

Opening The Doors Of Opportunity In West Africa

Christian Children's Fund





"Giant silk cotton trees grow from very tiny seeds."

Gambian Proverb

CCF is helping these young women get an education. Like the giant silk cotton trees that grow from tiny seeds, these girls are growing strong in body and mind. They are the future of The Gambia.

Sowing The Seeds of Self-Reliance In The Gambia

CCF's partnership with Gambian communities is helping build strong sustainable communities and better lives for children. CCF's sustainable livelihoods work in The Gambia is an excellent example of how parental input and participation are key to creating sustainability and self-governance. CCF-The Gambia is building sustainability through individual community efforts that involve parents and children, and in the process, is strengthening civil society.

CCF started working in The Gambia in 1984 and now assists approximately 63,300 children and families in 26 Gambian communities. Every CCF-affiliated community in The Gambia includes a major income-generating activity which often benefits the entire community as parents learn new ways of making a living and create a brighter future for their children.

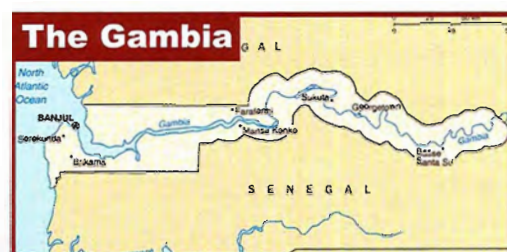
In every CCF program, parents take the lead in community development. They form administrative and advisory committees. They lead implementation of set development priorities for their communities. They allocate CCF funds to support programs for their children. Parents also help construct schools and are trained to serve as community health educators.

When parents work to resolve community problems with their neighbors, the seeds of grassroots democracy, self-governance

and sustainability are sewn. In so doing, civil society—the interaction of civic organizations, government and business—is strengthened.

Micro-Enterprise Development

Because farming remains the principal means of employment for most Gambians, economic stability is fragile. Because of the unpredictability of weather and even global marketing trends, CCF-affiliated communities are working to create new sources of income towards a more diversified economy. CCF has established strong Micro-Enterprise Development (MED) program initiatives in The Gambia. The diverse activities include a tourist lodge in Bijilo, a cashew nut plantation in Mankana, apiaries at the Kabafita Family Helper and Wassadung Education Projects, and a juice factory in



Darsilami. The juice factory was officially opened by His Excellency, the President of the Republic of The Gambia in 2003. CCF is encouraging farmers to use some form of mechanized farming for rice and other crop production in the Western Division. In addition to providing more food, using power tillers and milling machines will also reduce the labor burden on women.

A number of CCF income-generating enterprises specifically target women. For instance: CCF helped women from the fishing village of Tanjeh build a fish smoking oven that reduces the amount of wood



A CCF-supported juice factory in Darsilami is one of many micro-enterprise development projects designed to help villagers become self-reliant.

consumed and at the same time, increases production. As a result, the output of each woman increased from one basket to ten baskets of smoked fish per day. Through CCF MED programs, women from seven villages in the remote Bintang community run an onion farm. Each woman manages 15 onion beds, and the farm produces a 14-ton harvest.

Ensuring the continued viability and success of these small business operations is a major part of CCF's MED program. To help assure business stability and growth, the Hay Group Management Consultants from Holland provided management training to community members involved in CCF micro-enterprise. Through this training, staff and parents learned how to write successful business plans and identify income-generating activities that are both sustainable and meet market demand.

Food Security

In addition to increasing family income through micro-enterprise, CCF also helps farming families increase their crop production through new technologies.

Fulani pastoralists, who used to roam the lands raising livestock, are now learning how to establish and run more efficient farms with the help of the Mankana Mixed Farming Center in the Foni Jarrol District. CCF worked with the Department of Agriculture and Education in setting up the center, where farmers learn about modern farming techniques and crop diversification. The program is providing the incentive for many young Fulani to return from the cities, where they were having a hard time making ends meet due to lack of paid employment and life skills training.

Local farmers, who rely on rudimentary techniques, use the center's agricultural tools and milling and threshing machines to make their work easier. They also make use of draught and dairy animals through the center's animal husbandry program. In this program, farmers borrow draught animals and work them on the center's communally-owned fields. Milk from the dairy animals provides them with an additional source of income, and helps them improve the nutritional status of their children. The center also provides farmers with seedlings.

Health Challenges

In the years since CCF opened an office in The Gambia, parents have worked with CCF to combat malaria, initiate nutrition and health programs for children, and construct day care centers in their communities. Malaria, an epidemic in The Gambia, is one of the



At a CCF health post in Kuloro, women receive prenatal exams and nutrition information. CCF is working with parents to build community clinics and pharmacies throughout The Gambia.

country's leading causes of under-five deaths. As part of its comprehensive malaria program, CCF-The Gambia provides bed nets to families and insecticide to treat the nets. In addition, CCF organizes communities to treat the bed nets, works with communities to eliminate standing water and distributes anti-malarial drugs in community run clinics. The number of malaria deaths among children has dropped by more than 40% since the program began.

Volunteer CCF parent "health motivators" monitor the nutritional status of children under the age of five, and the communities arrange supplemental foods when needed to combat malnutrition. In Bintang, for instance, young children used to suffer vitamin A deficiencies. Working with CCF, the community responded by establishing a mango orchard near the local preschool. Now, the school incorporates mangos into the children's daily meals, which has led to improved nutritional status.

In Bijilo, the families built the village's first health clinic, which was inaugurated by Gambian President Yahya Jammeh. Impressed by the community's can-do attitude, the President promised to find the town a doctor. And he did. Bijilo families built a home for the doctor as part of their commitment to securing better health care for their children. In addition, CCF has worked with parents to build community clinics in Somita and Sanyang, and pharmacies in Mankana and Faraba-Bantang.



Early Childhood Development

Getting children interested in school early on and preparing them for a successful entry into kindergarten are the driving forces behind CCF's Early Childhood Development (ECD) program (supported by UNICEF and The World Bank). ECD in The Gambia includes both home-based care for children from birth to three and preschools for children ages three to six.

One typical community preschool, the Banjulunding Nursery School, offers a program for 448 children. As in most communities, Banjulunding parents are heavily investing in the ECD center. They serve on a parent advisory board, pay a portion of the school fees and are helping with the school's renovation. From a one-room building, the ECD center has grown into six classrooms and an administrative office. With trained ECD teachers, toys and

books, the center stimulates the development of preschool children and encourages age appropriate socialization skills. Nutritious lunch and breakfast also help to assure proper physical development. And because the preschoolers receive regular medical checkups and immunizations, mortality rates of infants and children under the age of five have dropped since the center opened.

The Challenge

Since CCF first began working in The Gambia, communities have reported dramatic reductions of infant and under-five mortality rates. The number of malaria deaths among children has dropped by more than 40% since CCF's bed nets program began. Immunization coverage now reaches 90% of CCF children. CCF hopes to secure more funding to support additional communities to provide health and other services to the thousands of Gambian children living in poverty.