



Informations

of the society

"Bützower für Gambia e. V."

a nonprofit organization



Development Aid in the Smallest African Country

First of all we'd like to say thank you for the opportunity to give you some information about the aim of our work and about our activities.

If you decide - after having read this folder - to support our project the members of our society and, first and foremost, the children in The Gambia will be very thankful.



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An idea is born: Help for self-help in Gambia



In March 1997 the nursery school teacher Monika Thomsen went on a trip to The Gambia. She enjoyed the sun, walking along the beaches and relaxing but she also was interested in the way of life of the Gambian people outside the holiday resort.

So she came to the a bit remote village Kerr Serign where she visited a nursery school, called "Morgan and Willy", which was built and completely furnished by Dutch people. The headmaster Isatou Konateh and her two colleagues teach about 70 children at the age of three to six years.

Isatou and Monika Thomsen became friends. Until 1999 Monika visited this African country three times, got to know new friends and learned about the problems and conditions of the people there. She realised that they were in need of urgent help, especially in the hinterland.

However, "Help for self-help"!



Help for self-help

Many people, who visited The Gambia, want to help this country. The most sensible kind of help is help for self-help. Through the building up of more schools the Gambian government can be supported to realise their aim to make school compulsory for all children. Getting education offers an important opportunity and a good chance to the young people to realise their situation and their possibilities and to overcome old patterns of thinking. In future they should be able to take part in all economic and political affairs.

But they can't do that alone. That's what Monika Thomsen realised. Since her first stay in The Gambia she has fought for this small African country and especially for its children at home.

First she was surprised but then she enjoyed more and more the huge response her appeal for solidarity had in Bützow. Many people donated money, supported activities to raise money or even went to The Gambia for getting more information. So a group of very engaged people founded an interest group.

From an Interest Group to a Non-for-profit Society

The Interest Group was founded in Bützow in January, 16th 1999. First it was connected with the German Women Association to be allowed to take donations and to be entitled to give written records about donations.

One year later the Interest Group became a society. Monika Thomsen was elected chairwoman, Erik Schönborn deputy chairperson, Hella Gutzmer became treasurer and Kerstin Mauersberger became secretary.



The founding members of the Nonprofit Society were:

Monika Thomsen, Hella Gutzmer, Kerstin Mauersberger, Katharina Bonny, Andreas Beck, Wolfgang Wehrmann, Margitta Looß, Heike Kasbohm, Dietmar Bonny, Regina Nürnberg und Erik Schönborn

The village Labakoreh

In May 1999 two members of the Interest Group went to The Gambia. Their task was to find a place where a nursery school could be built. After a long search and lengthy negotiations with mayors in different villages they decided to build up a nursery school in the village Labakoreh. This decision was accepted by the Interest Group.

Labakoreh is situated south west of Jambul, the capital of the Gambia, in the middle of the bushland. From Jambul to the village it takes you 45 minutes if you go by car, i.e. 30 minutes metalled road, the rest isn't metalled.

There live about 2000 people we were told by the mayor. The two group members got the impression that the inhabitants, grown ups and children, hadn't had much contact to white people. The atmosphere there was so original and impressed the two Germans very much. Isatou Konateh lead the negotiations with the mayor who put about 1500 sqm of land at our disposal, free of charge, to build a nursery school.





From the 27th of October to the 11th of November Monika Thomsen and Hella Gutzmer with her husband spent their holidays in Gambia. During that time they saw by

Our projects – step by step.
Patiently.

themselves how things developed and gave the money for building up a new school.

They realised the difficulties to build up a house in the bush. The most important thing in Africa is a well. The first works to build on were done. The stones for the school buildings were made of sand, gravel and water and dried in the sun on the spot. All the materials had to be taken with carts pulled by donkeys over a distance of many kilometres. But the first steps were done and the first walls of the building were erected.

The "holiday makers " themselves helped to build the school. On the other hand they had to talk to the authorities, to study the project documents and to control the whereabouts of the money.

The children of the village beamed with pleasure when the three Germans opened a case full of shoes. 35 pairs of new, coloured shoes - a donation from Gerd and Petra Schulz, Bützow - were given to the village children.

In addition to that T- shirts, medicines and first-aid kit , donated by the two Bützow chemist's shops, pencils, exercise books and other school materials were given to Isatou to keep for the new school.



The first step is done! A first school building is built up.

Since April, 5th 2000 30 children, aged three to six, from the small village Labakoreh and its surroundings attended the nursery school.

Eight women, members of our society and sympathisers of our project, took part in the opening celebration of our small school. The Gambian women from the surroundings came to cook and later to dance. Also governmental and district representatives came. There were tears in the parents' eyes because of happiness to improve the education of their children in the middle of the bush.

Now every morning the children can learn the alphabet, the numbers, reading and writing in English, taught by the engaged teacher Isatou Konateh. Together they will sing and play, too. The participants of the opening celebration will never forget the bright children's eyes.

Thank you so much for your help!



This is the school uniform of the children in Labakoreh. It's red and white checked.



We make progress (2003)

Our next project, to build up a well, could be finished in 2003. But according to our experiences in Africa, sometimes projects were not easy to realize. It's never easy, we learned especially during our visit in May/June 2003.

Thanks to Alagie's commitment and talent for organisation and using shovels, buckets and ropes the well was prepared to 15 metres deep till May. Now it was possible to draw water with the help of a rope. But it should be easier for the two handicapped teachers. A pump was needed. After hours of searching in Jambul an Indian firm was found which took on the installation. Again there were difficulties and faults to overcome, nevertheless after three days everything was working although one bolt was still missing.

Now our teachers are able to draw the water easily and needn't use buckets any longer.

After having cleared this hurdle we invited our 80 children to take part in a trip to the sea on the occasion of the International Children's Day. Only four or five of them had ever seen the ocean although Labakoreh is situated 15 to 20 kilometres from the sea.

Monika Thomsen told: "When the children saw the sea, they were so surprised that they didn't move. But then you couldn't stop them and we only saw a huge, red dusty cloud."

After having swam in the sea for the first time in their lives their appetite was enormous. Their parents had prepared a meal with rice, sweet potatoes, maniok and chicken which was eaten greedily.



On the spot in May 2004

Our second chairperson went to Gambia together with five friends, who were very interested in our work, to stay there for 14 days.

First and foremost technical work was to do, like to repair the pump, the production and installation of the equipment for the playground and some administrative tasks were to do, too. To finance these works we got support from: "NUE-Dornum", students of the John-Brinckman Grammar school and our godparents and many other sponsors. Especially we were happy being able to continue to pay our helpers and teachers in Gambia. In Labakoreh nearly 100 children, two to seven years old, attended our school and so it was necessary to build up more rooms.

During their stay the Gambia friends who were with us could see by themselves the teachers' work at school and how the children were treated according their age. We visited children who had attended our nursery school in a state elementary school some kilometres away from our village. The headmaster wished to get more of so well prepared children.

As expected we organised a little party for "our" children – a real beach party including a fine meal and playing games. Many things we brought with us (there were 180 kg in our luggage) were given to the children. It was a wonderful day at the beach, for the children as well for the adults.

Our new aims are now the expansion of the school building and a school garden, which can be used to provide the children with vegetable. Furthermore we always need money to buy teaching materials and to pay the teachers.



Update: 2005

Like every year our association presented itself at the "Geese Market Days" in Bützow. The result: ten new godparents were found.

Thanks to the sponsors the children in Labakoreh can attend school for free this year, too. Also 2005 three members and one godmother went and saw the village people.

We gave a new coat of paint to the classrooms, paid the wages to the teachers and organised a trip to the sea for the children who were looking forward to this trip for long.



Presentation at Stadtfest 2005 in Bützow



At the beach we got to know a little girl, who Miriama, had difficulties to follow her mates.

Back in Germany we got in touch with doctors. The doctor Simone Krug tried to help us. With the help of the teacher in Labakoreh and, of course, with the permission of the girl's father we arranged a medical examination. Doctor Krug's assumption was confirmed: "the English disease" or Rachitis. Miriama needs medicines for many years. Doctor Krug provided her with vitamin C and Calcium for one year. We organized the transport of that to Labakoreh. The treatment could be started.



We had to help Miriama

Update: 2006

Also 2006 the children and their parents in the village Labakoreh were looking forward to our visit. The three committee members and the two sponsors, who used their annual holidays for this stay and paid for it out of their own pocket, knew that a lot of work was to do.

Monika shows donations to the children. 50 Euros given by the pupils of an elementary school in Bützow to buy school uniforms.

The children were very happy that a second swing was build and the first one repaired with help of a generator and equipment to weld which was brought to the village. The well was made four metres deeper and a new filter was put in. In Gambia the level of the water table sank in the last years so that the filter continually got covered with sand.

Together with Miriama we went to her doctor and gave the medicine which she needed for the following year. The medicine was provided by Mrs.Krug and the doctor decided about the correct dose. Our teacher is responsible that she gets the medicine every day.

They can't have medical care in the village because there a suitable building is missing. So the parish council asked for our help. After discussing the problem we decided to renovate a building which could be used. The house was in a bad condition because termites had destroyed the roof and there weren't any doors or windows and it wasn't rendered.

Our new task was to ask for donations in Germany.



Monika presents the donations: 50 Euro, donated by a 4th Class of Grundschule am Rühner Landweg in Bützow to buy new school uniforms.



Monika and the children of our school



Miriama and the doctor take the medication.



Monika and Miriama

Update: Now it's the year 2007

It's a special year for me as the initiator of the association for development aid in Gambia.

In May, ten years ago, I got to know this country for the first time. And now our little group can look back on successful, effective results. 9 of the 11 members were in the village and got to know the people there and their situation. Many sponsors saw the projects for themselves in Labakoreh and supported our work on the spot.

From the 29th of May to the 12th of June we visited "our" village together with three sponsors. Of course with a lot of luggage.

Sally, the doctor in Sukuta, is very happy about the medicine and the first-aid kit which we got from the chemist's in Güstrow and Bützow. We have known Sally for many years because she is the doctor in charge for the village Labakoreh.

Thanks to our sponsors 90 children can continue to attend our nursery school for free. The teachers got their wages. For 20 children school uniform could be made.

The walls which protected our school garden had to be made 3 bricks higher because the goats ate all the bananas and damaged the mango and lemon trees. We hope that the trees will grow again and the children can harvest vegetable.

Miriama's state of health has improved very much. The doctor in Banjul assured us that Miriama will be healthy in some years when she gets her medicine regularly. And we, the association, doctor Krug and the teacher who gives the medicine to Miriama every day, we will do our very best to realize it.



The children and adults in the village Labakoreh/Gambia say thank you to the Rotary Club in Güstrow for the generous support. Because of that it is now possible to build up a medical station and this way to offer medical care on the spot. Nearly a ruin was completely renovated, new doors and windows were put in, the walls were painted and the roof was replaced.



Now every 2 weeks there are surgery hours. A doctor will come and vaccinate the children, treat people who suffer from Malaria or other diseases and will help wounded people. Unfortunately we aren't able to organise a daily medical care.



Nevertheless the people are happy.
We are very happy.



Update: In Labakoreh 2008

In 2008 our chairwoman and eight friends of our society started a trip to the smallest African country again. For the Krug family, who had been sponsored Mariama, the girl who suffers from rachitis for 4 years, it was the first stay in Africa. The members and friends of our society wanted to do a lot during their short stay from 22nd of April to May 1st 2008. Early at their first day they went to "our" village to get an overall picture of the current situation and to plan the next steps to do.

We were very happy about our health centre, the rooms were tiled and every Monday the inhabitants of Labakoreh and its surrounding can get there medical help. One village man pays attention to cleanliness and security of the building. The next days we organised a table, chairs and baby beds. The money for these things was donated by the recovery clinic Lohmen/ Germany and some private donators.

Except that the expansion of the centre began. The rooms for two toilets and a shower room, where you can go to straight from the patients room were prepared. Cement, stones and corrugated iron were organised by the society members. We made good progress day for day.

The medicines and first-aid kit, which was donated by pharmacies in Güstrow and Bützow were given to nurses and Sally, the doctor who feels responsible for the health centre.

It was a pleasure for us to listen to the children while learning English in our nursery school. They were very excited but also curios when they noticed us.



The Rotary Club Stavenhagen/Germany enabled us to pay the repair of the well on the area of the nursery school. And the door frames of the toilets could be replaced. They were damaged by termites very hard during the last seven years.

With the help of many hard working village people the school walls were painted in one morning, very carefully not to destroy the paintings created by the children. Both teachers of the surgery school got their wages.

It was always discussed with the mayor of Labakoreh, the school teachers, the health centre nurses how the money our society members collected in Germany should be used in the most sensible way.

A special event was it for the Krug family when they paid Mariama a visit at home. The girl's father gave them a letter as a token of his appreciation, which moved them to tears. Together with Mariama, her Teacher from Labakoreh the Krugs visited Dr. Emanuel in Banjul, who treats the 8 years old girl.

When Mariama will be of age her legs will be cured says the doctor's prognosis. The treatment, given the last 4 years, was successful and made it easier to go for the girl.

Like usual the beach party was a must. The children enjoyed the afternoon at the beach very much. They weren't nearly to stop and went wild with enthusiasm in the water.



Update: Labakoreh 2009

This year Monika Thomsen and a friend, who has been a sponsor for long, went to Gambia. For the first time they wanted to stay there for three weeks. So there wasn't such a high time pressure while carrying out all tasks.

Thanks to our supporters and sponsors we could pay our Gambian helpers. Our teachers, who are handicapped people as known, were happy that we could employ a caretaker. He will maintain the buildings and yard, will do necessary repairs, look after the garden etc.

Surprised we realised that even in one of the poorest countries on earth the prices have gone up. The cheapest sack of rice costs 150 Dalasi (about five Euros), diesel one Euro per litre.

Last year we didn't have the money to give school uniforms to the new pupils. This year we were able to have school uniforms made.

A special Thank You to the children, parents and teachers of the elementary school "Am Schloß" in Bützow. On the occasion of their school opening ceremony they donated 590 Euros, which they got through different activities in 2008, to the children in Labakoreh. This donation we used to pay new tables and chairs, made by the village carpenter, for one classroom. Additionally we could paint the room newly and buy 24 chickens for our children's party at the beach.

The children were very happy when they got the 10 Balls we had bought in Gambia. And we could give toy animals and dolls to them. This way a big wish they had was fulfilled.

Like usual there were meetings and discussions with the mayor, the teachers and the parish council of Labakoreh. So we got to know what else was needed: cups and buckets for the children; a rake, a spade and scissors for the caretaker; paint for the yard doors and the swing and locks for the class rooms again.



Viel bewegt mit dem Einsatz der Schule „Am Schloß“ in Bützow.



The health centre could be nearly completed till the day we went home. The sanitary rooms were tiled, a toilette, a shower and four doors were installed.

The mayor got a patient's bed and promised that the village women could give birth there from now on. We hired the carpenter to build a cupboard for the medical things. In that cupboard we'll store medical things like a blood pressure measuring instrument, a stethoscope, clinical thermometers and first-aid kit.

Referring to that we thank the chemist's shops in Bützow and Güstrow, the firm ANZAG and a doctor in Grahl-Müritz very warmly. The small but useful health centre makes a first medical help and shorter ways for the inhabitants of the village and its surrounding possible. Without the centre medical care wouldn't be possible at all during the rainy season because the village is far away from main streets and the ways aren't passable.

Our annual visit at Mariama showed that she made a lot of progress to improve her health state and to overcome rickets. In September Dr. Emanuel will decide whether calcium will be given to her further on or not.

With these results our society proves how a sustainable development in an African village can be reached through the help of many sponsors and supporters over the years.



Update 2010

The regular, personal contact to our partners in Labakoreh is an important basis for our cooperation.

So some members and friends of our society set off to the smallest African country. For three weeks our chairwoman Monika Thomsen, the active supporter Mrs. Kasten, some members and interested people stayed in Gambia.

Immediately in the next morning after our arrival the work began: On the way to the village Labakoreh we noticed that our sign indicating our nursery school at the main street was knocked down. At once we hired some craftsmen to fix the sign with cement. When we went to back the sign was already o.k.

In Labakoreh everybody was happy seeing each other again – the children welcomed us with shining eyes. There was a lot to tell. We had substantial talks with the teachers, who are employed by the society, and together we decided the next tasks: to tile the two classrooms that cleaning will be easier. Together with the craftsmen, who wanted to tile the rooms, we bought the materials they needed. The following days we used to install blackboards which were needed urgently. The village carpenter replaced the old tables in the second classroom. Some of the 6 years old children who attend the nursery proudly read for us from their English schoolbooks. Additionally we could buy new school uniforms with help of the money we got from sponsors. Together with the children's mothers we organised a banquet for the 90 children at the schoolyard.

One day we were the teachers for one lesson at school. We used maps and pictures from our home country to show how we live and the farmers work at their fields. Even the adults listened to our report attentively.



At the beginning of the second week we had our, meanwhile traditional, beach day at the Atlantic coast. The children went wild with enthusiasm in the water and played at the beach. This year not the teachers but we prepared the meal; it was Benegie (rice ,chicken and vegetable). At the end of the day we were assured that this was the most beautiful one of all the beach days we had.

There was progress in our health centre, too. The waiting room was tiled, walls were painted and the pillars of the roof in front of the house were completed. The baby clothes, knitted by an older woman from Güstrow, were given to young mothers for their newborn children. The midwife, called "Mama" in Gambia, got important things like bowls, buckets, plastic wrap and boards for the storage room. To keep the roaming cows out we had a gate made. Two seriously handicapped village people were very happy to get wheel chairs sponsored by the Recovery Clinic Lohmen. Finally the staff members got their wages as we do every year.

Another pleasing news we got from Dr. Emanuel in Banjul. Mariama's health state (Rickets, look "Update 2005") had improved and probably the girl would need her medicine only the next two years. Mariama's parents thank the Krug family for their support over years from the bottom of their hearts. Financial support was also found for Mariama Kamara. Since August the 22 years old young woman has attended the only hotel management school in Gambia , which we visited, too.

To fulfil the demands at school she gets additional lessons. There are three other, older children who are able to attend a secondary or high school because sponsors give support.

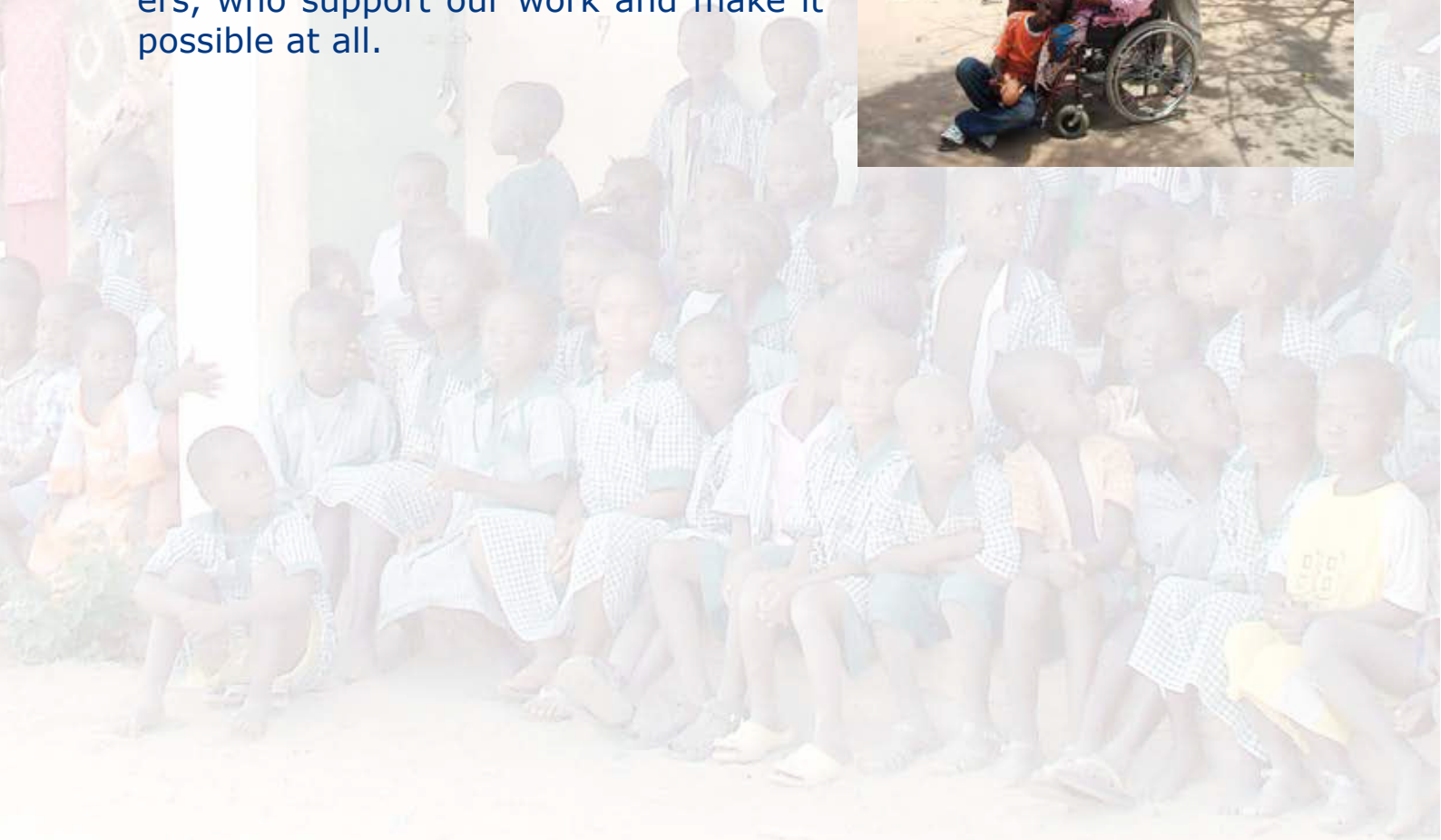


The preparations for our next big project, to build up a third classroom, are already in progress. The Gambian children and we are looking forward to each donation, which helps to reach our aim.

The aim of our society is still to enable the children and youth to get better chances in life, to build up a future according to their own abilities and interests.

For meanwhile 13 years Monika Thomsen has reported on experiences on the spot, together with members of the society she has organised exhibitions and meetings at schools and town festivals in Güstrow and its surroundings. Actions like "A day for Africa" at the former grammar school "Ernst Barlach" contribute a lot to realise our aims in Gambia. This way positive contacts between people and schools are developed.

On behalf of the children from Labakoreh, The Gambia, we say thank you to our loyal sponsors and numerous helpers, who support our work and make it possible at all.



Update 2011

According to our plan to build a third classroom we started our campaign "1000 stones for Gambia" in August 2010. You could get one stone for 1 Euro. These symbolic stones were offered at such events like the Bützower Geese Market and exhibition MELA in Mühlengiez. To finance the extension we were in need of 5 500 Euros according to estimate.

At this point we'd like to thank all the people who helped us to inform about our project and gave financial support. Among them were the North German Foundation Environment and Development, the Güstrow Blitz publishing house, the women centre "Trude" in Teterow, the cosmetics shop "Anna" in Güstrow. The Ernst Barlach Grammar School in Güstrow and school in Bernitt.

At the end of 2010 we reached our aim. The extension building could be started.

Our this year's journey started in March, 3rd 2011. As usual the chairwoman of our society and main initiator Monika Thomsen and Mrs. Kasten took part and decided to stay in Gambia for four weeks. Four other friends joined them, they helped to realise our project on the spot and stayed there for 14 or 7 days.

Immediately when we arrived our helper there, Lamin, announced a surprise for us. We went to the village and couldn't believe what we saw. The external walls of the new classroom were finished.

As usual we were warmly welcomed there, not only by the teachers and pupils but many village people came to welcome us in the typical African way, very warmly and lively, with singing and dancing. The teachers invited us to have dinner with them.



Before having a meal together we went to look at our health centre. There we noticed that the entrance was damaged. And the water pump of the well at the school yard was out of order. While having our meal we discussed the work to do during our stay.

The next day we first went to a DIY store, which is not comparable with one in Germany. Together with the village carpenter we bought timber for the roof and wood for tables and chairs. Then the transport of wood and timber to Labakoreh had to be organised and we went to a metalworker. There the door and window frames were ordered.

They all knew that we wanted to have the work done very fast because the class room should be ready to use till the day of our departure. The craftsmen there are happy to get a work through our orders are interested in doing their jobs properly and quickly. The building up made good progress. After a week the roof timbers were finished and they could start to render the building.

Then we went to see Mariama, who suffers from Rachitis and we found a sponsor who pays her treatment. We were happy to see that her health situation has improved again.

We also visited the college for restaurant and hotel, which Mariama Kamara attends thanks to German sponsors. There we had a talk with Mariama's tutor and the headmaster of the college and got to know that Mariama is a good student and will pass the first part of her education there in June.

In Labakoreh two young people came to us and asked for financial help. Fatu Jalla, a 17 years old girl, finished the ninth schoolyear and would like to get a higher educational level. The same wish has Keba Nuang, who passed the 11th grade successfully and would like to pass the 12th grade.



In the second week of our stay there we had a very special, emotional experience. At our first day in the village a little girl was born and her parents decided that her second name should be Monika to honour Monika Thomsen., one example that the village people there love and appreciate Monika very much.

By the way, in many talks we had there with different people or institutions, they all appreciate our project and emphasize how thankful they are. Of course, we accepted the invitation to come to the party when the girl was baptised.

All inhabitants of the village took part in this party. Our presents were knitted baby clothing not only for the little Monika but also for four other little babies. These jackets and caps were knitted by Mrs. Naujocks, a good friend of or society. Thankfully and with big delight the babies were dressed and we took photographs of the babies and their mothers.

During the second week we had to pay The university of The Gambia a visit. Together with Zena, Jamara and Mustapha, the new teacher who we need for our new class room, we met authorities there and discussed possible basic and further training for our teachers. Some days before our departure our traditional beach party took place, where all our pupils and many village people took part. Then the final stage of our new building started. Everybody did his/her best , not only the new but also the old window frames were painted with bright green paint, new chairs and tables were put in the new room. And Mr. Koschak succeeded in repairing the pump.



Our new signs to inform where our nursery school is situated could be erected at a main street and a sign was put at the school building. The lettering of the signs we prepared in Germany.

And then everything was done: the opening party could start. Everybody, Germans and Africans were full of pride and delight that we reached our aim together and could help to offer better chances for the future to young Gambian people.

To be continued in 2012.



Update 2012

At 30th April 2012 six sponsors, each of them with 40 kg baggage (medicine, first-aid kit, shoes, clothes, toys etc. and one wheel chair), started their journey to The Gambia, where they arrived at 10 p.m. after a physically demanding trip.

Immediately next morning we went to Labakoreh where we were awaited impatiently. The basic structure of the canteen for our children was ready thanks the very good job Lamin did. Now we had to get building material (wood, roof plates, nails, tiles etc.), services, pots and pans.

The work progressed well and on 13th April, together with the children, their parents local representatives and guests, the opening ceremony took place. Of course, as well as many speeches the natural dish "Ebbe" (fish and vegetable) was there.

From September this year our children can have a warm meal in this canteen thanks to donations from the Güstrow-Bützow-region and first and foremost thanks to the financial promotion of the NUE Dornum. To finance these meals, probably 1000 Euro per school year, will be a demanding task for us.

The second task of our stay was the health centre. Its roof was damaged badly by termites and had to be renovated completely. The donations we got from the roofer Pahl from Tarnow and from the Reha-clinic Lohmen we used to buy wood (Mahogany, i.e. resistant to termites) for 1500 Euros. Then we had to pay nails, roof plates, cement and sand for the stones and to pay the craftsmen. It was a great pleasure for me and the village people that the medical centre was ready to use the day I left.

Now every Monday the doctor will come to treat the patients from Labakoreh and the villages nearby. The male nurse Mussah will be there daily to give out the medications we brought from Germany and to give first aid to the people in need.



In our second week there we got a bad news. The caretaker of our health centre, Osman, died. He saw that everything was clean and proper in accordance with our instructions and we were in good contact. Together with Lamin I took part in the Muslim mourning ceremony, which was quite different from ours, and gave some small presents. Because Osman didn't have a family the village community was thankful for our support. The reason for Osman's death we didn't get to know. Obviously it's not important for the people there.



We met many people who suffered from fever, cough, joint ache and cold. No wonder! Hot temperatures at day and cold ones at night, bad living conditions! Many people sleep on the bare clay ground, the huts aren't rendered, the roofs are leaky.



Especially one concrete case shocked us very much. We visited Fatu Jallow's parents. Fatu is a 17 years old girl who attend the 11 class and whose school fees are paid by Frau Dobschlaff from Güstrow. Fatu's parents live together with their seven children (what is normal there) in a hut, whose roof had uncountable holes, no beds or mattresses, hardly nothing to eat and the little child ill. It was obvious that they wouldn't come through the coming rain season under these circumstances. The clay hut would collapse.



Spontaneously one member of our group (Malve Lucke) decided to buy roof plates for this family. At our society's expense we had the walls plastered and rendered, with the wood which we didn't need any more for the health centre and some we bought in addition the roof timbers were built.. Lamin, our employee on the spot, and two other members of our group bought bamboo beds and mattresses for the children. The family was endlessly grateful to us.

And we realized again how necessary our help, the concrete help on the spot, was.



For the children there the beach party is the highlight of our annual visit. One day they spent playing, swimming and having a picnic at the beach. It was a pleasure to see how fast and enthusiastically the children joined "our" Laurentia and Boogie-Woogie dances.



During our stay we had to cope with many other tasks. Wages were to pay, organizational questions, for example referring to serving the meals for the children, had to be discussed.

We visited schools to get information about the learning results of our older godchildren. We were very pleased about the good results Solomon reached. He is the godchild of the Koschack family from Bützow and has got the possibility to get an engineer qualification. Then his training place can help him to find a job in the army, the police or telephone company. So he is a good example of our aim: help for self-help, i.e. help whose effect is directed at sustainability.



Also our young teacher, whose qualification we pay and who has been working at our school for a year now, does a good job. He teaches in a very dedicated way, full of new ideas and with good social competence. He wants to have more learning material for the children. At his suggestion we bought a rubbish bin for the school area, probably the only one in the village. Refuse disposal is a problem for The Gambia. We are happy that the young generation wants to initiate changes.



Since spring we have provided another child, who suffers from rickets, with medicine from Germany. The 4 years old Amatoulei, whose mother died while giving birth to her and who now lives with relatives, has worse deformities than our Mariama, whose treatment was successfully finished after seven years. We hope we can help this girl, too.

We could make another handicapped boy (12 years old, from the village Bijolo) happy when we the wheelchair to him which was donated by the Reha-clinic Lohmen.

A time, full of experiences but successful, too, ended at 29th April 2012. Some members of our group were really shocked about the poverty and bad living conditions of the village people. And that's the reason for us to go offering help for self-help. We hope for example that the two sewing machines we brought from Germany will help to create two new jobs.

But to realise our plans we rely on donations and therefore also on behalf of the village people we say thank you so much to all of our supporters and sponsors.



Update 2013

This spring six members of our association, twelve sponsors and sympathizers went to The Gambia. For quite a lot of them it was the first trip to the black continent and therefore full of new impressions and deeply moving, emotional experiences.

Thanks to many engaged helpers and friends here in Germany, who initiated donation actions and other activities to provide our association with money, we were able to realise our project for this year. Our aim was to install a water supply for the kitchen and the toilets and to build washing facilities for our children.

It was necessary to lay a pipe system for water and sewage. A water tank, which is filled with water taken from our well with help of a generator and which provides the end stations, was put up. That makes the work of the staff there easier very much. Up to now they had to carry the water with buckets to the kitchen and toilets.

This way an important step is done to teach firm hygienic habits. The teachers urge the children to wash their hands with soap – provided by their parents – before having a meal and after they were at the toilets.

Last year the Gambian ministry for education controlled the nursery schools all over the country and closed 33 of them because of different reasons. We had to build the toilet for girls further away from the boys' toilet. That was done, too, and we are proud that our school is seen as one of the best in that area.



Another pump repair was necessary again. The cylinder lay broken on the bottom of the well about 8 metres under water. Thanks to our village people's talent for organisation we could buy a new cylinder – the village people absolutely wanted a German product, because of its quality – and a diver came to exchange the cylinders. After three days everything was done and together with the children, their parents and the "Tubabs" (white people) the water supply system opening took place in a happy, typically African atmosphere.

Our time there went by very fast. We went to see the children who have godparents in Germany, gave the presents – brought with us from Germany – to the 90 children and their families, medicines and emergency supplies were taken to the male nurse Mussa in our medical centre and we handed a lot of glasses over to the doctors in the only ophthalmic clinic in The Gambia.

As our stay there went on three friends of our association spontaneously became godparents to young village people. Now these young people can attend a secondary school. For example, Mariama Kandeh, a 17 years old girl, can start a vocational training to become a tailor. The godparents, Matthias Thomsen and Heike Haas, handed a sewing machine over to her. This way the girl soon will be able to earn her living herself.

Heike Burghardt and her 7-year old daughter became godparents to the 17 years old Fatu Jallow. Now Fatu can continue her studies in a high school. Her father died some time ago and so she lives alone with her mother in the village. Her brothers are brought up by her dead father's relatives in Senegal. When Fatu got to know that somebody makes it possible for her to finish her studies she was so happy that she run away in tears. Seeing that there wasn't a dry eye among us.

Ulrike Milinski and her 13 years old son Tillmann will finance Keba Suwane's - who is the same age as Tillmann - education.



Another family was very happy when we gave an oven as a present to them. In this family the father is a baker and is now able to supply the people in his and the neighbouring villages with bread. So he is able to earn his seven persons family's living.



The traditional beach party was a special highlight for all of us. It was the first time that black and white children had a party together. We prepared many games and the children, the black and white ones, had a lot of fun. Especially the swinging cloth (6 by 6 metres) and the sweet chain, which was made by Jette and Tillmann, were the attractions of the games.



All in all it was a very exciting and emotionally moving stay for all of us. So we were encouraged to go on helping the people in Labakoreh.



Update 2014

On March 31st two members and three friends of our society started their annual trip to The Gambia to inform about the progress of our projects there. The main focus was on the quality development of our Nursery School, of course.

Right at the morning of April 1st we went to Labakoreh together with Lamin, our wonderful helper on the spot. As usual the welcome there was very warm and moving. But immediately we were confronted with some unexpected tasks to do, as example: the wall round the school yard had to be made three stones higher.



To improve the quality of the school meals we laid out new patches together with the children.



Now a shed for the garden equipment was missing. When Monika went home on April 30th this task was solved, too.



Unfortunately, the pump which pumps the water into a tank was out of order. So we had to buy a new one.



We were successful but the problem there is that you don't get any guaranty for the goods you buy. Now the pump works and we hope for a long time. The water pipeline is very important for the provision of the hygienic conditions at our school. Particular as we – thanks to our sponsors - brought toothbrushes and toothpaste for all children with us and the teachers will pay attention that the children clean their teeth at school daily. We were surprised when the children sang a “tooth-clean” song for us. That was prepared by the teachers to show us how thankful they are for this initiative.

We are really happy that we succeeded in employing a young elementary teacher. She is in her last study year and will do the practical part of her programme in our school. That means that we now have two

qualified teachers – our Mustapha finished his studies, which we financed, in April – at our school and this way our children's education can be improved on a higher level.



For our society it means that we have to have 130 Euros ready to pay the teachers' and Javara's salaries monthly. Javara, who has been working at our school since the beginning but doesn't have an accepted educational certificate, will work with the youngest children. Our Sena, who did this job before, is happy that she now is responsible for the school kitchen. In the last week of her stay in The Gambia Monika and all members of the staff there had a meeting to work out a paper with rules and standards which are binding for everybody at our school.

During our stay we went to those older children and young people who get a higher education or a vocational training to be informed about their living situation and the progress they make and, of course, we delivered presents from their German godparents to them. We were very pleased to learn that their teachers are satisfied with the results they got.



First-aid kit and medicine, which we got from doctors and pharmacies in the Güstrow/Bützow district free of charge, was taken to our medical centre and we went with some children to an eye specialist clinic for a necessary treatment. There we handed over the sponsored glasses from Germany. Doctor Emanuel was very happy, too, when he received the medicine and emergency supplies we brought from Germany. Ramatolei, the girl who suffers from rickets, is treated by him with medicine which is sponsored by a doctor from Bützow.



How important help for medical care is we experienced when we visited our old friend Karl there. His little son was holding his arm and we saw how painfully he pulled his face. Karl couldn't go to the doctors' with him because he didn't have the money. We gave him the necessary money and now the boy, whose arm was broken and became inflamed, was operated. We were very happy when we met him – beaming with pleasure – after two weeks.

Unfortunately the sun wasn't shining the day we had our traditional beach party with all school children. But nevertheless as usual we all had a lot of fun playing, swimming and having lunch together.



But the absolute highlight this year was the village football match we organised. It was only possible thanks to the Bützow shop owner “Hella Sport”, who sponsored two goal nets, and the sports club Güstrow SV 09, who gave us about 40 footballs used but in very good shape. On the spot we had two goals, out of galvanized metal, made.



All village people cheered when the mayor thanked our society in a euphoric speech and announced that in future every year there will be a football tournament called “Monika Thomsen Tournament”. Of course, we presented the winner of the football match with a cup.

All in all like every year we can say: there are many problems to solve but thanks to our sponsors and many helpers we can help and small steps are important, too. And as usual we come back home full of impressive experiences, happy and with new ideas for our future work.

Update: 2016

The building of a training centre for tailors was in the focus of our work during our this year's stay in The Gambia. On March 21st we started building the centre at our school area and seven days later a preliminary examination was carried out by a generous sponsor, who is very experienced in the building branche, of our society.

All of the craftsmen, that means: bricklayers, carpenters, locksmiths, tilers and joiners, came from our village. Because of their very good work we could overcome all the problems which have always been normal for all of our activities in The Gambia.

Because of ecological reasons we wanted to use solar energy instead of a generator for energy production. So we talked the planning and realisation of the necessary works with a local solar energy firm and they immediately started the solarcells installation. So in April 2016 solar energy was produced.

The building of our training centre was finished before we went home again and now in August eight to ten young village people can begin their one and a half or two years lasting vocational training as a tailor. The training is financed by German sponsors and a part of the running costs, a.e.the costs for materials, will be taken by the trainees who earn money through sewing the school uniforms for our pupils.

Many people from Güstrow, Bützow and the surrounding area helped to realise this project. A lot of donated sewing machines (mechanically or electrically powered) were sent to The Gambia in a container by ship.

Of course, our "regular" tasks weren't neglected while we were there. As we do every year we visited our grown up god-children to be informed about their educational progresses. One of them is Fatu who can start her training to become a nurse because she gets financial support from German godparents.



That our help is effective proves Soliman, His training to become a computer specialist was paid by godparents and now he has got a job at a government office.

Traditionally we organised our yearly beach party for our schoolchildren. And thanks the commitment of all of the German visitors the children had a lot of fun and were very happy.

Another traditional event was the football match between a Labakoreh team and a team from the neighbourhood. We are happy to see how carefully the football players handle the sponsored footballboots and the net.

And there are two other children we could help to improve their living conditions. One is the mentally and physically handicapped 9 years old Ousman. A woman - who formerly lived in Bützow but now in Holland - and her partner became his godparents and bought him an urgently needed wheel - chair, which was sent to The Gambia together with the sewing machines. And we bought a bed for him, because he was sleeping on a mat on the naked floor.

Especially happy we were because of Ramatoulei's health progress. Suffering from rickets she has got medicine from a German sponsor for 4 years and it is enormous what can be done with 70 Euros - for the Gambian village people prohibitively expensive - per year.

Ramatoulei before the treatment in 2011 and after the treatment in 2016 ->

Sustainable "help for self-help" - that is what our society wants to offer the people in the smallest African country. And we think with the realisation of our new project we are on a good way to make our aim come true.

But all our activities are only possible because of the support given by many friends and sponsors our society has got. We want to thank them very much. This year on behalf of them all we'd like to name the students of the John-Brinckman-Grammarschool, who organised a "Day for Africa", and the NUE in Dortmund.

