

VSO in the Gambia



The Gambia is the smallest country in Africa, with few natural resources except fish.

During the Easter holidays we visited Julia & Jan Sander, who are working with VSO in the Gambia. Julia is helping redesign the primary school curriculum, and Jan is helping to exploit computerised personnel records of teachers and civil servants. In their different ways, both are trying to modernise Gambian working practices - not something that can be achieved overnight. It will probably take most of their 2-year stay for their



Outside the Sander's house in Kanifing.

recommendations and training to have a lasting effect on Gambian teachers and civil servants. They are living in a house provided by VSO in a suburb of Kanifing, near Serekunda, which they have managed to make quite homely, decorating the walls with local



The Gambia Teacher Training College.

goes to the capital Banjul.

As well as their main jobs, VSO volunteers are also encouraged to organise their own aid projects; VSO has a small projects fund to help this. Julia and Jan's first project has been the building of a nursery school in Kunkujang, a small village which is a long bumpy ride south from Banjul. An enthusiastic local group has provided the labour, and VSO has paid £1000 for materials. We went with

batiks. Only having a cold shower is not a problem when temperatures often get up to 40C, but they have had to get used to the dust, and daily power cuts. Julia commutes to the teacher training college in Brikama, and Jan



Checking receipts.

Julia and Jan to inspect the nearly completed school. It has brick walls (they made their own bricks) and a corrugated iron roof. A lattice of holes provides lighting and ventilation. Julia and Jan were received with great enthusiasm; the children cheered and chanted welcome, and the parents gave presents of mangoes, and local honey - we gave pens paper and sweets in exchange. Apart from a few rough benches, and a blackboard, the school has no equipment. Julia and Jan hope to provide some from VSO funds. The honey was the first production

from another project which

VSO may support. A group from the village has been on a training course, and built and stocked hives, which they proudly showed us. But bottling and marketing have yet to be organised. Helping with small projects like this must be immensely satisfying for Julia and Jan. The Kunkujang villagers are keen and appreciative of help, and successful results can be seen after a few months.

The headman of Kunkujang.



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Mums and children wanted their picture taken with Julia.



The current "school" - a blackboard under a tree in Kunkujang.

*Françoise & Andrew Lorenc
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