

April 3, 2012: Press release „Project Aid The Gambia“



„Project Aid The Gambia“ opens Njaba Kunda Health Center

Njaba Kunda / The Gambia, 03/04/2012. The dazzling whiteness is surprising the eyes of the visitors to the brand new model clinic in the village of Njaba Kunda in The Gambia, West Africa. The site of the Njaba Kunda Health Center located in the dusty area north of the Gambia River almost looks like an oasis. Eight white-painted buildings are grouped around a large mango tree. Flowers and plants line the tiled with broken tile paths between the houses. Some twelve months it took "Project Aid The Gambia" to do the construction. It required a further year to plan for the reconstruction of the former "Children's Hospital of Bochum in The Gambia."

The officially invited guests who have traveled this Tuesday (April 4, 2012) from the capital Banjul to the African bush, are impressed. The Gambian Minister of Health, a representative of the German Embassy, a delegation from the World Health Organization (WHO), local politicians and of course the villagers of Njaba Kunda came to the official opening of "their" new Health Center. And this covers not only the basic services for the inhabitants of the region, but it is also an example of a model for the whole country.

"At first I was more than skeptical," says nurse and clinic manager Alimatou Saidy, "as the people of Project Aid told us about their plan to construct concrete and tiled beds instead of the normal ones we did have here." Saidy has worked in Njaba Kunda, as the old building still operated: the buildings were dilapidated, it was dirty, the old tiles were broken and the metal beds were rusted. There was a long time without running water, and electricity was available only a few hours a day. But on Tuesday morning, when the nurse is walking through the buildings one last time before the opening ceremony, she is finally convinced. "Here you have to keep clean. There is no excuse. Now we have round the clock electricity and water. "

Today, the clinic is equipped with a 6-kW solar power system, a donation from the company "Naturstrom" of Dusseldorf, Germany. Members of Project Aid have built up the system last summer by themselves. It provides the clinic with current and drives the pump that fills the 16,000-liter water tank. Unlike in the past, the clinic now even has a small laboratory.

"In planning the clinic we used a lot of thoughts," Project Aid chief Matthias Ketteler says, "how to empower the staff here to ensure long lasting hygienic conditions as simple as possible." Therefore, not only all the floors and walls are tiled in the clinic but also the concrete beds, tables and cabinets. Something very special is the ventilation system of the buildings: through slits above and below the windows, the air circulates in a natural way and provides a comfortable room temperature in this hot area. The construction of the new Health Center was funded by donations from "Project Aid The Gambia" - supported with funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

In the morning Matthias Ketteler, Alimatou Saïdy, the clinic staff and hundreds of people have gathered opposite the site with their guests for the official handover of the new clinic to the Gambian government. Until all the guests have arrived and the opening ceremony begins, several hours passed.

In his brief speech, which is translated into the local Mandinka language, Matthias Ketteler then appealed to the clinic staff to take care for their new clinic. "We can not stop as of today," he says. "We can buildup the most fantastic hospital, but that's no good if people's attitude does not change. A building must be maintained forever, to keep the standard."

And the standard of the new clinic is unmatched in The Gambia. "I'm very impressed," the Gambian Minister of Health, Fatim Badjie, says during her visit to the clinic. "This Health Center is really a model clinic and we should strive for this standard for the whole country. The people of Njaba Kunda appreciate it and will make a good use of it."

The people of Njaba Kunda have participated in building the Health Center and brought in in recent months large amounts of sand and gravel. It was important to them, even to make their own contribution to the project that they know that it is a model for their country.

Also, a small group from Germany, many of them from the city of Hattingen, have come to the opening to Njaba Kunda. Many have long been friends and supporters of Project Aid. They also see the special feature of this project. The 21-year-old apprentice Kevin Arndt is the first time outside Europe. "This clinic is just great," he says. "What impresses me most are the tiled concrete beds in the wards."

This is what the people of the Njaba Kunda are impressed about also, when hundreds of them by the end of the opening ceremony walk through the site and curiously visit their new clinic.

Matthias Ketteler's and Project Aid's work for Njaba Kunda also after the opening is far from over. Project Aid will be responsible for the hygiene and the training of staff in Njaba Kunda for the next two years.

Kevin Arndt has set out to save money immediately once at home again for the next trip to The Gambia to visit Njaba Kunda once again in one year's time. "I'm already a fan of The Gambia," he says.

And nurse Alimatou Saïdy? In the evening, as the trouble has slowed down, she tells the story of a mother who gave birth to her baby in the clinic today during the opening ceremony. "The mother wants to call it out of gratitude 'Alisha'", Alimatou says. That's the name of the little daughter of Matthias Ketteler.



Background Information "Project Aid The Gambia"

Since 1985, "Project Aid The Gambia" is providing development aid in The Gambia and guarantees that all donations go directly on site. Since 1991, "Project Aid The Gambia" operates its own private Health Center, the "Jahaly Health Center", in the village of Jahaly on the south bank of the River Gambia. In Germany this Health Center is known as "Buschlinik Hattingen" (Bushclinic of Hattingen). Approximately 500,000 patients (March 2012) have been treated there now.

In 2004, with support of the "RTL German Television Spendenmarathon" (telethon) the journalist and TV host Markus Lanz opened a kindergarten with nursery school in Jahaly for 240 preschool children. Besides these two projects the organisation supports five garden projects for over a thousand women in the sister villages Jahaly and Madina.

In 2009, the Government of The Gambia awarded Jahaly Health Center as a model clinic.

The board members and founders of "Project Aid The Gambia", Matthias Ketteler, Frank Heuer and Dieter Lieken, are working in Health Care (Nursing) for many years.