

THE GAMBIA

JANUARY 2026

Places visited

- 4 Schools
- 2 Hospitals
- 1 Fire Station
- 1 First aid Clinic
- 1 Scout Lodge
- Several Villages and family homes
- 2 Churches
- 1 Social Project Farm
- 1 College / University
- 1 Start-up enterprise

THE TRIP

This trip took place between 16th and 30th January, when I joined the charity Gambian Projects Overseas as part of a team of seven people. We spent two weeks in The Gambia, with the first week based near Banjul on the coast, visiting different locations each day. In the second week, we travelled inland to Jarra Soma, where we stayed for five days at the same school, allowing us to spend more time in one place and build deeper connections with the local community.



GAMBIAN PROJECTS OVERSEAS

Gambian Projects Overseas (G.P.O) was established in 2003 by a group of friends in the UK with the aim of providing support to communities across The Gambia. The organization focuses on creating self-sufficient and sustainable projects that empower local communities to improve their own circumstances. GPO focuses on building, teaching and resourcing.

THE TEAM

The team consisted of seven people, each bringing different skills and experiences. Our focus areas included SEN awareness (my own project), playground design, and sustainable gardening and allotments. While we each had our own specific roles and projects, we also worked collaboratively, supporting one another's work and spending time contributing to each other's projects throughout the trip.



WEEK 1

SCHOOLS

In the first week, we visited three schools. During this time, I was able to carry out classroom observations, spend time playing with the children, and have meaningful conversations with the teachers. In two of the schools, we also spent an afternoon delivering SEN training. Gill from GPO worked alongside me for this, which was great.



At the first school, there was no existing awareness of special educational needs, staff were unfamiliar with conditions such as autism, dyslexia, and dyspraxia. As a result, the session focused on the very basics, introducing the idea that children learn in different ways and need different kinds of support.

The second school had a greater level of awareness, as they were supporting two pupils on the autism spectrum who had very high needs. This meant the training could go deeper, with staff asking thoughtful questions and showing a real desire to learn how they could better support these children in practical, meaningful ways.

HOME AND VILLAGE VISITS



Despite this, it was genuinely encouraging to see two of these children being accepted and included within their own communities, reminding us that dignity, belonging, and care can exist even in places where resources and formal support systems are limited or non-existent.

We also visited family homes, known locally as compounds, and travelled to different villages to distribute donations provided by the charity. During these visits, we met children with disabilities such as Down syndrome and cerebral palsy. However, due to the lack of testing and screening services, these conditions are often undiagnosed, and many children (and adults) are confined to their compounds as a result.



I was able to distribute sensory packs and learning resources to several children, as well as to all of the schools we visited.



This photo was taken at Bojang School, where I am gifting the headteacher a guide on Special Educational Needs, along with a pack of sensory and visual learning aids to support inclusive teaching and learning.

WEEK 2

ST MICHAEL'S SCHOOL

We spent five days at St Michael's School, arriving on the Friday and making the most of the weekend while the children were not in school. This allowed us to deliver two full days of intensive training on the Saturday and Sunday. The teachers quickly engaged with the conversations and were especially keen to create their own resources, which felt like a truly sustainable approach, meaning they will be able to continue this work long after we had left.

After exploring the benefits of visual supports, reading resources, and inclusive approaches to special educational needs, we worked together to create classroom timetables and picture symbols for everyday use. St Michael's School has 168 pupils across just three classrooms, with children ranging in age from 3 to 10 years old. With no teaching assistants and extremely limited resources, each teacher is responsible for over 50 pupils in the class at the same time. The dedication and commitment of these teachers is remarkable.



We also spoke openly about the challenges they face in supporting children who learn differently or more slowly than others. For me, this was particularly challenging, as it required me to step outside my own context and truly try to understand the realities they work within every day in addition to not having additional and creative resources readily available to enhance their teaching.

The charity GPO donated a laminator, paper and pens, so they could make their own picture symbols. They are able to source laminating sheets in their country so this is something they can continue to use and have. We used the symbols I took out as an example and then created ones specific to their school.

HOSPITALS, CLINICS AND FIRE STATION

Local services such as the hospital and fire station were visibly run down, with very limited resources. However, the people working there were incredibly kind and welcoming, and, like the teachers we had met, they were doing their very best to serve their communities. Their commitment, joy, and care for others was deeply inspiring, and the warmth of their spirit was genuinely contagious.



This was the delivery room in the maternity ward. We were also shown the theatre used for C-sections, where the CEO explained that it had been out of use for over nine months due to a broken machine. When we asked what was needed to get it operational again, he told us they required an oxygen concentrator.

We didn't know that previously and what he didn't know was that we had exactly that in the van, ready to be donated to the hospital. At each place we visited, we were given a short tour before unloading the donations. This was a very emotional day for all there. And this wasn't the only place we had in the van, something they mentioned they were in need of. So many stories and miracles like these happened during our time out there. So, at this point I say, if you have anything you'd like to donate, even if you think it's rather random, GPO will have it and be able to ship and donate it to the places in need.



This is the fire station, along with a photo of the dormitory where the on-call firefighters stay. They welcomed us warmly and shared stories about the people and places they had served. They were a close-knit, dedicated team, living and working in conditions of deep poverty, yet continuing to serve their community with commitment, dignity, and care.

MORE PROJECTS

As mentioned earlier, other projects completed during this trip included the construction of two playgrounds and work on sustainable gardening. Here are some photos showcasing the final results of these efforts.



A playground using tyres and wood, sourced locally.
And a small allotment for the school to grow their own veggies.



Tyre Tunnel



Balance beams



Garden

There were several other places we visited and people we got to know. Feel free to ask me more about the university, the college, the farm, the scout lodge etc. and even the culture and animals. It's a lot to put into a small blog.



Thank you to everyone who generously donated towards this trip. None of this is the work of one person, it takes a whole team to raise awareness, promote understanding of learning needs, and support communities in meaningful ways.

It requires time, money, resources, and dedication, and I am so grateful to everyone who made this possible.



A huge thank you to our drivers, who kept us safe and on track for the full two weeks, and to everyone who prepared our meals and cared for us during our time in The Gambia. Thank you!



