Lady Kira's Annual Report

October 1, 2023

Following Covid and the continuing effects of the Ukrainian war on food and fuel prices many Gambians, like people in so many other countries, are continuing to struggle with galloping inflation. Tourism has never fully recovered and the increased cost of flights doesn't bode well for this coming season either.

The Gambian economy is not doing well and borrowing has increased exponentially. I am very concerned that sheer desperation is driving many of the African countries into making deals with the Chinese and lately the Russians under extremely unfavourable terms storing up trouble for future generations.

Unfortunately many citizens are placing the blame for everything on their current government and, in particular, President Adama Barrow. We sincerely hope this doesn't escalate into civil unrest as has happened across much of this part of Africa recently. There have been recent coups in too many nearby countries!

The next Gambian Presidential election is due in 2026 and there is much animosity already amongst the many (9 last time) political parties. President Barrow has only recently confirmed his intention to run again whilst the UDP (main opposition party) are still vociferously claiming that they were unfairly deprived of winning the last election in 2021. Echos of Trump vs Biden but with a tribal element added!

The general security situation in The Gambia has deteriorated quite markedly. Crime rates are way up due partly due to sheer desperation on the part of the many unemployed young men but also reduced numbers and effectiveness of police and military. I just heard this morning the very sad news that two PIU (police intervention unit) policemen were shot dead today at the Sukuta traffic lights. Thus far there is no known motive and no suspects.

Until very recently, this type of gun crime was almost unheard of but we are also hearing of increased numbers of street muggings and robberies. Not only of businesses but homes and even schools. Fortunately, this summer, none of our premises have been affected although we have had minor thefts from classrooms in the past.

But there is some very good news too. I'm very pleased that the recent formal link up with GSS has been very successful. They have been able to fund tiling of several classrooms for, Stepping Stones, Hilary Emery School, Makumbaya ECD and Mariam Mae – which AOT had not been able to afford – and to provide varioius supplies and assistance with more teacher training throughout.

Meanwhile, this year, AOT contributed the sum of 6,000 GBP towards supporting the schools.

The Gambian Management Team, very ably led by Kemo Bah, continues to provide good day to day supervision and training. Of late, 4 regional “cluster monitors” have been assigned to assist with making regular inspection visits to each school. And this past year there have been training seminar held for Head Teachers, monitors and for all teachers led by Kemo with guest speakers.

As before, Fanding Manjang remains in charge of all the building and maintenance for the schools and the clinics. This is a never ending “Forth Bridge” type of role – especially in view of the Gambian climate with torrential rain, termites and other big challenges. We already have plans for further work which will need to be done during 2024 – notably at Jappineh HC where the ambulance bay needs to be renovated and the clinic doors all need to be replaced this year. We are fully aware that it is crucial to keep up with maintenance to keep all the clinics in working order.

All of the clinics have continued to thrive and, as I previously mentioned, there is healthy competition between them to see which can generate the biggest turnover each month! Last year Wellingara Health Center was the overall winner in terms of patient numbers. They are all on target to have sufficient funds in the bank by 31st December, after paying their own salaries, to make a substantial contribution to the cost of replacing their drug supplies for 2024. As most of you know, there are considerable advantages to purchasing medicines wholesale for the entire year. We lock in lower prices and get great discounts!

Sustainability is always the real challenge for small charities such as ours. We have made great strides in developing management expertise in The Gambia and now we will be considerably strengthening fund raising capabilities by merging our 4 schools with those funded by GSS.

All the staff understand the need to strive towards eventual self-sufficiency. But there are inevitably maintenance challenges and on going training needs.

The GMT have shown that they are perfectly capable of keeping everything running smoothly with minimal input (or interference) while I have been in the UK since April this year having my hip replaced and then recuperating etc. That is very reassuring.

But none of this would be possible without our many donors and the generous donations. And please don’t forget, especially those of us who are getting older, the opportunity to include a legacy to the AOT when you write or review your will. We still need the support of all of our friends and donors to enable us to continue to assist so many people who are relying on your generosity.

Cheers,

Kira