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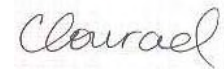
The Nova Scotia - Gambia Association is a non-profit development organization based in Canada that works in partnership with West Africans to pursue initiatives for equitable and sustainable futures for youth.

Dear Friends and Partners of the NSGA,

Now two months into the position of Acting Executive Director of the NSGA, I can say with all honesty the experience has been -- and continues to be -- one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life. Among the highlights have been my trip to The Gambia this past February, with my son Jakob (founder of *Twoonies from Toubabs*, which is described in more detail later in this newsletter); working with the Gambian staff of the NSGA; and facing the daily challenges in the Halifax office, with June always there to assist and lend a much-needed ear.

The challenges are many: we face the end of our largest CIDA grant this fall, and although new proposals are being submitted, these are never guaranteed. The ability to generate revenue that will continue to support the work by the Gambian staff -- the very foundation of the NSGA -- is always on my mind. We have 24 Gambian staff, and each and every one plays an important function in the NSGA. From the drama troop, to the trainers, the media unit, financial personnel, monitoring and evaluation of projects, project managers and, of course, our esteemed Country Director, Nyakassi Jarju, work as a collective unit to deliver the programs the NSGA has become so famous for in The Gambia.

With every challenge comes an opportunity. I see now that on the Canadian side of the Atlantic, my opportunity is to lead the cheer-leading team while the Gambian NSGA trains, day in and day out, goes out in the field and delivers education which saves lives through the health-training they do so well. We need to cheer harder, work more effectively and see how we can make their jobs easier. The NSGA is a team and we must do more than practice our cheering. We need to find ways to get the media equipment and many other supplies they need to deliver on their tasks effectively and be able to think that the sky is the limit ... especially when it's an African sky. Please help me to cheer loudly, dream big and deliver on our goal.



NSGA Annual African Dinner

Following in the steps of last year's successful Annual African Dinner, which raised \$20,000 to support health and education programs in West Africa, the NSGA will host this year's dinner at the Lord Nelson Hotel, April 28, 2011. Guests will enjoy live African music and dance by the Maritime Center for African Dance, a reception with great silent auction items, a three course West African meal and presentations by the NSGA's most passionate volunteers.

Together, we will celebrate NSGA's 25 years of operations and connect Canada's East Coast with Africa's Smiling Coast through a short film capturing our Gambian staff and programs, and with compelling stories of volunteerism shared by Jakob, Kristin and Erin. These three young people will show us how they fly, swim and run in support of health and education in West Africa. Jakob Conrad will share experiences from his recent trip to The Gambia and his *Twoonies for Toubabs* Valentine campaign in support of Education in The Gambia. Kristin Roe will share stories from her Channeling Hope campaign in support of communities affected by HIV/AIDS. And Erin Poirier will talk about her volunteer experience in The Gambia and how it compelled her to launch the Love4Gambia fundraising campaign and run across the country this July.

Please join us, we need your support! Tickets are \$100\$ each/\$75 for members and students, and can be purchased through the NSGA office, (902) 423-1360, info@novascotiagambia.ca.



NSGA Today

Baba Jallow in The Gambia

*Baba Jallow is Head of the Media Unit with the NSGA in The Gambia. CIDA Intern, Matt DeCoursey, sat down with Baba over a breakfast of **Nygbet H aag Nybbeh** (mixture of oil, tomato sauce, onion, hot pepper, cassava and beans) and morning tea, to discuss Baba's role with the NSGA, as well as life in The Gambia.*

Matt: Baba, you sure do enjoy HOT peppers in your food, don't you.

Baba: Oh yea! Pepper is good. It makes me have more spicy food ... and a more spicy life (*he says with a chuckle*). If I have pepper, I at least enjoy my food. I prefer pepper to sugar.

Matt: And what about your morning tea?

Baba: Yea, my morning tea. I have one tea bag every morning with some mints in it and that does me for the day until the next morning. That's my daily routine.

Matt: Baba, how long have you been working with the NSGA?

Baba: Since 2002 in August of that year.

Matt: How did you first come to the NSGA?

Baba: I was working in a building on Kairaba Avenue with a computer institution. I was working on computer software and hardware, networking and IT. Luckily, when NSGA moved into that building, they had three computers, and they needed me to install the software for them and to give their computers access to the printer. At the time, Burris Devanney (NSGA founder and former Executive Director) and his wife, Louanne, were on holidays in Canada. When they came back, they brought along two new computers to be assembled. I assembled these computers, and then they started to consult with me more and more on computer problems in their office. Then, they decided to employ me as an IT specialist.

Matt: So, you were originally an IT man?

Baba: Well, actually when I started officially with the NSGA, I found out that Burris had a whole media unit sitting in his office (a single H8 video camera, and editing system). They were just sitting in Burris' office. One day, Mohammed Ambrose (former NSGA colleague) was doing some editing work and I thought ... hey I can do these things. I told Mohammed, and he asked me if I had any media training. I told him I was trained for eight years in media skills and competencies before I started in IT.

Matt: So you were the right guy for the job it seems.

Baba: (*Laughing*) Oh come on, Matt, I was very lucky. Mohammed said the NSGA would be starting a new program, the first drama competition, which took place in New Town Hall. I took the video camera and covered the event. Then I loaded the recording to the editing system and started editing. It took me a while to understand the software. But, since I first started I have become media certified by the Commonwealth of Learning and have traveled to London several times for conferences.

Matt: So then, on a daily basis, what do you enjoy about your job?

Baba: I work with machines. That's my strength. The video and editing work keeps me quiet ... in the back corner of the office where I can concentrate. It's important work and I like being a good resource person for what the NSGA is trying to accomplish.

Matt: What about working in the field?

Baba: I enjoy the field when we are conducting community film shows. These are very important. When we present films that are helping young girls and boys become sensitized to things like teenage pregnancy, child sexual abuse and early marriage, I feel like I am helping them learn.

Matt: Baba, tell me about your hometown?

Baba: I have two hometowns ... my original or where I am now?

Matt: Both

Baba: Well, my original village is in the North Bank Region of The Gambia ... a village called Kerr Cherno Baba. It is a big Marabou village, where every year, thousands of people from all over (The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Senegal) come to see the shrine of the old man. I was named after him ... he's my grandfather.



Your donations help promote healthy lifestyle living, stronger communities and access to a brighter future.



Building families and communities, one step at a time, volunteers make the difference!





NSGA Today

NSGA Over the Years 1994-1996

The **Almudo Project**, an unique project in NSGA's history, addressed the needs of street children in The Gambia. Almudos are young boys in the care of marabouts who are providing them with an education. 'Almudo', an Arabic word, means 'measure' and refers to the one-litre tomato cans the street children typically carry to beg for money or food.

Medical and education students worked together with Gambian peer health educators over a two-year period. This project is a good example of action research, combining data collection of the health conditions of the target group together with provision of primary health care, basic hygiene, and recreation opportunities through the Contact Centre. The children, through NSGA advocacy and intervention, were returned to their home villages.



In 2011 the NSGA is celebrating its 25th anniversary as a registered charity in Canada

Matt: And your new home?

Baba: Now, my second home is in Combo North ... the village of Youna. I live there with my mom, my younger brother, my wife and three children.

Matt: When you are not in the office working, what do you do?

Baba: Mostly, I never sit at home. I do a lot of work at my compound. I have a field at the back of my compound where I am involved with watering my orange trees and overseeing my cassava trees. And, just keeping the compound clean is a lot of work. I have small chickens that need their hut cleaned often. I'm busy!

Matt: What is your favourite thing about The Gambia?

Baba: It's peaceful. People of different tribes interact, and are very cordial and jovial together. You will see different tribes joking with each other. We are a friendly people. We visit and enjoy each other's company.

Matt: What is your goal in life?

Baba: If I finish my second compound that I'm trying to build with a stronger structure (cement building), I want to try and build a shop around the corner and have a small business to keep my life going and to pay the school fees of my children. Also, I want to have access to congregational prayers at the Mosque for the five daily prayers ... on time.

On a daily basis, Baba works tirelessly, juggling both the media and IT needs of the NSGA office. A friendly face, with a quiet sense of humour, Baba Jallow is an integral part of the NSGA family. He is quick to lend a hand to his colleagues and eager to see all communities across The Gambia unite to build a stronger nation.



Baba with NSGA founders Louanne and Burris Devanney



Baba at work for NSGA

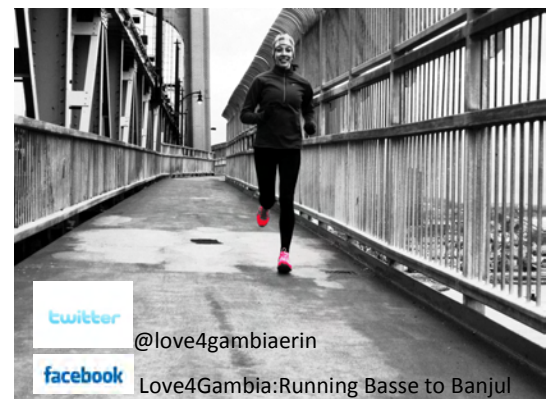
Love4Gambia Update

Starting July 7, Erin Poirier will be lacing up her sneakers to run all the way across the country of The Gambia. During her 430 kilometer route, she will be raising money for the NSGA. "Sure, it's going to be tough," said Erin. "The heat will present the biggest challenge because I know that no matter what length of time I spend in Africa, I'll never acclimate to it.

So I am trying to prepare my body for the heat by going to hot yoga practice. Sometimes in the studio, I feel like I've become one with the melting air. Other times, I think: "Gentle Lord! It's 37 degrees in here!" I look like I just got out of a swimming pool and this is average temperature I'll be running in." On these days, the preparation isn't so productive. Right now, Erin's marathon training with Coach Cliff Matthews is geared toward her third Boston Marathon. "I'm running 85 km-plus per week, fitness that will carry well onto my plane to Africa. Running is the easy part. Cliff dictates my training plan and I do exactly what he says. It's hard work, but it's something I love."

"The really brutal part is doing the extra things I need to do to stay healthy in this long training cycle. I'm piling food into my body like I'll never eat again. The sidewalks have been in poor condition during this wicked winter we've endured on the East Coast. The wind freezes my cheeks and sometimes my contact lenses, blurring my vision. Everyday I remind myself that spring always comes. "

To support Erin's Love4Gambia campaign and to follow her progress as she prepares for and runs across The Gambia in July, visit her at www.love4gambia.com





Two Feet, One Heartbeat = Change

Blue Nose Marathon Scotiabank Group Charity Challenge

On Sunday, May 22, join together with the 60+ committed NSGA runners and walkers on our Team Love4Gambia in the Scotiabank Blue Nose Marathon Group Charity Challenge. By fundraising \$100 and running or walking any distance from 5km, 10km, 21.1km, 42.2km, you can make a difference. Your two feet and one heartbeat will create change for youth and communities in The Gambia.

The Scotiabank Group Charity Challenge awards cash prizes for the top 3 teams with the most runners/walkers on them. Prizes are \$3000, \$2000, \$1000. Join today and help NSGA win!

With your support, and the support of those like you, Erin knows that when she begins her 430 km run across The Gambia on July 7, she won't be running alone.

<http://love4gambia.com/bluense-team/>



NSGA Today

Peer Education in The Gambia

Saint Mary's Students Helping Students to Teach Others

A new partnership between Saint Mary's University and the NSGA is giving Nova Scotia students a first-hand opportunity to help improve the lives of people living in West Africa.

In November 2010, six students and two professors travelled to The Gambia to launch the effort and work with high school and junior high aged students on environmental health education projects that tackled issues ranging from deforestation to waste management and climate change.

"The Nova Scotia Gambia Association has a 25-year-long history of promoting peer health education, especially with respect to raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and how it can be prevented," said Geography Professor Dr. Jason Grek-Martin who led the group with Dr. Cathy Conrad. "When the NSGA identified environmental dimensions to health education it wished to address, we suggested a partnership to help it hone its environmental message while giving our students a profound learning experience in a developing country."

"The peer health model identifies top students in various partner schools and establishes a targeted program to help Gambian students learn key health issues and communicate what they know to their peers and wider community. This is often done through the creation of humorous dramatic productions.

Dr. Grek-Martin said during the most recent trip the Saint Mary's students were divided into two groups. One spent time getting students to identify environmental issues in the country such as water quality and air pollution and focused on the local environment by "green mapping" the schoolyard and identifying local features that impacted their health for good or for bad. The second group focused on identifying medicinal trees and plants traditionally used in The Gambia that have become increasingly threatened by deforestation.

Environmental Studies student Samantha Page worked with students to help them make the connection between environmental challenges and their community.

"We thought we might be talking a lot about global warming, but they were much more interested in making the connections between the impact of a 'dirty' environment on the health of their community or the effects of bush burning and deforestation."

She said Gambian students are hungry for educational opportunities and turned up for optional weekend events with the same enthusiasm as when they participated in the classroom work carried out during the week. The student's optimism was refreshing, she said. "They are very positive about the future of the environment, which is a nice change to the doom and gloom we are bombarded with in North America."

Samantha commented that the skits that the students developed -- and will be performed for other students and community members -- are funny and poignant at the same time.



Saint Mary's students Brenna Thompson and Oliver Woods work with students in The Gambia.



NSGA Today

Pakalinding Training Session

Pakalinding, a small village in the Lower River Region of The Gambia, hosted a CIDA-funded training program 4-7 March. The session brought together 40 of the region's teachers. Each is to become a teacher-coordinator for the Peer Health Education Teams within their school. The four-day workshop provided the future leaders of the PHE teams with the necessary information and skills to create a structured and sustainable PHE team within their school.

Information on sexual reproductive health and STIs occupied a full day. This proved to be a highly interactive and informative session. For many of these teachers, it was the first forum facilitating an open discussion of sex and sexuality. The culture of silence surrounding such topics in The Gambia is a barrier to providing accurate sexual and reproductive health information to students.

These teachers will return to their PHE teams where they will create an environment open to discussing such topics and provide students with the necessary information to live a positive, healthy life.

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As a member of the African Society at Saint Mary's, Samantha said the trip reinforced her love of Africa. She hopes to return and be involved with the NSGA in the future. This semester, in another directed study program, she used the environmental knowledge gathered by the group in November to develop the environmental section of the peer health manual used by Gambian students.

Dr. Grek-Martin said as part of the partnership, the student group has created a report outlining their observations and has submitted it to the NSGA with the hope they will use it to better target the environmental educational message in other parts of the country. He said overall the program was a resounding success, and he hopes to continue the work through future directed-study courses in The Gambia running every other year.

In early February Dr. Cathy Conrad returned to The Gambia with two students to introduce her recently developed WetPro water quality testing kit to the community. The kit was developed to give non-scientists an easy, yet accurate way to test water quality. The kit has been used in Nova Scotia, but the Gambia trip was its first international trial.

Twoonies from Toubabs

When nine-year-old Jakob heard his mother, current Executive Director of the NSGA, talk about her trips to The Gambia, he would be amazed by the stories of life in such a different part of the world. Upon her return from a recent trip, he looked over her shoulder and said, "It would be a dream come true to go there one day". Having worked on environmental projects in The Gambia over the past number of years, she told him if he was really serious, he would need to think about a way to "give back" to The Gambia. In that way he would gain much more from such a trip.

When he came back to her a few days later with an idea, she knew she had to make this trip happen. He came up with the name *Twoonies from Toubabs*, decided he would make and sell Valentine cards with the aim of raising \$2,000. Jakob received a plane ticket to The Gambia for Christmas and arrived in The Gambia on Valentine's Day, 2011. Following is an interview with Jakob about his fund-raising campaign and his experiences in The Gambia.



Jakob with a new Gambian friend (Photo Courtesy of Oliver Woods)

Q. Why did you want to raise money for the NSGA?

J. The schools in The Gambia need more help with education and training for teachers.

Q. How did you come up with the name *Twoonies from Toubabs* and what does it mean?

J. I was trying to raise money from Twoonies (Canadian \$2 coins) and Gambians call non-Gambians Toubabs.

Q. How did you raise money and was it a success?

J. We sold Valentines cards for Twoonies and packs of Valentines cards for \$10. We raised more than \$2,000 -my original goal, so yes, it was a success!



NSGA Today

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Q. Why did you want to go to The Gambia?

J. Because The Gambia seemed like a really cool place to go to. I wanted to see how Gambians live and experience life there.

Q. What did you do when you were there?

J. Lots of things! I went to schools; I even helped paint a school. I delivered money to the NSGA office; I went on a safari to a crocodile pond and a monkey park. I saw and experienced the country.

Q. Why did you feel like this would be a "dream come true"?

J. Because most adults don't get to go to Africa and I got this chance and I am a kid. There are a bunch of places I'd like to go, but Africa was pretty high on my list. I also want to go to Italy, and Mexico!

Q. What will your next fundraiser for Twoonies from Toubabs be?

J. We have lots of ideas: like maybe putting a book together about the experience. We could also raise money for sports there by organizing a sporting event in Canada, like a paddling race or maybe a soccer tournament.

Q. What message would you like to send out to Nova Scotians? Why should they support this?

J. Almost every person in The Gambia knows about the NSGA. It is one of the most important organizations in the country. This is because of us, Nova Scotians. But they need more support and more money to be able to educate kids and do their work. If every Nova Scotian (and there are almost 900,000 of us) only gave a Twoonie, we would raise almost \$2 million dollars for the NSGA. Also, they don't have much but they make the best of what they do have. Here in Canada, we have so much and don't even appreciate it.

You can read more about *Twoonies from Toubabs* at: www.wix.com/toubabs/twoonies or join *Twoonies from Toubabs* on Facebook.

Art for Tomorrow

For the second consecutive year, Saint Mary's University student Kristen Herrington hosted "Art for Tomorrow", at the Paragon Theatre on behalf of the NSGA. Local artists donated more than 100 postcard sized paintings to be sold for \$10 each.

The event was an artistic success with live music played by local bands the SoHo Ghetto and the Town Heroes. A group of live painters, recognized as 'Luchador Proper' (Peter Farmer, Nick Brunt and Justin Lee), accompanied the bands by creating their own pieces of art for the audience's entertainment. An impressive display of paintings and a buzz of energy rounded out the night and raised \$1,300 for NSGA.



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