

TO DO! 2009
Contest Socially Responsible Tourism



Award Winner

GAMBIA IS GOOD (GiG)

**An Agricultural and Tourism Network
for Regional Development and Poverty Eradication**

represented by:

Mamud Touray, Sales and Marketing Manager

Fajara, Serrekunda

The Gambia

Rationale for the Award

by

Klaus Betz

1 INTRODUCTION

The author visited the Gambia from 19th November to 1st December, 2009, on behalf of the Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V. (Institute for Tourism and Development) in order to check the TO DO! application submitted by GAMBIA IS GOOD at location, with the following result: The author recommends awarding GAMBIA IS GOOD (GiG) the TO DO! 2009.

The award primarily gives recognition to the aim of building a well functioning agricultural and tourism network which was realized within five years – promoting regional development and poverty eradication. The foundation of GiG goes back to the initiative of the UK-based development organisation CONCERN UNIVERSAL (CU)¹ which continues to be in charge of GAMBIA IS GOOD.

CONCERN UNIVERSAL has been working in the Gambia for 17 years, in the following key areas: improving the living conditions of the rural population, HIV/Aids prevention, capacity building with local organisations. CU has 65 employees in the Gambia. One third of the staff, mainly local experts, works with GAMBIA IS GOOD.

The following award rationale is geared to a "measure" rather than a "project" (confer contest rules). The focus is therefore not on a single tourism project, but on the whole of the activities that contribute to the strengthening of and networking among everybody involved, thus contributing to everybody's economic and social benefit (win-win situation).

2 BACKGROUND

The Gambia, with a size of 11,295 square kilometres, is the smallest country on the African continent. Its capital is Banjul. About half the size of the German federal state of Hesse, the Republic of the Gambia has a population of almost 1.7 million. The presidential republic stretches along both sides of the mighty Gambia River. It is about 30 to 50 kilometres wide and 480 kilometres long, from west to east. With the exception of the Atlantic coast in the west, the Gambia is surrounded by neighbouring Senegal.

English is the official language, but the mainly Muslim population (85 percent) consists of various ethnic groups who use their own languages. The largest group are the Mandinka. Other sizable communities are the Fullah, Wolof and Jola speaking inhabitants. A large part of the population lives near the coast and in the urban centres of Banjul and Serrekunda.

The Gambia is one of the world's poorest countries. According to the International Monetary Fund, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2008 was 808 million US\$ (rank 167 in the IMF list of 180 countries). According to the World Bank (2008), 61 percent of the population live below the poverty line.² A teacher would earn on average 1,900 Dalasi per month (about 50 €). A 50 kg bag of rice – the population's most important staple food – costs about 700 Dalasi (roughly 16 €), providing food for a typical extended family of ten for about half a month.

The Gambia does not have any natural resources of economic value. The country's main economic sectors are agriculture and fisheries, as well as tourism as the main source of foreign exchange. Groundnuts, cotton and fish are the main exports. The Gambia is highly dependent on imports (especially rice). According to the United Nations World Food Program, the Gambia is a "food-deficit country." The country's current food security, i.e. the availability of food, is only 27 percent. In order to pay for the necessary imports, the foreign exchange generated by tour-

¹ Also see www.concernuniversal.org.

² The World Bank has set the poverty line (in developing countries) at one US\$ a day.

ism and other sectors is very important. According to official figures, the number of tourist arrivals comes to about 140,000 every year.

Due to the global economic crisis, the Gambia has experienced a partly dramatic decline in the number of guest-nights spent by foreign tourists. According to country information published by the German Foreign Office, the minus in May 2009 was 26 percent. Most of the tourists are from the UK, the Benelux states, Scandinavia, and Spain. German guests are rather a minority, as on the one hand there are currently no direct flights from Germany to the Gambia and on the other hand there are hardly any German tour operators offering holiday packages to the Gambia.

3 THE ORGANISATION

3.1 History and Objectives

The starting point for founding GAMBIA IS GOOD (GiG) in 2004 was the idea to link income-poor subsistence farmers³ in the hinterland with the tourism regions on the coast, which are – for Gambian standards – economically strong. The objective was to offer hotels and restaurants a reliable supply chain of fresh, good quality products from the local fields and gardens. The idea was successfully implemented and as it turned out, it had great advantages in various respects.

First of all, the Gambian farmers involved could and can fundamentally change their livelihood – from mere subsistence agriculture to commercial farming and horticulture, producing in a targeted manner for a more or less guaranteed group of buyers. This means a safe income (cash), gradual social advancement, opportunities for training and education, and increased self-esteem.

Second, the restaurants and hotels on the Gambian coast now have reliable suppliers at their doorsteps (with exceptions during the difficult rainy season between June and October, which is, however, the low season in tourism) and can partly obtain their products from the local markets. Thus a large part of the fruit and vegetables required need no longer be imported by air or sea, or by road via Senegal.

Third, this helps the Gambian economy to save foreign exchange. Fourth, it increases the country's food security and fifth, the sourcing policy focussing on local products also reduces CO₂ emissions (carbon footprint). In the context of the discussion on climate change, this is a small but not an insignificant contribution.

3.2 The Network

In this interplay, GAMBIA IS GOOD (GiG) is the central interface. The organisation acts as an agent, buyer and seller, distribution centre, contact office for inquiries by visiting tourist groups, but also as a partner in the training and capacity building of Gambian farmers. GiG does not consider itself an "aid agency," but a development initiative in the process of establishing a sustainable and self-financing enterprise. The extent to which this has already been achieved is, according to GiG information, almost 70 percent.

From the very beginning, GiG has been supported – via CONCERN UNIVERSAL – by various donor agencies, with a total amount of almost 320,000 £ over the past five years. The donors

³ Agricultural production targeted at feeding one's own family (not market-oriented).

include the UK Department for International Development (DfID), the organisation Haygrove⁴ and the "Travel Foundation" founded by the UK tourism industry, which has committed itself to promoting sustainable tourism (motto: "Caring for places we love to visit").

Apart from the general manager's position, the other about 20 employees of GAMBIA IS GOOD are local experts (finances, storage, distribution, purchases, sales, marketing, training, and consultancy). These experts, in turn, are in close contact with about 250 local producers and of course the tourism enterprises. On the producers' side, there are about 1,000 trained farmers (90 percent of whom are women), who are active in both individual enterprises and collectively managed community gardens.

GiG's customers are 14 hotels and 23 restaurants along the coast.⁵ In addition, they include about 15 street vendors in and around Banjul and Serrekunda as well as companies, other NGOs, catering services, two ships, and individuals who buy from GiG's market stall in Fajara.

Besides, the work of GiG is structurally well thought-out and draws on a good knowledge of the situation in the country. For example, as the country is "divided" by the large Gambia River, GiG works to ensure equal opportunities for people on both banks with regard to market access, but also with regard to training and capacity building and thus future livelihood options for the farmers involved.

Without the support of GAMBIA IS GOOD the farmers in the regions of the so-called "North Bank Division" (the bank which is accessible only by ferry) would be facing significant disadvantages. Without the refrigerated truck owned by GiG, the producers on the North bank would hardly be able to transport their products with the necessary speed and freshness to the GiG centre at Fajara on the other bank of the river, and thus to the hotels and restaurants – unlike the farmers in the "Kombos" (the areas south of Bakau, Fajara, Kotu and Kololi which are located in proximity to the tourist centres). Within one or two hours these farmers are able to deliver their newly harvested produce to the GiG centre at Fajara.

It has to be seen in this context that GAMBIA IS GOOD is active in two training and capacity building centres. On the one hand, the organisation works with the GiG farm near Banjulinding (in the Kombos), which is also suited to be visited by tourist.⁶ On the other hand, GiG works with the communal Njawara Agricultural Training Centre (NATC) on the North Bank near the Senegalese border.

Trained farmers are the basic foundation to build an organisation like GAMBIA IS GOOD and to make it successful. In order to ensure a continuous supply to the hotels and restaurants, it is necessary to work according to planting and harvesting plans, while continuing to increase the range of products (fruit, vegetables, lettuce, eggs, honey, herbs, juices, nuts and dairy products).

⁴ Haygrove consider themselves as the leading organisation for organic horticulture in the UK. Further information: www.haygrove.co.uk and www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk

⁵ The expert in charge carried out a spot check of these enterprises. In the interviews, the comments made by chefs and purchasing managers regarding the cooperation with GiG were all positive (reliable, good quality, etc.).

⁶ The "Travel Foundation" mentioned above spent 120,000 GBP on this.

4 ASSESSMENT

The comparison of the activities conducted by GAMBIA IS GOOD with the **six TO DO! contest criteria and three additional questions** leads to the following assessment:

Evaluation against the TODO! contest criteria

4.1 Taking into account the different interests and needs of the local people through participation

Unlike mere tourism projects, which are often able to influence their respective environments by acting in a socially responsible manner, the activities of GAMBIA IS GOOD point in another direction. In this case it is the environment (the almost 1,000 participating farmers) who have an impact on the tourism sector through the GiG supply chain – which eventually also benefits the tourists.

The participation practiced here is characterised by a "buy locally" philosophy. The most important motive is the livelihood security of the farmers and their families – bearing in mind the World Bank's analysis mentioned above (61 percent of the population below the poverty line). In a nutshell: Thanks to the structures built by GAMBIA IS GOOD and with a market share of 35 percent, the horticulture farmers involved are able to generate a secure income. And: They regard and experience the tourism sector as a partner which is acting and willing to act in a cooperative manner.

Apart from a few farms well managed by men, there are – much more often – very successful community enterprises set up by women at the village level, which are engaged in year-round horticulture on six to eight hectares of land. Some of these enterprises have 150 to 200 members working together according in strictly structured clusters of production. They are organised in committees with elected spokespersons (e.g. one hour's drive from Banjul on the horticulture farms of Bandjulinding, Gunjur and Ndemban).

In addition, there are independent excursion programmes for the hotel guests' exposure, e.g. to the GiG training and demonstration farm not far from the coast (more than 2,200 tourists have visited to date). Wherever possible, GiG uses the slogan "From Seed to Plate", encouraging tourists to discover Gambian farming methods and to register for a cooking class of local dishes. It was also for this reason that local chefs have published their own cookbook, entitled "The Gambia is cooking".

4.2 Enhancing the awareness of the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural lives

In order to evaluate the project this criterion also requires a different point of view as GAMBIA IS GOOD works in two directions. Tourists are encouraged to give preference to staying at hotels and eating at restaurants that are cooperating with GiG. They are also encouraged to learn more about the background of organic farming by going on an excursion to the GiG farm mentioned above (solar cookers, biogas, low-cost irrigation, and production of organic fertilizer). The training programmes for future GiG farmers, in turn, focus on issues that are relevant in the tourism context.

The programmes are based on the principle of tourism being regarded as a tool for development. One subject addressed in the training programmes for farmers are the quality standards required by hotels and restaurants. This includes handling the harvested products in a considerate manner and storing them in the right way. It also includes transport, planting and harvesting schedules as well as development of consciousness concerning the role of the market and the relevance of the tourism sector as a customer and taker.

As the author was able to witness at the communal Njawara Agricultural Training Centre (NATC), subjects like reforestation – in order to protect the remaining forests – and the targeted planting of fast growing woodlots are also addressed in the training programmes. Furthermore, the farmers learn to use so-called "live fencing" to protect their fields or they learn how to start small-scale poultry farming.

4.3 Participation of broad local population strata in the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism

Within not quite three years GiG was able to pay producers a total of five million Dalasi (about 130,000 €) in profits – with a sharp increase (from only 20,000 € in 2006 to as much as 50,000 € in 2008). This also means that the tourism businesses' demand is higher than what can currently be met by the local market, even in view of a downward trend in guest-nights. GiG therefore continues to work in the same manner – to enable more and more farmers to shift from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture. The objective of making GAMBIA IS GOOD a sustainable business in the long run requires a larger number of local GiG producers, an expansion of their market share and a significant increase in turnover, which is currently about five million Dalasi.

On the other hand, certain effects only become visible at a second glance. In view of the Gambian family structures, "1,000 GiG farmers" means that up to 5,000 people benefit directly or indirectly from the cash income associated with their activities. This enables quite a few families to plan their lives differently. For example, it makes it easier for them to pay their children's school fees. The fee for a child in primary school is currently 600 Dalasi per year, which many families find hard to afford as this amount may correspond to as much as half a month's income.

4.4 Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improving working conditions relative to payment, social security, working hours as well as education and training

In the case of GAMBIA IS GOOD, this criterion is not applicable as such. Firstly, GiG is not an employer in tourism, and secondly, despite the professional way in which GiG operates, the organisation rather works at the so-called grassroots level. In view of the conditions in the Gambia (where there are still day labourer jobs paying 2.50 € to 3 €), the context of the GAMBIA IS GOOD activities is, for the meantime, to ensure the livelihood security of the rural population and to reduce poverty. Irrespective of these challenges, the training and capacity building programmes (see training centres mentioned above) stand for best practice even under difficult circumstances.

4.5 Strengthening the local culture and the cultural identity of people living in tourism destination areas

On the one hand, the Gambia has also been seeing supermarkets, especially in and around the big cities, offering many imported (Western) consumer goods and branded items, while local products are hard to find – a "lifestyle" phenomenon also common in other developing countries.

GAMBIA IS GOOD tries to counter this development through marketing activities (flyers, posters, adverts) pointing out that local products are not synonymous with inferior quality. Furthermore, as *nomen est omen*, all of GiG's distribution vehicles carry the painted slogan "GAMBIA IS GOOD", thus continuously promoting the idea.

At the same time, there is still a lack of active support from the side of the hotels and restaurants. Hardly any of them inform their guests (e.g. on the menu) that preference is given to the local sourcing of fresh fruit and vegetables of high quality even though the orders placed with GiG on a daily basis are a confirmation of this policy.

Among the GiG farmers, however, a certain pride has started to emerge. The producers visited by the author were happy to show him their land under cultivation and to explain their farming methods and their plans for the future. They were noticeably optimistic and confident that they were on the right track.

4.6 Avoiding and minimising any social and cultural damage caused by tourism in tourism destination areas

Young people usually leave their villages in order to "make it" in the tourist centres on the coast, but only a few of them actually succeed. Many of them try their luck as informal tour guides, but often they end up selling t-shirts on the beach, doing occasional jobs, driving taxis or becoming "bumsters."⁷

GAMBIA IS GOOD offers a chance to reduce the rural exodus among young people as for the first time they see income opportunities in their respective villages and thus a perspective for their future.

Evaluation against the TODO! additional questions

A) Could you give some examples which document that your project/measure is in line with environmental compatibility?

First of all, by buying and reselling local products, GAMBIA IS GOOD helps to reduce food imports to the Gambia. This reduces the need for energy and transport, and thus the level of pollution related to it.

Furthermore, GAMBIA IS GOOD advocates forms of horticulture and agriculture which are as sustainable, nature-based and environmentally friendly as possible, especially in the field of reforestation and the use of organic fertilizer (e.g. composting). The respective methods are

⁷ An expression used for young local people who try to get into contact with tourists (especially women) in order to benefit from them economically.

presented during training programmes at the GiG Farm and at the Njawara Agricultural Training Centre.

A completely organic production at all the GiG producers' farms and gardens is not ensured. However, the production methods tend to be organic, as every farmer has to think twice whether he/she can financially afford non-organic fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides.

Besides, the conditions are difficult to compare with organic farming in Germany: Horticulture producing a variety of vegetables and different types of lettuce is a relatively new concept in tropical Gambia. (Until GiG was founded, people used to plant mainly tomatoes and cucumbers.) Furthermore, the annual rainy season presents an enormous challenge: Whole lettuce gardens may be washed away within a few minutes, tomatoes which were planted too early might rot in the wet soil, greenhouse protection is not common, and pests affecting the crops can ruin a family.

B) Are there any examples in the framework of the project which make clear that a just participation of women and men has been taken into account during the planning/implementation phase of your project/measure? Considering gender relation, can be found any improvement of the status/situation of women within your project/measure?"

There are no targeted measures in that sense – people follow the traditional West African gender roles. That is irrespective of the fact that the Gambia is a predominantly Islamic country and that village affairs – towards the outside world – are determined by men representing the respective community.

At GAMBIA IS GOOD the leading positions are taken by women while most of the employees are men. Among the rural GiG producers, men are a minority. Unless they have specifically decided to do horticulture and have become "entrepreneurs" (usually on one or two hectares of land), horticulture and agriculture as well as the sale of products and the market activities are – as almost anywhere in West Africa – traditionally in the hands of women. In this field, the position of women is a strong one.

This becomes very clear in the large collectively run village gardens or communal horticulture farms where up to 300 women work together and earn their own income. The structures in these gardens are strictly organised. Usually, a group of ten women manages a certain area or a certain plantation (cluster). Each cluster is represented by a delegate in the committee which manages the horticulture enterprise as a whole and takes responsibility for it. Men are hardly involved, unless as mechanics or technicians or in other "men's jobs".

C) Through which measures/mechanisms is the economic and institutional sustainability of the project guaranteed?

The sales and marketing department is already self-sustaining, says general manager Amy Hause, while GAMBIA IS GOOD on the whole is only 70 percent self-sustaining. Even though GiG is defined as a social business, the objective remains to become a financially self-sustaining organisation. Therefore, the turnover is once again to be increased significantly. However, this undertaking depends on how tourism in the Gambia will be developing over the next few years.

5. CONCLUSION

GAMBIA IS GOOD (GiG) has taken on a role which in other countries is often played by a governmental or semi-governmental regional development agency. In certain ways the bridge built by GiG between the agricultural and tourism sector is in that sense almost regulative in nature. It is even more impressive that GiG at the same time contributes to poverty eradication. It shows that the tourism sector is able to take new avenues. The motto of the British "Travel Foundation" which is also involved in the project is to be applied not only in the UK: "Caring for places we love to visit".

English translation: Christina Kamp

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