

Lady Kira's Annual Report

October 1, 2022

As I reported last year, throughout the developing world, Covid and now the effects of the Ukrainian war on food and fuel prices has pushed many people back into abject poverty and undone many years of progress in both health and education. It has also undermined routine vaccinations and other healthcare initiatives so there will undoubtedly be more longer term consequences.

When I returned to Gambia in October of last year, schools had just resumed. During the many months they had been shut due to Covid very few of the children had access to any kind of educational activity so there was a lot of catching up to be done. In a country with limited access to electricity, online learning is not really viable. The academic year was extended by several weeks last year to try to catch up a little of lost time. Alas the exam results at Grade 9 have not been very good so there is still work to be done. And of course the head start given to children through having a good nursery education makes a huge difference to their future.

With all of the AOT schools back in action and running smoothly, our Gambian Management Team were able to assist the GSS (Gambian School Support) charity to refurbish two schools last year - in Pirang and Bakary Sambouya.. Work was funded by

GSS and completed during the first term of 2021 school year. This year, during 2022 they have restored another school in Pirang, the Good Shepherd school, and worked miracles in renovating another school in Santo Su, Brufut in under 8 weeks despite it being rainy season. Well done Fanding and his team and Kemo Bah. Earlier in the year GSS had already agreed to take over the funding of the Makumbaya school from the now defunct Gambian School's Project.

All of these schools lost their previous sponsors who were no longer been able to travel to visit them. Unfortunately, this is a common pattern whereby many people start projects and then run out of money, health or energy! One of my major concerns has always been how best to secure, as much as possible, long term, viability for all of the AOT projects we have worked with.

With Josh Dale Harris having joined us as a trustee last year, we have been forging closer links with GSS and I am delighted to report that we will be further strengthening our relationship by formally merging the dozen nursery schools we have between us which we now collectively manage through the Gambian Management Team.

Most of you know that 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. There are also economies of scale, for example in purchasing teaching and learning equipment and stationary, for a dozen schools rather than just a few.

A good example was the Easter Holiday joint teacher training for the AOT built schools – Stepping Stones, Hilary Emery, Mariama Mae and Jappineh plus Makumbaya and Big Tree in Faraba Banta. Together with 2 of the schools originally being funded by GSS - First Steps and Brufut ECD and the two added in 2021 by GSS, in Pirang and Bakary Sambouya. In total this year we had over 60 teachers attending and some very lively sessions headed by our own Kemo Bah and Mr Trawally, an ECD specialist.

The seminar was again held at the Woodpecker Hotel, which has easy access and excellent facilities. Because of the size of the group, we were able to negotiate good discounts and this was the second time of combining AOT and GSS teachers.

So with the schools in the capable hands of the GMT and now with additional help under the wing of GSS, this will enable me to concentrate much more time next year on our 3 Health Centers – Jappineh, Wellingara and Bakary Sambouya. During the regular GMT meetings it's nice to see the healthy competition between them to have the highest revenue each month! 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 already completed their budgets for next year and they are getting more and more capable of handling all this sort of administration on their own - which is exactly what we have been striving to achieve!

I am very pleased to report that “whenever I drop dead’ (not that I am planning to do so anytime soon but you never know) I know that the GMT is in good shape to carry on with the good work!

But none of this would be possible without your 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