



The Gambia: A trustee's perspective

by Alan Davies

As new Trustees, Kate French and I wanted to see at first hand how Village Aid's activities support rural communities



in West Africa. So - armed with the invaluable Rough Guide and a mountain of anti-malaria medication - we were excited to have the opportunity last month to spend a week in The Gambia, visiting people and projects. And it did not disappoint!

The Gambia has a lot going for it: relative peace and stability; low incidence of HIV/AIDS in comparison to other parts of Africa; fertile land especially around the river; and an emerging tourist industry based around the beautiful Atlantic coastline and stunning bird and animal life across the country. But none of this can disguise the crushing and deep-seated poverty which we and others are trying to address. Few places 'up-country' have reliably clean water, sanitation, electricity, sufficient food or basics such as medicines, school books or tools. This really is a subsistence economy - people barely get by.

In common with our work in other parts of the region, Village Aid - through its local partner organisation AVISU (The Agency for Village Support) - funds and assists in three important areas: literacy, economic empowerment through loans/micro credit schemes, and village agriculture projects. These are aimed mainly at women and girls, whose lot is particularly tough out there. We were privileged to be able to stay in their compounds, to meet and talk with a wide range of people, and learn how our work is having a real impact on their everyday lives.

So what were the highlights? Well for me, they revolve around the Gambian people themselves. They have a natural grace, dignity, warmth, unquenchable good humour and indomitable spirit - beautifully expressed in the social drama which is very much part of village life. It was wonderful to see young and old alike respond so positively to our interest and concern. And it is humbling to know that through Village Aid's efforts we are able to make a real difference - through better diet, labour-saving devices, improved literacy and the opportunity for the more enterprising to start a small business. Everything we do is based on the need to be sustainable, so from the needs we witnessed we returned buzzing with ideas to improve the capacity and capability of AVISU's Board and staff; and understanding how best to focus our awareness and fund raising within the UK. With your help we shall make it happen and bring our ambitions for Village Aid's work in The Gambia to fruition. ■

2008 Spring Newsletter

Christmas appeal

A big thank you to all of our generous supporters who gave to our Christmas Appeal in aid of orphans in Sierra Leone. We managed to raise **£1500!**

From the Autumn bulletin we also found a project partner for ADA in Nigeria whose generosity will ensure that Agnes and her team have a steady income each month, so they can plan effectively.

If you are interested in becoming a project partner, please get in touch.

Photography exhibition

The many trips that Village Aid employees, trustees and friends have made to our projects have resulted in a large library



of photographs. With a picture telling a thousand words, what better way to spread the Village Aid story than with a photography exhibition?

Our first appearance will be in conjunction with the Derby Spring holiday drama academy final performance.

19.00hrs, 11 April 2008 at St Benedict School, Duffield Road, Derby

Let us know if you are interested in hosting your own exhibition.

Sierra Leone: YAPAD and SLYEO

Village Aid has been working in Sierra Leone since 1991 and now works in direct partnership with two organisations – SLYEO (Sierra Leone Youth Empowerment Organisation) and YAPAD (Youth Alliance for Peace and Development).

With both of these organisations, Village Aid is working to improve the situation faced by young people across the country, many of whom are severely traumatised by their experiences in

the civil war that lasted from 1990 to 2000. Employment and literacy levels for young people in Sierra Leone are amongst the lowest in the world. These problems are now recognised as major obstacles to democratic development in the country.

Krystle Lai, YAPAD's current VSO Advocacy advisor has written the following article on YAPAD's work.



Sierra Leone has now been at peace for over five years, and the last year has witnessed a peaceful election and the swearing in of Ernest Bai Koroma, of the All Peoples Congress, as the new President. It is important that the root causes of the past civil conflict continue to be addressed to avoid a reoccurrence of the violence, images of which are still conjured up by this small West African nation.

Youth Alliance for Peace and Development (YAPAD) established in

2000 is an umbrella organisation that works with over 45 youth agencies across Sierra Leone to do exactly that. The essence of our work is captured by our motto: to promote peace through youth empowerment.

Youth empowerment is a complex and difficult process. YAPAD, with support from Village Aid, is empowering young people through youth serving agencies in Sierra Leone by implementing a three-year advocacy programme. As part of this programme, YAPAD promotes skills sharing and cooperation among member organisations and encourages them to network and learn from each other. YAPAD also offers help to build the capacity of alliance members, mainly in the areas of project management and advocacy technique. The first act of this three year programme was a five day Advocacy Training Workshop, organised by YAPAD, to which all alliance members were invited.

YAPAD implements its strategy through its member organisations, placed in communities across

Sierra Leone. These member organisations work with people in a more direct relationship than YAPAD itself. This implementation strategy allows YAPAD to support various communities to implement a wide range of campaigns on issues such as gender based violence, inheritance rights, HIV & AIDS, and inclusion of differently-abled people into mainstream society.

The photograph on the opposite page is one of YAPAD's implementing partners: Young Women In Need of Development (YWIND). Based in Kono, YWIND actively engages and empowers young women to take a stand against HIV & AIDS. To date, Village Aid has helped YAPAD support fifteen member organisations, including YWIND, to implement advocacy campaigns in eight out of the fourteen districts in Sierra Leone.

by Krystle Lai



Young Women in Need of Development (YWIND) making a stand against HIV and AIDS

Easter appeal - Vision for the blind, Sierra Leone

Over the last 12 months Village Aid has made important new friends in Sierra Leone. The organisation Vision for the Blind is a self help group of resourceful and imaginative blind people, determined to prove that people with disabilities can make a vital contribution to the future of their country.

Fighting against prejudice and the assumption that they cannot do or even think for themselves, this great group of people are organising support for the many thousands of isolated blind youngsters and adults trapped by poverty and lack of employment.

Village Aid is seeking ways in which we can give them meaningful support, both to run their office and pay one or two staff, as well as providing livelihoods

training in soap making, craftwork and business for people who lose their sight. Our initial target for an Easter appeal is simply to raise enough money to

send them a small grant of less than £5000. If you would like to help Vision for the Blind through Village Aid please complete the enclosed form. ■



Members of Vision for the blind in Sierra Leone support thousands of other youngsters and adults

Cameroon: Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association

Village Aid started to work with the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) in 1997.

Traditional Mbororo society suffers severe persecution at the hands of state institutions, and is badly equipped to cope with the rapid pace of change which is affecting all of Africa. MBOSCUDA and Village Aid work in more than

30 remote mountain communities, helping to integrate Mbororo people into wider society, whilst supporting the development of local institutions which can defend local interests and drive local development efforts.

The story below of Robert Fon is a truly inspiring read.

Men and women of honour – challenging injustice and corruption in Cameroon

by Nuhu Salihu

A lawyer on a motorbike (and wellington boots!), braving the bad roads to remote villages to meet his clients is not a common sight! The Bar Association queried that barrister Robert Fon's involvement with a "para-legal" programme was bringing the profession into disrepute. He contended that he had broken no law, committed no crime and (if his Dad's view is taken into consideration) committed no sin either.

Upon graduation from school Robert Fon knew he wanted to become a lawyer. His father thought his chosen profession was a "sin" and advised him to become a priest instead so he could "do good to/for other people". He followed his dream but also his father's advice "to avoid sin". Robert Fon is a practising lawyer in North West Cameroon where Village AiD works. His clients are mainly Mbororo cattle herders. In a country renowned for corruption

and human rights violations Robert's career choice and work as a human rights advocate is full of interesting stories. His main clients, the Mbororo, are used to "quick fix" solutions often using bribes to address their problems. On the other hand corruption is endemic within Cameroonian society, including the judiciary, so what looks like a solution or a just verdict today quickly turns out to be a temporal or transient affair.

"government officials from several departments colluded with each other to seize 50 cows from his herd"

Sometimes the clients or victims of human rights abuses themselves undermine the efforts of MBOSCUDA and Robert Fon to get justice.

Robert recounts an interesting experience where some Mbororo clients decided to get another lawyer on a case he was handling for them without consulting him. The lawyer whom they had paid failed to turn up in court on the day to defend them! In the end it was Robert who was there to defend them. The clients later confessed that they opted for another lawyer because Robert did not demand huge legal fees before taking up their case! For them

expensive fees meant that a lawyer is likely to be a strong advocate for their case. In another case, a victim was accused of borrowing £50,000 from a wealthy cattle rancher and tea farmer, who was known for using corrupt government officials to incriminate and extort money, cattle and land from Mbororo people. To the surprise of all, the matter was taken to court and judgement passed in favour of the victim, who remarked:

"I was so scared at the beginning that I almost fled. I did not believe that any lawyer could defend me against such a wealthy and influential man!"

More recently Abdullahi Mohamadou and his family became victims of a massive racket where government officials from several departments colluded with each other to seize 50 cows from his herd. He got support to follow up the matter legally. However, 18 cows that have been recovered so far have not been handed back to him and one government official who has requested anonymity is of the opinion that the same tycoon is advising the courts not to hand over the cattle because doing so will give MBOSCUDA the courage to challenge

...continued

future cases.

Despite these set backs, attempts to bribe or buy-off Robert Fon and threats thrown at him and staff of MBOSCUA, the good work continues. Robert's work and integrity has earned him the respect of the Mbororo community, the envy of colleagues and helped to inspire a generation of Mbororo students enrolling to study law to become the future "Robert Fons". ■



An introduction to Maggie – the new Finance and Admin officer in YOWE

Name: Maggie Doku

Role: Finance and Admin Officer

Organisation: YOWE, Ghana

How many people work for YOWE? 6

What does Yowe do? YOWE has been working in over 20 rural communities in both Manya and Yilo Krobo districts for the past eight years. The bedrock of YOWE's work is REFLECT. This is a methodology that allows people to use literacy as a tool for the analysis of their development needs and initiate actions. Micro credit support is usually provided to all participants of REFLECT activities who have demonstrated sufficient preparedness to make judicious use of the credit after undergoing the requisite training.

How many people have YOWE given credit to?

364 people from 18 communities in 2 districts

What is the current repayment rate? 82%

What is the interest rate? 20% for both long and short term beneficiaries

How many people default? Currently there are 62 defaulters listed

Why do people default on their loans? One major factor that contributes to loan default is over concentration on farming. Despite the variety of



training provided to recipients to help diversify their income sources, they still fear the risk in diversification and keep putting the majority of their loan into crop farming. In some instances, the rain fails them. In the case of a good harvest, low prices deny them enough income to ensure prompt repayment.

Also, some beneficiaries do not put their loans into productive ventures, some use the money for education, health, clothing, litigation and disputes and therefore little income is realised to repay the loan.

Where is the YOWE office? YOWE is located in a relatively quiet environment in amongst residential houses. We share our boundary with an Apostolic church. We have many visitors every day. ■

Jo puts the FUN back into FUNdraising!!

FOCUS ON: Volunteering

We have many dedicated volunteers who help us in a variety of ways. In this bulletin, we'd like to introduce you to Mary...

Mary Wren



I have been a volunteer at Village Aid for 18 months. I became a volunteer after seeing a Village Aid stand at the Bakewell

show, and chatting to Sue, who was manning the stand. I discovered that she was a volunteer and some of her enthusiasm for Village Aid's work in West Africa brushed off on me.

I have been interested in the lives and problems of people in Africa since spending 15 months nursing in Kenya as a VSO volunteer more years ago than I care to recall. I am now retired and I

like the idea of again being involved, albeit in a very small way, in helping some of the people of Africa to better their way of life.

So, what does a volunteer do? The answer is anything they are capable of doing. I usually spend an afternoon a week in the office doing clerical tasks such as photocopying and writing letters. It is particularly busy when a mail shot takes place - a case of all hands on deck stuffing envelopes. I make myself useful providing cups of tea for the workers and even occasionally go round with the Hoover! (Village aid does not employ a cleaner, so as to keep down costs). I also sometimes help with the catering at social and fundraising events.

I enjoy the time I spend at Village Aid and am always made to feel welcome and valued as part of the team. ■

“If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a room with a mosquito”

African proverb

Jo Williams - Village Aid's donor development manager - needs your help

I've now been working with Village Aid for three months. As I've got to know more about Village Aid and the work our partners are doing on the ground I'm more motivated than ever to raise money for such a great cause, but I need your help!! There are many opportunities in which you can get involved, by either taking part or simply attending one of the events on the back page.

You CAN make a difference. If you are already supporting Village Aid, you believe in what we do. With a little thought you most probably know someone else who would also be



interested in supporting Village Aid – whether by signing up as a regular donor (please use the enclosed flier) or getting involved in one of the ways shown on the opposite page...

Ways you can help

Corporate partnership opportunities

Do you know, or work for, a company that may be interested in partnering Village Aid? From choosing Village Aid as the Charity of the year, to sponsoring an event or newsletter, or setting up a Payroll giving scheme, the opportunities are endless.

Fundraising events

Bring your community, village, club or school together to reach a common goal – supporting Village Aid’s work in West Africa. Organise your own event – from sponsored walks to non uniform days or African themed discos. We can help with marketing materials and advice.

Buy an ethical gift

Someone hard to buy for? Someone who has “everything”? Buy an ethical gift from Village Aid. A herd of goats, 100 tree seedlings, literacy materials, the options are endless. Check out www.villageaid.org for further information.

Build tomorrow today – leave a gift in your will

By leaving Village Aid a gift in your will you are investing in our future programmes. You can ensure our work continues.

Become a Village Aid Ambassador

Do you feel as passionately about the issues in West Africa as we do? Do you have some spare time on your hands? Are you prepared to go that extra mile to help? If so, please get in touch, we need you.

Give for FREE!

There are many ways you can give to Village Aid without spending a penny yourself.

- » www.everyclick.com - change to this search engine, nominate Village Aid as your charity and raise funds every time you search the internet.
- » Do you ever shop online? If you do, then by using the shopping portal www.buy.at/villageaid to access 100s of shops such as *Tesco, AA, John Lewis, La Senza, M&S, Ryman, Specsavers, Hertz, HMV, Butlins, Carphone Warehouse, HMV, Mothercare, BT, Powergen, Barclays Home Insurance, Sky Digital* Village Aid will receive a percentage of your purchase cost - minimum 3.5%. ALL AT NO EXTRA COST TO YOU!
- » Sending flowers? If you use www.charityflowers.co.uk Village Aid will receive 15% of the purchase price.

www.villageaid.org



Village Aid is 20 this year and we have come of age with a newly designed website and streamlined logo. If you have access to the internet please check out our new website www.villageaid.org designed by local design company Boulder Design www.boulder-design.co.uk we hope you like it!

In today’s media climate, with more and more people using the internet to research charities and donate online it’s essential to have a high quality “shop window”. ■



“All the world’s a stage...” - Village Aid’s Spring Holiday Drama Academy

In April this year children from all over the Derby City area will have the opportunity to take part in the ‘Spring Holiday Academy’ being organised by Helen Hunter, Drama Education Coordinator for Village Aid.

The aim of the Academy is to stimulate discussion and raise the students’ understanding of global citizenship. The students will be involved in drama sessions throughout the week and then devise their own piece of social drama exploring global issues, to be performed to a public audience on the Friday evening.

Students are asked to consider:

**What do you think about your world today?
How do you want your world to look in 2015?**

The young people will be encouraged to become ambassadors for change, helping us to raise awareness and understanding of the challenges people in Africa face today.

Helen will be supported throughout the week by Rashid Bawah, a social drama practitioner from Ghana, and the students will also have the opportunity to learn traditional African drumming from a local expert, Adam Gallagher.

This is a valuable opportunity for young people to actively explore issues relating to poverty in Africa, and to gain an understanding of how their actions can have an impact on people living in the developing world – and of course to have fun and share what they have learned at the end of the week! ■

Upcoming events

**Easter Saturday
22nd March**

“**Change the World with Music**” at Wirksworth Town Hall. A musical evening with performances from Steve Rivers and his West African drumming ensemble “Unbeatable Energy”, followed by Jazz band “Unknown Creatures”, and local band “Riptide”.
7.30pm Tickets £7, concessions £3 Available from the Village Aid office.

7th-11th April

“**All the World’s a Stage**” - Village Aid’s Spring Holiday Drama Academy. For more information contact helen@villageaid.org

11th April

Photo exhibition, St Benedicts School, Derby

14th April

Charity Stall at Bakewell market. Please get in touch if you have any saleable goods that we could use.

25th May

Open Garden event at Shatton Hall Farm, Bamford

14th-15th June

Three Peaks Challenge - Snowdon, Scafell Pike and Ben Nevis in 24 hours. Fancy the challenge – or sponsoring our mad challengers!

9th-10th August

London Triathlon – If you’re not ready for the challenge, do you know anyone who is? 9 places left.

For more information on any of the above please call Jo on 01629 814434 or email jo@villageaid.org

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