

THE METHODIST MISSION AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMME

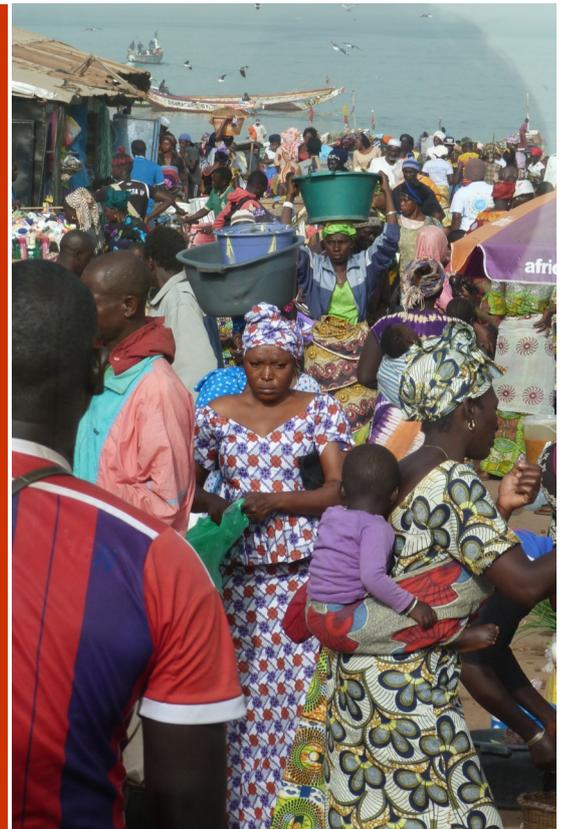


Welcome to the Gambia!

The Gambia is a country located in West Africa. It is the smallest country on mainland Africa. The country is located on either side of the Gambia River and this flows out into the Atlantic Ocean.

Some Key Facts about the country

- Over 90% of the population are Muslim, Christians make up approximately 8% of the population.
- The Gambia has a tropical climate. There is a hot and rainy season from June to November.
- The Gambia achieved independence from Great Britain in 1965. It's current President, Yayha Jammeh, became the Head of State in 1994.
- The country's economy is driven by tourism, fishing and farming.
- It is approximated that as many as one third of the population live below the poverty line



In this resource you will learn about the Methodist Mission Agricultural Project (MMAP) and how it works to improve lives for many people living in the Gambia



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BACKGROUND TO MMAP



Since 1946, large numbers of trees were cut down across the Gambia, this combined with lack of rainfall in the late 1960s led to increased crop failure. This would have severe consequences for local people.

In 1974, the Methodist Church in the UK and in the Gambia decided to work together to search for a practical solution to this worsening problem. They started by encouraging local farmers to grow citrus trees. The Methodist Mission Agricultural Project was born. Very soon though, MMAP adopted a change of strategies, because of frequent droughts, they switched from Citrus trees to planting cashews and mango. The reason was because these plants develop a bigger canopy and begin a two yield fruit within 2-3 years. This fruit could then be sold by the farmers.

By 1981/82, MMAP started scouting for seeds from indigenous trees to the Gambia, such as the mango which contains lots of fibre. They also had set up seed multiplication centres and orchards. There were three nurseries established where farmers

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could be taught about MMAP and how it worked. They also realized they needed to branch out from just producing mangoes as this kept the markets small, so they began to develop a strategy for dealing with this. MMAP now produces cashew, mango, oranges and tangerines. They aim to give farmers a variety of crop to grow, this would help the farmer to yield a greater profit.

Traditionally in the Gambia, it is women who are more engaged with farming. It is often the case that men will farm during the rainy season but women will carry on right throughout the dry season.

One of the reasons that MMAP grow a variety of crops is because they know that female farmers value this variety. They recognise the more variety of crops, the better nutritional value for their families.





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HOW OFTEN DOES MMAP PRODUCE FRUIT? AND HOW MANY TREES DOES IT PRODUCE?

The cashews usually fruit every year around March/April. The mangoes will follow around May to August. The oranges that are produced are normally ripe around January, however the life of the orange can be prolonged by leaving on the tree. All of the crops start off life in a polypot (see above photograph) for up to a year.

MMAP can produce up to 5000 trees a year, but they are limited at the moment to around 600-800 trees at the moment. This is a good growing area for the trees as it is not too hot. It normally takes a cashew tree up to two years before it can produce fruit and three to four years for the mangoes.

WHAT ABOUT WATER?

The Gambia has been blessed with water. The water its accesses is of good quality. It is not hard water. This is all the way along the River Gambia. The acidity levels of water are also not that bad. MMAP advise farmers to have their orchards away from the side of the river as this is better in regards to water.

So in a country that has a dry season, how does MMAP keep their crops well watered? Queens College saw MMAP workers watering the plants whilst on their visit. However, where possible, MMAP avoid using wells. If wells are dug, they will hit water after 8-9 metres. It is better for the trees to hold the water, which they do. This will create more moisture in the earth and can start to reverse the cycle of drought.

HOW ARE POLYPOTS DISTRIBUTED?



Originally with the tree planting, MMAP imported polypots and gave them to farmers. When MMAP went back to the farmers after a few weeks, they found that farmers weren't making use of or looking after the polypots. So MMAP had to change their strategy.

MMAP bought back all the polypots and asked the farmers who were interested to come and buy them. And the farmers have been coming and coming! MMAP found that because the farmers bought the polypots, they valued it more, rather than when they were given it for free..

SO WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Once the farmer has bought the crops, we wanted to know how MMAP followed up with the farmer. MMAP normally would follow up with them. Previously, as part of their outreach programme, they would teach the community about what to do with crop production, how to take care of orchards etc.

Due to the financial situation, MMAP are largely an office based organization, but any farmer who comes to buy from them can be given technical advice such as when you farm, when you should buy your crops, They show them how to plant and cultivate them.

The farmers are free to come at any time and MMAP will give free advice and lectures. Farmers come to MMAP with their problems and MMAP seek to find solutions which address the problem without the use of chemicals.



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WHY DON'T YOU WORK WITH BEES?

It is well known that bees are essential for pollination of plants. So why doesn't MMAP link to a nearby bee programme?

MMAP have thought about bringing bees into their nurseries however because they have water points within them they have decided against this.

Sometimes around the water, the bees can become aggressive and also the bees do not like too much noise. With having lots of people walking around the nursery it could be difficult to keep them separate enough from the bees, so MMAP decided against having bees,

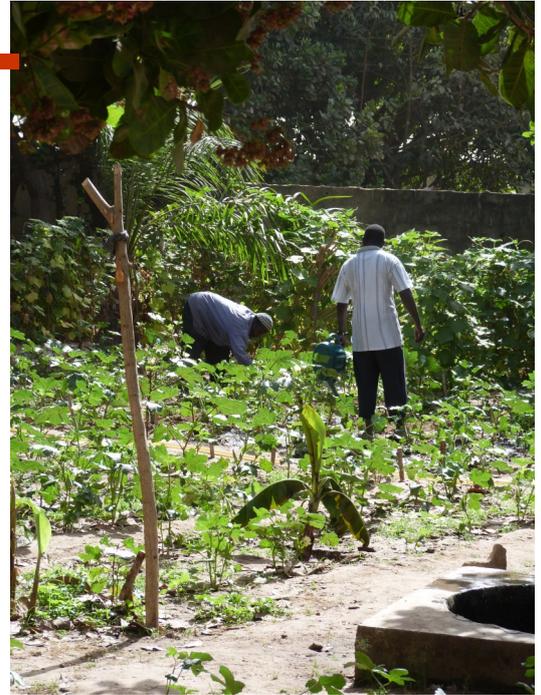


RE LINKS & QUESTIONS

And God said, "See I have given you every plant yielding seed and every tree with seed in it's fruit; you shall have them for food."

Genesis 1.29

How does MMAP enable people to live out this biblical verse?



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

MMAP has its roots in the Methodist Church. They realized that continuing crop failure and lack of rainfall would only contribute to increased food insecurity. This only sought to contribute to already vulnerable households. So what does the bible say about poverty?

Matthew 25 looks at the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats.

The core message of this parable is that God's people will love others. People that follow God will serve others as if they are serving God himself.



Genesis 1: 26 & 28 speaks about how Christians are called to care for the environment. Many Christians interpret these verses by believing that people have a responsibility for the world that God created and that they have to make their own decisions about how to do this. This is often referred to as being Stewards of God's creation.

Many Christians believe that in the idea of stewardship because the bible tells them in **Psalms 24:1** that 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.'



"Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour, was dressed like one of these"

Luke 12: 27-28

What do you think Jesus' view about his father's creation was from this verse in Luke's Gospel?