

WINNER Gambia is Good project, The Gambia





How Gambia eased its growing pains

Poor rural farmers in The Gambia have been able to grab a sizeable share of the lucrative tourism market thanks to a project that has helped them meet the exacting demands of local hoteliers

THE GAMBIA is a well-established 'winter sun' tourism destination. One of West Africa's most peaceful nations, it's a narrow lick of a country, surrounded by Senegal on all sides except for its 50 miles of Atlantic coastline.

The Gambia River is a dominating feature of life in The Gambia, stretching from the Atlantic Coast 186 miles into its interior,

dividing residents into north or south bank inhabitants. Steamers can navigate the river for 140 miles inland. For the first 80 miles, it's fringed with mangrove-covered banks, later giving way to red cliffs topped with green vegetation. Dotted with ferries, fishermen in dugout canoes and cutters loaded with groundnuts, the river offers the occasional

FARMERS WHO'VE COME GOOD

Ebrima Jawara, a grower from Daru Fodeba village, explains how being part of Gambia is Good has helped: 'Quality seeds and training have helped me to achieve higher yields, a longer harvest period and good prices. Last year I bought one pack of tomato seeds for 600 dalasi [£12]. When I finished harvesting I had earned 22,000 dalasi [£450], which is at least three times what I would have got without Gambia is Good. Presently, I have an Irish potato plot in my garden and three nurseries of hybrid cabbage and tomatoes. Now, my dream is to increase my cultivated areas and earn more money.'

Jonsoba, a grower from Kambong village, adds: 'I heard through GiG about a new cabbage variety and got some seeds. Two months later I harvested three bags of big and beautiful cabbage heads. I sold these to GiG for 2,800 dalasi [£58]. Before, I could not expect to earn so much money. Next year I also plan to try out a new sweet pepper variety.'



glimpse of hippos and crocodile surfacing, and baboons playing on its banks.

Though winter tourism is a major source of business in The Gambia, attracting around 100,000 visitors a year, mostly from the UK and Europe, it is virtually all package-tour trade, controlled by Western-owned big tour operators, airlines and hotels. Thus, most of the tourist money that should find its way into the local economy instead leaks out of the country. The big operators even get a sizeable chunk of the tourists' spending money because they arrange the excursions.

But in 2004 the Gambian community fought back. A collaboration between Haygrove, a UK fruit and flower grower which supplies major UK supermarkets, the international charity Concern Universal and local groups in Gambia, found that farmers in Gambia were missing out on trade with high value tourist hotels and restaurants.

At the same time that thousands of kilos of local produce were going to waste – often not even making it beyond the garden gate >>



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– the businesses were importing truckloads of produce from Holland, France, Spain and even neighbouring Senegal.

Although the hotels were willing to buy high-quality Gambian produce they were put off by unreliable local supply, inconsistent quality and shortages during peak periods.

With £197,000 funding from DFID's Business Linkages Challenge Fund, a fair trade horticultural company, Gambia is Good, was set up to start to turn this around for the benefit of poor rural Gambian communities. Haygrove worked with local subsistence growers to improve irrigation, grading of harvests, distribution and marketing. Producers have been given access to quality seeds, pesticides and fertilisers that were not previously available. Over-produced items were replaced with in-demand ones such as courgettes and broccoli.

Initially Gambia is Good worked with 30 growers but now works with 1,000, of which most are businesses run by women.

Hoteliers have welcomed the initiative with open arms – 80 per cent are participating and are now buying 20 tonnes of produce a month during the season. In the past year GiG has diverted £34,000 of sales

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A further innovation saw Gambia is Good link up with The Travel Foundation to launch their own farmyard, which is used to demonstrate best-practice and generate additional income through production and tourism – so far more than 1,000 First Choice tourists have visited the farm on excursions.

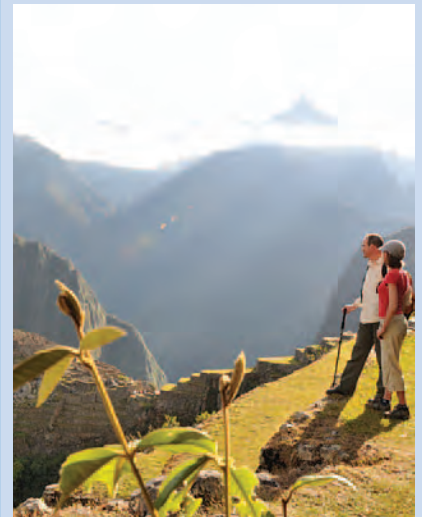
'Supplying the hotels was not easy in the beginning,' admits Adama Bah, The Travel Foundation programme co-ordinator. 'A lot of capacity building was needed to match supply with demand. We ourselves import from Senegal to meet any shortfall while we are still building that capacity.'

www.concern-universal.org

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

'GAMBIA IS GOOD has demonstrated that it is possible for 1,000 local growers, 90 per cent of them women, to produce 20 tonnes of vegetables and fruit in the tourism season to supply hotels and make a real contribution to reducing poverty in The Gambia – this is a local project of international significance.'

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