

The developing journey with the TTV initiative facilitated a truly life changing experience. After finishing the program, I am truly taken aback at how much my perspective of the world has shifted. It was during my time out in The Gambia where I could see the invaluable nature of my very fortunate education and how it could help me to tackle real life problems in a constructive and collaborative manner.

The journey of the program began with the formation of our TTV team, which was then divided into the different sub-groups for the projects we would be participating in at Marlborough and in Gunjur. These groups were the photographers, the story-tellers and, my group, the Mango business project. The collaborative exchange of cultures was an important aspect of the trip. The idea of immersing yourself in another's culture to see its strengths and its weaknesses and also being able to reflect on where you come from and what you are fortunate for but what you would also like to see to change in your culture. This common respect of these two communities coming together highlighted to me that no matter who you are or your background there is always something to be learned from someone else's experience. The ability to see from a fresh perspective is the one of the improved skills I value most from the trip.

The Gambians we were partnered with were amazing. The seamless ease into friendly conversation when we first meet them at the Tarud offices indicated how fun the trip was going to be with them by our side. Sharing meals, playing card games, dancing, swimming and having a good laugh were just some of the brilliant things we enjoyed doing with them every day. What was striking was how all the Gambians were so optimistic for the future of The Gambia and how they all valued the principle of education and hard work. This encouraged us all to appreciate the education we had received.



*The TTV group at Tarud meeting the Gambian partners for the first time*



*The Gambian partners and TTV group in the bus*

The immense notion of community in the Gunjur was striking. The warm embracement of the entire group with the locals helped to set at ease the nerves of the group as we were slightly nervous in being in such a novel environment. One particularly moment was when each member of our group went with our corresponding Gambian partners to their compounds where we ate and shared experiences with their entire family. The openness and embracing nature of the families filled all of us with the sense of belonging to the Gunjur and encouraged us to feel if we had just adopted a second home. Another aspect was the immersion into a primarily Muslim based community, which gave us great insight into how Islam operates and its peaceful foundations. The breath-taking experience of being invited to attend the significant religious event of Tabaski or Eid al-Adha on our final day in the Gambia was a sight I will never forget.



*The TTV group witnessing the religious festival of Tabaski*



*The group all journeying to the Grand Mosque and later for a walk along the beach*

Touring around Gunjur meant we meet with the Iman, the Chief, the elders and all the locals going about their lives. We visited schools, the market, the grand mosque, an eco-lodge based on the idea of ecotourism and the markets. The pungent smells of the fish market and the eye watering smoking houses for the fish reflected the Gunjur's geographical location near the sea and it was a pleasant experience immersing ourselves in such a vibrant and communal place.



*The photographers in the vegetable market*



*The group departing for the fish market*



*The Gambian partners and the TTV group dancing at the lodge*



*The Group learning how to play a traditional Gambian drum*

Our trip to the British High Commission, where we met the High Commissioner for the Gambia Sharon Wardle, was a thought-provoking experience as we all were able to gain an understanding of the finesse of a diplomat, and also be involved in a Q and A with the ambassador where both the local Gambians and the TTV group were given the opportunity to raise issues with the High Commissioner and hear her thoughts and plans on dealing with them.



*The group with the High Commissioner*

Though not every moment of the trip was a smooth ride, with climate, illness and tiredness impacting everyone. It was interesting to see the development of resilience between all the members of the group over the course of the trip. Seeing how, regardless of who you were, everyone had peaks and troughs, lows and highs and what was great was seeing how the group of the Gambian partners and those from the UK would lean on each other for support when they needed it the most. I remember when Baba, a Gambian partner who was very passionate about his growing chicken business, was very upset that one of his favourite chickens had died the night before, but the whole group came to his support despite having known him for less than four days at the time.

The mango business initiative's primary purpose was to produce a report about the state of the Mango industry and the measures that should now be applied to develop the industry in the Gunjur region. We began by investigating the roots of the supply chain for the potential business by visiting local mango orchards and asking the farmers about the challenges that they faced. We then had meetings with numerous parties involved in the industry such as the Gunjur Mango Growers Cooperative, Tarud Board of Trustees, Youth Empowerment project, United Purpose, Tropingo, the High Commissioner and other smaller groups as well to try get some idea about the current state of the industry and the way in which each party saw how they could help improve it.



*The Mango Group speaking to the Director of United Purpose at Tarud*

Having spent six months prior to the trip researching about the state of the current mango industry and the potential and problems that were attributed to it, we began our investigative work. Upon reflection, the importance of being on the ground and seeing the situation for ourselves helped to paint a far clearer picture about the mango industry in The Gambia than from back in the UK. What we realised pretty early on was that, although we had researched the business models and supply chains employed by UK suppliers to the large supermarkets, a whole new approach of starting from scratch and slowly building up the business, concentrating on specific mango commodities such as jams, juices and dried mango which could be easier to export initially and allow for a platform to be built off from.



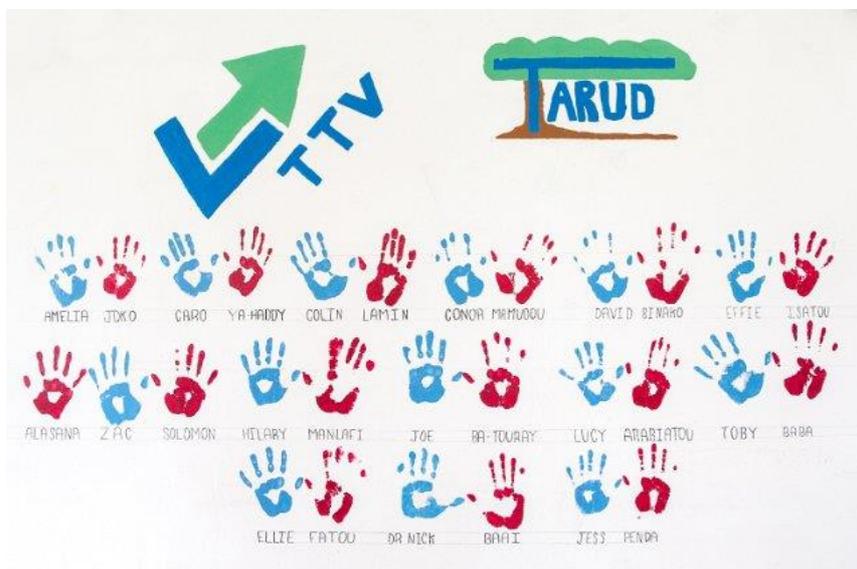
*Inspecting the use of solar power to help create dried mango*

The development of not only business acumen, but also of the vital communication skills required to easily share and collaborate ideas for the project, was another thing we all gained from the trip. This was highlighted when the Mango group went to investigate the site of a cold storage unit and consider with the elders of the village their intentions for the site and also for the possible routes that could be taken to secure investment for the ambitious project.

Upon reflection, after arriving back in the UK it would be fair to say that my perspective of the world has evolved. I now see the globe as a far broader, far more diverse place than I had before, and it excites me. I have a passion not only to discover more of the world, but also to return to the embracing and loving community of the Gunjur that I now seem tethered to for ever.



The whole TTV and Gambian group



The hands of all the members of the TTV and Gambian group