

Annual Review

From the Editor

The Open Hands Gambia (TOHG) is a small charity which began some 30 years ago in the streets of Banjul through the actions of mainly one man, Mr. Kenneth Njie. He saw the needs of many local children and decided to try to meet them. With the support of his wife (Revd. Femi Cole-Njie) and family, they began providing food, medicines, educational support and spiritual guidance for many of the young people in Banjul and the environs.

In 2002 a young British woman, Nicola Lewington, visited the Gambia during her gap year from university to undertake voluntary work. She was introduced to the Njie family and Kenneth and Femi's work inspired her, upon her return to England, to see how she might be able to help these children. With the support of family and friends The Open Hands Gambia organization was born, gaining charitable status (registered charity number 1105784) in England & Wales in 2004.

In 2009, TOHG achieved charity status in The Gambia too. TOHG has a three-fold aim of serving the people of The Gambia through relieving poverty, advancing education and protecting good health.

A warm welcome to readers of the Open Hands Gambia Review 2023/24. It has been a case of building back after Covid, with charities experiencing a rising demand for their services and the need to adapt to a world moving online. The year under review has been one of progress, as we have sought to fulfil the charity's aims of relieving poverty, advancing education and protecting good health for the people of the Gambia. In this Review our Co-Chairs report provides a flavour of the charity's activities over the period. We furnish particulars of our successful fundraising ventures and finance, details of the training trustees took part in, and the formal presentations of Medical supplies in the Gambia, only made possible as a result of supporters of the charity for which we are grateful.

Happy reading! *Taiwo Awoyungbo*



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The Co-Chairpersons' Annual Report 2023/24



It is our delight to be presenting yet another annual report in the life of the Open Hands Gambia Charity. This year has been one like no other as we have witnessed some progress being made towards the realisation of the Charity's aim of reducing dependency and giving dignity to individuals in the Gambia by seeking to empower them through the proposed sustainable development initiative. We are indeed grateful to God.

The little we have achieved in the year under review, 2023/24 would not have been possible without the support received and the contributions made by fellow trustees, namely, Mr. Taiwo Awoyungbo, Mr. James Goode, Mrs. Jai Njie Bright and Mr. Stanley Njie and legal advice received from Ms. Barbara Eze (Participant Observer). The highlights of the year under review include, Trustee Training, meetings with the TOHG – Gambia Chapter, Fundraising, Promotion and donations.

"This year has been one like no other as we have witnessed some progress being made towards the realisation of the Charity's aim of reducing dependency and giving dignity to individuals in The Gambia by seeking to empower them through the proposed sustainable development initiative."

Trustee Training

As was agreed at the Annual General Meeting in 2022, Trustees attended an online Trustee Induction and Refresher Training Course organised by the National council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). The course was insightful and extremely beneficial both for the new Trustees as well as the existing Trustees. The course has enabled the Trustee Board to consider its governance role, ways of working and its relationship with the Gambia committee.

"The main focus would, however, be the Cottage industry/mini manufacturing base initiative."

TOHG - Gambia Committee

A joint meeting of the UK Trustee Board with the UK Gambia Committee was held via Zoom in April 2023. The meeting was a fruitful one. The trustees were able to share with the Gambia Committee members lessons learnt at the NCVO training, lessons aimed at enhancing the working relationship between the two bodies. It became clear that the Gambia committee was committed to continue pursuing the aims of The Open Hands Gambia Charity in relation to health and education in a more informed manner. The main focus would, however, be the Cottage industry/mini manufacturing base initiative. Plans were afoot for drawing up terms of reference for the purpose of recruiting a consultant who would carry out a scoping exercise/feasibility study in respect of the Cottage industry/mini manufacturing base initiative.

In April 2024, there was a hybrid meeting at the Kombo Beach Hotel in the Gambia with members of the Gambia Committee and Trustees who had travelled to the Gambia. A clearer pathway for the Cottage industry/mini manufacturing was discovered – working with a vocational school in Farafeni which specialises in preparing students for manufacturing roles. The principal of the School, Revd. Chris Manley was in attendance.



40th Wedding Anniversary 2022 & The Fundraising Variety Event 2023

Fundraising and Promotional

We did mention in last Year's annual report that the funds raised at the Thanksgiving service held in honour of the Co-Chairs' 40th Wedding Anniversary would be the beginning of future fund raising events as it had not been possible to do much in the area of fundraising since the pandemic struck in 2020. A fundraising variety event was held on the 1st of July 2023. The programme included songs, poems, comedy, organ recitals, a steel pan performance and a promotional slot for the Charity using a Power point presentation. The latter was so effective that a gentleman who attended the event sent an email offering further suggestion for promoting the Charity's work and for securing donated items to be sent to The Gambia. A little over a thousand pounds was raised as a result of the event.

The offertory at the Thanksgiving event held in honour of the Revd. 'Femi's seventieth birthday in May 2024 and all monetary gifts received were donated to the Open Hands Gambia Charity.

We are also grateful to the few people who make regular monthly donations to the Charity.

"The latter was so effective that a gentleman who attended the event sent an email offering further suggestion for promoting the Charity's work and for securing donated items to be sent to the Gambia."

- Monitoring the progress of the **Partnership** with the Anglican Vocational School
- Developing **strategies** for promotion of TOHG -UK
- Fundraising with a **Business Plan**
- Supporting **initiatives** in the Gambia in line with the TOHG's vision.

Donations to The Gambia

In the year under review, we have given the opportunity to the Gambia Committee to provide the UK Board with specific items that would be required by schools in particular. Books focusing on teaching Children with learning difficulties were donated to the Gambia Committee for use in schools established for that purpose.

Following the presentation of medical items to the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital in Banjul in 2022, a review of medical items donated was conducted. This resulted in the making of a donation of locally sourced

medical items made to the Methodist Medical Clinic in Marakissa by Jai Bright in May 2024. Items of clothing and books donated by families who attend the fundraising events and others are regularly shipped to the Gambia.



Medical Supplies

Advocacy

The Co-Chairpersons joined other Charities in challenging the Rwanda Offshoring proposal put forward by the Home Secretary. A letter was written and sent to the then Home Secretary, Priti Patel who happens to be their MP. The letter which was sent on behalf of The Open hands Gambia Charity passionately outlined the reasons why Offshoring would be a disastrous move. We are grateful for the significant contribution made to the letter by Mr. Taiwo Awoyungbo, our indefatigable secretary. The letter received a response from the Home Secretary who rather justified the action being taken.

Future Plans

These include:

- ◆ Monitoring the progress of the Partnership with the Anglican Vocational School
- ◆ Developing strategies for promotion of TOHG -UK
- ◆ Fundraising with a Business Plan
- ◆ Supporting initiatives in the Gambia in line with the TOHG's vision

In conclusion, we would like to express sincere gratitude to all who continue to engage with and support The Open Hands Gambia Charity. We hope and pray that TOHG's vision will be realised to the glory of God and the blessing of the people of the Gambia!

Presentations

A presentation of approximately £2000 worth of medicines to the Marakissa and Brikama Clinics was made on Sunday 19th May 2024 at the Trinity Methodist Pro-Cathedral in Serrekunda, The Gambia. A few words were shared by Mrs. Adele Sock, Chairperson Open Hands Committee in the Gambia and Mrs. Jainaba Njie-Bright, Trustee Open Hands Gambia UK.

The charity had been sent a list of medicines via the Local Committee and these were purchased at a wholesale pharmacy in The Gambia. D58,000 the equivalent of £605 was also presented to facilitate the purchase of other medicines required by the clinics but were not available at the time.

Present at the brief presentation ceremony were Bishop Bannie Manga, Revd. Louis Prom and Mr. William Forster, health coordinator of the Methodist Church, who expressed sincere thanks to the Open Hands Gambia Charity for the kind donation of medicines which would go a long way to fulfil a need.



Medical Supplies

Jainaba Njie-Bright
(Trustee and Research & Procurement Lead UK)

"We hope and pray that TOHG's vision will be realised to the glory of God and the blessing of the people of the Gambia!"

Trustee Training

The Open Hands Gambia (TOHG) Charity Trustees attended an online Trustees Training in 2024, facilitated by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. We opted for an online charity trustee induction and refresher course. This took place over two half-days. The training was very comprehensive, providing guidance and understanding on charity trusteeship. The Trustees were very pleased with the training as it provided useful tools by which TOHG will better operate to achieve our mission.

The Topics covered during the training included:

- The Charities Acts 2011
- What is a Charity
- The Role of Charity Trustees
- Management and Governance of a charity.

It was heartening to affirm that TOHG's mission, aims and objectives, to name a few, fell under the charitable categories of the Charities Act 2011: namely Prevention or relief of poverty; Advancement of education; Advancement of health or the saving of lives; Advancement of citizenship or community development and the Promotion of equality and diversity.

The training reminded trustees of their role and responsibilities as charity stewards. It is important for Charity trustees to act collectively as a board, making decisions in the charity's best interests, and this requires understanding their obligations, complying with the law and their charity's governing document. Trustees must act in good faith, manage conflicts of interest, prepare annual accounts, and understand their duties under the law and the charity's governing document.

Turnover....

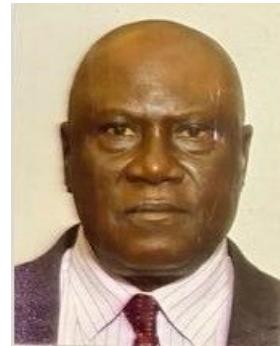




A takeaway from our training was that 'the Charity Commission expects trustees to take their responsibilities seriously. The Commission recognises that most Trustees are volunteers who sometimes make honest mistakes. Trustees are not expected to be perfect - they are expected to do their best to comply with their duties.

Charity Law generally protects trustees that have acted honestly and reasonably.' - this from Charity Commission CC3: The Essential Trustee: What you need to know, What you need to do.

Trustees said that they found the training insightful. Members said it helped them better consider governance within TOHG and their relationship with the committee in the Gambia.



James Goode
(Trustee UK)

"Trustees are not expected to be perfect - they are expected to do their best to comply with their duties."

Fundraising

The Open Hands Gambia held a fundraising variety event, 3 - 5 pm, on 01 July 2023. The venue was 35 Guithavon Street Witham CM8 1BJ, as Witham Methodist Church and Community Centre kindly made its facilities available for a fun-filled family day out. Tickets on the door cost £5 for adults; children went free. Guests came from Witham and further afield, anticipating being entertained while contributing to a worthy cause. I am happy to report that attendees were not disappointed!

Members of the charity, family and friends hosted the event with the aim of raising some much-needed funds and increasing public awareness of the valuable work done in the Gambia - relieving poverty, advancing education and protecting good health.

The day kicked off with a warm welcome from Jenny Jarvis (church steward) and her provision of housekeeping details for everyone's safety and comfort. Proceedings began proper with a prayer and Introduction by Revd. 'Femi Cole-Njie, followed by a musical interlude by the Cole-Njie Singers and Friends. There was a brief reflection by Cynthia Bonds after which Ken Brown – organist at Witham Methodist Church entertained with a musical interlude 'Savoy – American Medley.'

Just before the interval Kenneth Njie and Revd 'Femi regaled attendees with visuals and commentary of their pilgrimage to the holy lands in Israel.

During the intermission refreshments of homemade sausage rolls, meat pies, rock cakes and chin-chin (a West African snack of fried/baked cookie strips) along with assorted hot/cold beverages, including baobab juice, were served at a token pound a portion to further boost the fundraising.

The second half of the event began with an amusing comedy skit by Kenneth Njie and Olive Anofienam, followed by a musical steel pan medley by Evangelica Solomon and Bernita Brumant which got folks on their feet dancing to the rhythm. An informative visual tour of The Gambian and TOHG was presented by Jai Bright and Stanley Njie. When Ken Brown then delivered a rousing 'Gospel Rock Medley' the result was a standing ovation from all in attendance! 'Vote of Thanks' was given by Taiwo Awoyungbo on behalf of James Goode.

The event concluded with Revd. 'Femi joining the Cole-Njie Family Singers in a traditional song of thanks to God in the Creole language - 'Tell Papa God Tenki.'

*Taiwo Awoyungbo
(Trustee & Secretary UK)*



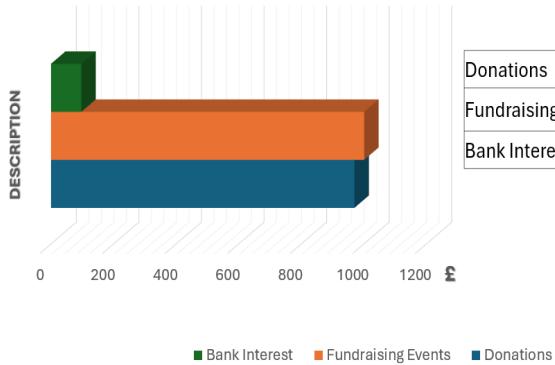
FAQ'S: People have asked about TOHG's work in the Gambia

The Charity's activities have included:

- * providing health care materials and medical equipment, working closely with the Sulayman Junkung Hospital in Bwiam. Previously we contributed to the hospitals purchase of a solar energy project and more recently sent shipments of personal protective equipment (such as aprons, gloves, face masks, hand sanitizers) in response to the global pandemic.
- * providing educational support for children from poor backgrounds through sponsoring students' school fees. TOHG has similarly sponsored several midwifery students to become qualified midwives.
- * providing educational materials and the equipping of school libraries
- * the charity has a vision of implementing a small cottage industry project for preserving vegetables and fruit to capture the seasonal glut of agricultural produce. Providing gainful employment will allow people to work their way out of poverty, enhancing their dignity and encouraging self-sufficiency.

Finance

Receipts 2023-24



Payments 2023-24



Trustee Recruitment

To achieve the Charity aims and aspirations, the trustees in the UK play an important role in making sure that TOHG is run in the interests of the people it is there to support. Being a trustee can be very rewarding personally and it also offers the opportunity for professional development. I am a retired local council worker, with a keen interest in charitable work that helps empower disadvantaged communities towards self-sufficiency. Like me, you do not have to have any particular formal qualifications or levels of experience to become a trustee (at TOHG). The most important attribute is a commitment to contribute to the development of the charity through applying your life experiences and professional competences. As a trustee you will help provide oversight of all the charity's decisions and help to set TOHG's direction. So, if you have some spare time on your hands and have wondered how to make a positive contribution to your fellow (wo)man, why not consider becoming a trustee with TOHG? If this piques your interest, please contact us at www.openhandsgambia.org or 020 7476 5460 / 07952 862 497.

To everyone who generously gave their time and talent and donated money, to make the event a success, TOHG extends our heartfelt gratitude and a very big "tenki!" An easy way to contact the TOHG is via email i.e. openhandsgm@gmail.com. We hope to hear from you!

*Taiwo Awoyungbo
(Trustee & Secretary UK)*

The Open Hands Gambia

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