

By Nils Janssen & Benedict Heuff

**FEB 28 - MARCH 08**

Imas The Gambia

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On the 28th of March, We, a group of 18 people, had set off from Maastricht Aachen Airport to the capital city of The Gambia, Banjul. With high set spirits and great goals, all of us were ready and excited for our amazing IMAS trip (Internationale Maatschappelijke Stage). With the purpose of building Gambia's very first school Library, we had set off to the small coastal town of Tanjhe near the capital city.

Welcomed by the lovely owners (Barbra & Kawsoe) of the compound Kiro Garden, we set off on the first day to a local market on the coast to buy ingredients for a traditional lunch for that day. This had given us a very exotic first impression of Gambia. The market which was in slum-like conditions located on the beach had given us a view on day to day in the life in the coastal parts of Gambia. Overwhelmed by the chaos of a thousand people on the beach trying to sell freshly caught fish from the sea or self-grown vegetables and fruit, we somehow had managed to buy all items on the list for our lunches. Rich on brand new experiences and totally unknown exotic local fruits like baobab we were ready to explore The Gambia and build a brand new school library.

This trip has been a once a lifetime experience for us all. We have been confronted with new realities and new experiences which have broadened our horizon in so many different ways. The fact that we have been granted the opportunity to travel all these thousands of miles at such a young age is already an absurd thing. On this trip, there were many things which were unbelievable, way too many to mention all. Nevertheless, I was able to circle out the best ones of them all. One of the most amazing moments on the trip was the interaction with the locals when we were in Kuntaur. We had countless moments with the local kids of the village kuntaur. We had been playing with them for hours on hours, playing football, singing songs, learning about their traditions and we even made a short visit to one of their houses. These moments were amazing allowing us to experience these local cultures.

Another moment that we will cherish, is the trip to the inland of The Gambia. The six-hour drive to our compound was astonishing. We were able to see the densely populated coastal areas transform into a wild dry and dusty landscape with little life besides tiny villages along the road. This had allowed us to relax a bit from the hard work we had done back at the school.

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The hard work at the school was an amazing new experience on its own. At the school, we were building a library from scratch. This meant we had to make everything ourselves. We had to make four thousand bricks from cement, water and sand by hand. This was incredibly exhausting and took by far the longest time to do. The hard-working in the sun had been an incredible experience, it had not only given us new insights in many ways, but it had also given us an excellent bond with the worker's which had helped us guiding us through the process of building the library. This bond will always be a very special thing.

Besides building a library we also have painted the school and had given the kids a short introductory class for computers. These classes allowed the kids to gain confidence in learning how to use such strange machinery. Many kids have never used or even been near a computer, therefore many are a bit afraid to learn how to use computers. We have helped them overcome these problems by giving them a short introductory class, allowing them to gain interests in using them for a future job.

Another amazing thing what we have done in Kuntaur was paying a visit to the local community gardens. These gardens supply the village nearby all year round with fresh crops. Each family of the village gets around 5 small patches of land where they are allowed to grow their own vegetables. Only women work at these gardens, they work hard watering the plants all day through wells. They manually get the water out of the well with small buckets and water the crops. This also had provided us with a good understanding of the day to day life is in the rural parts of Gambia. As the village food supply is stabled by these gardens, the population of the village had grown, leading to a new shortage of food. This means the gardens need to grow. This is very expensive for the village to expand their gardens. The village had started a fundraiser for the gardens with our hostess from Kiroh gardens. At the end of the trip, we had about 900 euros left, therefore we had donated the money to the gardens allowing the village to obtain their stability in the food supply.

So, to some up, we have had a great experience which we will never forget. A trip in which we were able to make a real difference in life for places where it is needed. We have broadened our horizon in such a way that it has changed us all a bit as a person for who we are. Therefore I think this was a very successful trip in which we all shared amazing experiences.



































