building a new block of toilets, but until it has all been checked out and quoted we will have to wait to decide what is the best course of action.

More on this in the next newsletter.



Friendship Gardens - Si-Kunda



The women's gardens are doing really well as always, seedlings have all been transplanted and in another month it will look a very different place once everything is shooting up, it always amazes us how quickly everything grows once established.

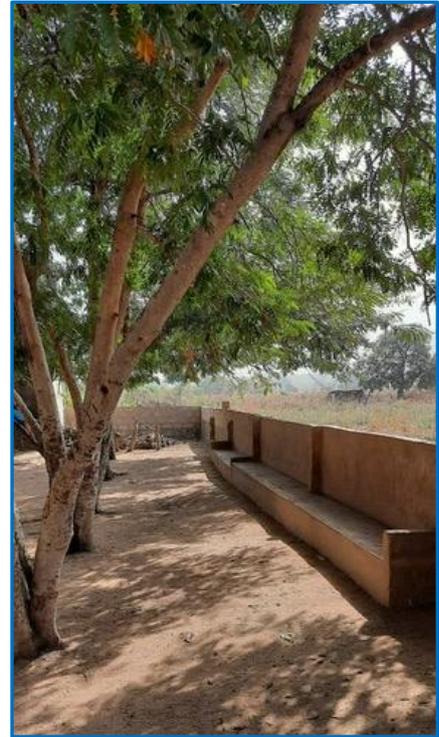
Although all six wells have water, it must be hauled up with buckets or with any container they have as unfortunately the borehole needs attention, which means the taps are unusable. The borehole was installed in 2016, but the pump seems to have given up and there may be further issues. Until it has been checked out, we won't know. So, it has now been arranged for the company that installs these to come and investigate, then hopefully we can get this repaired. The organization that had this put in unfortunately have no contact once it has been installed.

Medina Fonkoi Village Gardens Alongside all the usual vegetables a small orchard of different varieties of orange trees was planted last year which will sell well once in fruit later in the year.

Fonkoi Kunda Village School

This school now has 241 pupils of an increase of 35 since last year. New headmaster Abdoulie we knew from when he was a young teacher at Toniataba school in 2004, a very nice man, with energy and enthusiasm. The school gardens are very good and the tank we replaced is a godsend so that they can use it to fill up the reservoir with a tap, they could do with a hose to go to the other reservoir then they could utilise more space that is available. Lots of seedling beds, and lots of varieties of vegetables are growing.

Their top priority is to have a long low table made from blocks and tiled on top, to go in front of the seating area they have for their pupils at lunchtime. Also, a “lean-to” or pavilion roof to go over the top – another quote is forthcoming.



Latest update on Si-kunda School

The six classrooms are built and in use, (Nursery 1,2 and 3, Grades 1,2 and 3) A toilet block for pupils, along with teachers’ quarters for five teachers, each having a bedsit room with an outside toilet and small backyard are almost completed. These have all been built by a Dutch charity since we were able to handover the responsibility for the school to the government. The future of the school is now secure and we are so happy that the headmistress and staff seem very dedicated to do the best they can. The classrooms look great all having adequate desks & chairs for the children and blackboards. The teachers however didn’t have chairs, so we have sorted that out and some storage as they had none. It isn’t enough but we are waiting to see if anything else is forthcoming when the official handover to the village is made in February. There is still a lot they need, but going forward we will continue to support them as and whenever we can, we have a long history with this school and feel very happy with how it is evolving.

