

**An investigation of  
the Gunjur-Marlborough partnership:  
appreciating perspectives  
and  
developing collaborative relationships.**

**On behalf of**

**GCL Gunjur Community Link**

**TARUD Trust Agency for Rural Development**

**MBG Marlborough Brandt Group**

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## Executive Summary

### **An investigation of the Gunjur-Marlborough partnership: appreciating perspectives and developing collaborative relationships.**

For over thirty years, a North-South partnership has connected the Marlborough Brandt Group (MBG) based in Marlborough UK, with the community of Gunjur in The Gambia. Today that partnership depends on relationships between MBG and two civil society organisations in Gunjur, GCL and TARUD.

This investigation assesses the current condition of the partnership, in order to inform and illuminate continued collaboration between the three partners. Therefore, this study examines the value-based perspectives of each partner, their roles and inter-relationships, constraints on partnership working, and gaps between objectives and outcomes. To investigate these points, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were organised in Gunjur and Marlborough, with candidates from GCL, TARUD, MBG and the Gunjur community. Short-answer questionnaires were also presented to MBG members and residents of Gunjur.

Regarding the purpose of the partnership, the partners were found to have perspectives in common, and some differences. Partnership roles were well understood, although GCL found their declining role unsatisfactory, and there was disagreement over which organisation should represent the Gunjur community. Despite many successful outcomes during a long period of partnership, certain outcomes do not correspond with objectives. For example, Gunjur people are denied the opportunity to participate in linking exchange visits, and some development projects have failed to deliver the intended outcomes.

The partnership is constrained by the difficulties that people from Gunjur face in obtaining UK entry visas, meaning that exchange visits now only occur in a Marlborough-to-Gunjur direction. This has reduced local enthusiasm for joint partnership activities organised when Marlborough groups visit Gunjur. Partnership effectiveness may be constrained by inadequate understanding of Gunjur's institutional landscape, and capacity limitations in the partner organisations.

This report recommends a re-examination of the perspectives and roles of each of the three partners (GCL, TARUD and MBG) and of the relationships between them. It recommends revisiting the objectives of the partnership in order to improve partnership collaboration.

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## Section 1: Aims, objectives and stakeholders.

### 1.1 Aims

This study investigates the current situation of the Gunjur-Marlborough partnership, a North-South link between a UK community-based group and a small town in The Gambia.

Following more than thirty years of joint endeavour, the partnership now faces a new set of circumstances. The aims of this study are to examine the perspectives, roles and relationships of the partners, and to identify constraints, with the intention of supporting the partners in achieving outcomes that match their objectives.

### 1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. to understand the value-based perceptions of the partnership held by key stakeholders in both Gunjur and Marlborough, especially in terms of the perceived purpose and successes of the partnership;
2. to understand the specific roles of the partners, and the relationships between these organisations;
3. to identify constraints that impede the partners in working towards their objectives;
4. to describe any ways in which partnership outcomes do not deliver the intended objectives;
5. to suggest areas for consideration and discussion by the partners, pertaining to the points above.

### 1.3 Stakeholders

Three main organisations act within the partnership. They are:

- MBG (The Marlborough Brandt Group), a community-based interest group with about 300 paying members, based in Marlborough, UK;
- GCL (Gunjur Community Link), a voluntary committee in Gunjur who represent the interests of the town in the design and implementation of linking activities;
- TARUD (Trust Agency for Rural Development), a Gambian NGO based in Gunjur, formed by MBG and GLC (the predecessor of GCL) in response to local development needs.

In addition, further stakeholders have an interest in the partnership, including:

- local leaders, especially the Village Development Committee (VDC) of Gunjur, who have a civic and legal role as the 'local council' of Gunjur;
- the residents of Gunjur, many of whom are beneficiaries of TARUD programmes.

## Section 2: Introduction and background

### 2.1 Introduction and background

In 1981, a group of residents of the UK town of Marlborough, interested in development issues and concerned about the widening gap between global North and global South, established the Marlborough Brandt Group (MBG) with four principal aims (MBG, 2015a):

- learning about global development issues;
- teaching; presenting those issues beyond the group membership, through lectures, media and schools work;
- lobbying of politicians and parties, to raise the profile of development issues;
- linking with a community in the global South, “to bring authority to the learning, teaching and lobbying”.

After researching several possibilities, a suitable community link partner was identified: the village of Gunjur in The Gambia, on the West African coast. Village authorities gave their assent, and a local body was formed in 1983, known as the Gunjur Link Committee (GLC).

At first, linking efforts centred on exchange visits (EVs), with selected residents from each community spending a short period in the other town, living in a family home or compound, and participating in a programme of activities. Many hundreds of people joined exchange visits in both directions, with the aim of “gaining a deeper understanding of each other through shared experiences and mutual exchange” (MBG, 2015b).

Each exchange visit typically included a group project involving local residents working together with the visitors. For example, groups in Gunjur built a classroom block, planted a mango orchard, and fenced the women’s garden. In Marlborough, groups constructed a playground on a housing estate, established a cycle track along a dismantled railway line, and ran workshops in primary and secondary schools.

The partnership enabled some visitors to stay for extended periods. Some residents of Gunjur attended UK colleges, on training courses related to early-childhood education, hotel management and welding, for example. Also, gap-year students from Marlborough have worked as teachers in Gunjur schools.

During the first exchange visit of Gunjurians to Marlborough in 1986, representatives of both communities met to evaluate the emerging partnership. The Gambians pointed out their stark development needs. Child mortality was high, for example, and literacy was low, particularly amongst women. As a result, MBG agreed to fund development interventions in Gunjur. Initially, these programmes were coordinated informally by the (old) GLC.

Over time, the development side of the relationship grew, whilst exchange visits also continued. In 1997, MBG received £407,000 from the Big Lottery Fund (UK National Lottery) to establish an ‘integrated development programme’ in Gunjur. To dispense these funds effectively, a Gambian-registered NGO was formed in Gunjur, known as Trust Agency for Rural Development (TARUD), and MBG established their Project Support Group (PSG). Since then, MBG have helped TARUD design and implement a wide range of development programmes, including programmes devoted to skills training (eg. literacy), material provision (eg. pit latrines), education (eg. pre-schooling and health education) and economic empowerment (eg. microfinance and the Gunjur Youth Development Initiative).

In 2013, a dispute concerning the partnership arose in Gunjur. Certain members of the long-established but newly rejuvenated Village Development Committee (VDC) asserted that GLC was undemocratic, and in particular that the same families were always chosen to participate in exchange visits and host UK visitors. The dispute caused significant 'commotion' in Gunjur. Ultimately, the CLC was disbanded and replaced by a new body known as Gunjur Community Link (GCL). The new GCL general assembly was formed with a male and female representative from each of the kabilos, and from Gunjur's minority groups and community-based organisations (CBOs). From this assembly, an executive committee was elected which, since 2013, has coordinated the Gunjur side of the link.

GCL were immediately faced with a difficult situation when the locally-popular programme of reciprocal exchange visits (from Gunjur to Marlborough) was suspended. Due to changes in the eligibility rules for UK entry visas, it became substantially more difficult for Gambian applicants (especially young and unqualified persons) to obtain UK entry visas. With little prospect of participating in a visit, the number of local people engaging in other partnership activities in Gunjur substantially reduced. For separate reasons, participation in Marlborough-to-Gunjur exchange visits declined simultaneously; some UK parties (eg. school groups) became reluctant to travel to Gunjur due to the presence of Ebola in West Africa.

Also in 2013, the Gunjur community expressed a new concern to MBG regarding the high rate of youth unemployment, especially amongst men. In addition to the difficulties associated with having no work and no income, community members were worried that disenfranchised young men might be prone to get involved with the emerging drugs trade, or to travel illegally to Europe (via perilous journeys across the Sahara or over the Atlantic), or could be vulnerable to extremist groups such as Boko Haram (already active in other parts of West Africa).

In response to these particular concerns, a local businessman was invited to lead a Business Task Force. This steering group recruited a Gambian consultant to prepare a business strategy for Gunjur. The resulting 'Gunjur Youth Development Initiative' (GYDI), which has two staff at TARUD and is financed by MBG, has three strands:

- small interest-free loans to help develop existing businesses;
- a competition in Gunjur and in Wiltshire schools to generate business proposals suitable for West Africa;
- eight young residents (one from each kabilo) are sponsored to attend the Gambian Technical Training Institute (GTTI), with a view to equipping them to increase and diversify enterprise activities within Gunjur.

## **2.2 This research**

The Gunjur-Marlborough partnership has travelled far since it was first established, and much has been achieved in both Gunjur and Marlborough for individual beneficiaries and at the community level. The recent changes described above have created a new set of challenging circumstances for the Gunjur and Marlborough partners.

These problems are considered in Sections 5-8, set against a context of relevant Development Management literature. These four sections correspond with the four principal research questions for this study, which are introduced below, in Section 3. The research methodology is outlined in Section 4.

## Section 3: Research questions

### 3.1 Research emphases

After more than thirty years of active partnership, leaders of GCL, TARUD and MBG recognise the need to reappraise the partnership in the light of new realities, to ensure that the partnership remains viable and fulfils its objectives.

Throughout this report, the partnership and its circumstances are considered in these four ways:

- purpose and perspectives
- roles and relationships
- constraints and conflicts
- objectives and outcomes

### 3.2 Research questions

These four areas are formulated into the following four research questions:

- 1. What do different stakeholders value about the partnership? What are perceived to be the qualities and successes of the partnership?**
- 2. How is the partnership understood by GCL, TARUD and MBG, in terms of roles and relationships?**
- 3. What constraints do TARUD, GCL and MBG face in contributing to an effective and meaningful partnership? Also, what constraints do the partners face in terms of working together?**
- 4. What is the nature of any gap between the objectives of any partner and actual partnership outcomes?**

Sections 5-8 address each of these research questions, in turn.

Prior to that, Section 4 outlines the research methodology for this study.

## Section 4: Research methodology and design

### 4.1 Introduction

This section describes the research process in Gunjur and Marlborough, and explains the characteristics of the people interviewed. The sampling method and its limitations are discussed, and ethical issues pertaining to this research are considered.

### 4.2 Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Marlborough and Gunjur between January and March 2015. Other interviews were conducted by telephone or Skype during the same period.

On each occasion, a semi-structured interview was used, beginning from a set of standard questions corresponding to the principal research questions listed in Section 3. Interviews were permitted to become 'free conversations', enabling deeper enquiry on themes spontaneously introduced by interviewees. Further questions were posed for clarification, and examples requested. Additional specific questions were addressed to certain individuals, depending on their role.

All interviews were conducted in English. In approximately half the cases in Gunjur, the assistance of a translator permitted interviews to take place with persons unable to respond in English. This technique depends on a translator's abilities to interpret the full meanings of questions and answers. Given that some expressions or concepts are difficult to translate, there is a risk of conversations becoming rather simplistic, and of losing the implied subtleties and nuances.

### 4.3 Interviewee characteristics

Most **GCL interviewees** were members of the elected GCL executive committee. Representatives interviewed included the chair, vice-chair, secretary general and the linking liaison officer. One (non-executive) public relations officer was also interviewed.

**TARUD interviewees** included some trustees, the director, finance officer, three programme coordinators, receptionist and several programme staff.

**Gunjur community interviewees** included host families, local businesspersons, and the chair of the Village Development Committee (VDC). Project beneficiaries were also interviewed, including women working in their community vegetable garden or classroom teachers at the pre-school. Five kabilo heads were interviewed. Other residents were interviewed opportunistically as occasion arose.

**MBG interviewees** included some trustees, the director, administrator, finance assistant, volunteers and members. Some general members had previously occupied positions of responsibility within the organisation, including several who had served as trustees.



The total number of interviews conducted was as follows:

| Age          | Gunjur interviewees |           | Marlborough interviewees |          |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------|--------------------------|----------|
|              | Male                | Female    | Male                     | Female   |
| 0-19         | 2                   | 1         | -                        | -        |
| 20-39        | 12                  | 6         | 1                        | 2        |
| 40-59        | 7                   | 4         | 2                        | 4        |
| 60-79        | 5                   | 3         | 5                        | 2        |
| 80+          | 4                   | -         | -                        | -        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>30</b>           | <b>14</b> | <b>8</b>                 | <b>8</b> |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>44</b>           |           | <b>16</b>                |          |

Interviewee sub-categories

| Category             | Frequency |
|----------------------|-----------|
| GCL Representatives  | 8         |
| TARUD Staff/Trustees | 12        |
| Gunjur Community     | 24        |
| MBG Members/Trustees | 16        |

In reality, the separation between the Gunjur sub-categories is rather artificial. Most GCL and TARUD representatives were also members of the Gunjur community, and some community members had previously been TARUD trustees or members of the (old) GLC committee. For these reasons, distinction between these Gunjur sub-groups is not heavily emphasised in the following analysis.

#### 4.4 Additional research tools

A tool was designed for rapid data collection at the periphery of the town (in Freetown, Santoto, Santanba and Jujuba), seeking the views of a wider cohort. This questionnaire had six simple questions, asking the 24 participants what they knew of the partnership and its impact.

Similarly, an online questionnaire of closed-answer and short-answer questions was prepared for the MBG wider membership. Invitation to participate was circulated by email through the MBG office. Twenty responded, from a membership of around 300.

Two focus groups were organised. In Gunjur, a group of four 'host mothers' discussed the benefits and difficulties of receiving UK visitors. In Marlborough, a group of four MBG members discussed questions similar to those used in the semi-structured interviews. These sessions produced interesting discussions and rich data.

During the research period, opportunities presented themselves to see these organisations 'in action'. These included:

- the AGM of GCL
- the AGM of TARUD
- opportunities that arose by being based in the TARUD office for several days
- a public meeting in Gunjur with the British Ambassador
- the 2015 MBG Lent Lecture (on a development theme) in Marlborough

These occasions broadened exposure to each organisation, deepening an understanding of key individuals and their interactions with the public. These aspects of the investigation therefore comprised a form of action research.

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

This research was conducted following invitation by the GCL executive, and the TARUD and MBG trustees. On arrival in Gunjur, courtesy visits were made to community leaders including the Imam, Seyfo, Alkali and Nyansimba, who each endorsed the process. Three of these subsequently participated in full interviews: the Alkali and Imam were interviewed by virtue of also being Kabilo Heads, and the Nyansimba for her perspectives on the views of project beneficiaries, especially women.

Interview respondents were briefed on the research purpose and process, assured of anonymity, asked to give their consent, and offered the opportunity to drop out. However, consent was not obtained during informal interviews on the street.

Asking questions about development matters, constraints and change, possibly gives a misleading impression that the researcher can influence those things. It was therefore explained that this process would generate material for discussion without guaranteeing any particular action.

Many interviews took place during the course of the participants' regular lives, and some caused 'interruptions' to work, community or home routines. The question of the extent to which Northern research is permitted to disrupt ordinary Southern lives remains an ethical dilemma.

#### **4.6 Sampling technique and limitations**

The sample of interviewees was not fully representative of either community, as no attempt was made at stratified sampling or similar techniques. This decision was made for practical reasons: research took place in a restricted time-frame, and the pragmatic approach was to interview whoever was available.

Approximately half of the interviewees listed above were recommended by the GCL chair or the director of MBG, potentially biasing the sample towards those predisposed to comment favourably about the partnership. Both these lists were dominated by male interviewees. Efforts were made to address this imbalance throughout the research period, but the views of women are still underrepresented. Additional interviewees were identified by word of mouth. The short-answer questionnaire used an opportunity sample at the periphery of Gunjur with no particular connection to the partnership. However, the views of Gunjur's minority groups are not well-represented here.

## 4.7 Suitability of the research method

Personal interviews have significant advantages over written questionnaires in their adaptability. The spoken interview also permits the explanation and clarification of questions, especially useful for non-native speakers of English. The interview is a human encounter in which the interviewer can help the interviewee to relax and feel confident to give full answers, whereas a questionnaire can appear mechanic and impersonal.

The bulk of this data was qualitative in nature, being individual perspectives of the values and constraints of the partnership, expressed verbally. Qualitative techniques are particularly suitable for investigating perceptions, values and meanings, and where the nature and quality of social relationships are involved. However, analysing interview data is a value-laden activity. Interpreting evidence is affected by value judgments, preferences and assumptions. 'Truth' is a contested concept. Realities will appear very different to a family from Gunjur, compared to the view of their UK partners. The perspective of a Northern researcher may be different again.

Interviewees (in both Gunjur and Marlborough) may have complex motivations for their responses. They may give 'safe' and socially-acceptable answers, or speak from local narratives arising from 'shared understandings'. They may seek to impress, or deceive. They may wish to influence the research outcomes towards greater support, or reduced interference. It is therefore difficult to claim that the interview responses summarised in this study are 'the truth'. It can only be said that these were comments that this sample of people made on these particular days. From that starting point, the descriptions, analysis, interpretations and recommendations follow.

## 4.8 Next...

Sections 5-8 address each of the research questions from section 3.2, in turn, considering the partnership and its circumstances in the four ways stated in section 3.1:

- purpose and perspectives
- roles and relationships
- constraints and conflicts
- objectives and outcomes

Each section begins with a short review of development management literature and theory of relevance to the question posed. The research findings (from the interviews, questionnaires and focus groups) are then presented and discussed, together with some critical analysis of those findings. These findings and their implications for the partnership are then further discussed in Section 9.

## Section 5: Purpose and Perspectives

### Research Question 1.

**What do different stakeholders value about the partnership?  
What are perceived to be the qualities and successes of the partnership?**

### 5.1 Value-based perspectives (literature and theory)

The first step in assessing how the partnership might overcome any constraints arising within the new circumstances is to understand how each partner views the purpose of the partnership. What is it for, what are its strengths, and which aspects of the partnership are valued?

Thomas (1996, p106) describes that development management takes place “in the context of [conflicting] goals, values and interests.” Penrose (2000, p248) states that compatibility of values and mission is “the most important criteria for developing a partnership relationship”. Mission and values are not required to be identical, but sufficient overlap is necessary. This first research question investigates what is valued by the partners. Are they aiming for similar objectives? What is the nature of their common ground? Understanding the values held by each partner will give valuable information about the ways in which they will wish to confront the new challenges under consideration here.

Initiatives designed to encourage ‘developments’ are frequently contested (ie. they often cause or reveal disagreements) because stakeholders have different beliefs, ideologies and ways of interpreting the world (North, 1999). The strategies chosen in a particular context will be influenced by the values of those involved. Indeed, meaningful policy is not simply written and implemented, but emerges through real-world actions, interactions and events. Development management is sometimes said to be similar to sailing a ship, constantly adjusting to changes in the wind and tides.

The objectives of development programmes (eg. TARUD programmes) are frequently ‘external social goals’, such as increases in GDP/incomes, job creation, skills development, technological advances or social change. Such outcomes might be valued by stakeholders in Gunjur and Marlborough, but Sen (1999) asserts that changes like these are not the core aim. Sen equates development with freedom, and defines development work as removing the sources of ‘unfreedom’, such as poverty, weak public facilities, poor economic opportunities, inequality and discrimination.

It is worth noting that MBG did not set out to be a ‘development organisation’. As stated earlier, the original aims of MBG were learning, teaching, lobbying and linking, and development interventions began later. Nonetheless, this brief overview demonstrates the likelihood of multiple perspectives regarding the purpose of the partnership, amongst GCL, TARUD, MBG and the Gunjur community. Research question 1 therefore examined stakeholder perceptions of the partnership’s value, purpose and strengths.

### 5.2 Findings: Purpose and Perspectives

Common themes emerged amongst the perspectives expressed by various stakeholders. Interviewees from both Gunjur and Marlborough valued cross-cultural exchange, development

projects and exchange visits. Those from Marlborough also spoke about personal friendships and learning. There was a strong emphasis on individual opportunities as well as community benefits.

### 5.2.1 Cross-cultural exchange and learning

Some Gunjur interviewees emphasised the importance of **cross-cultural exchange**, in terms of:

- bridging the gap between North and South;
- the benefits of interrelations between cultures and religions;
- appreciating each other's values.

One GCL interviewee quoted a Mandinka saying to express this mutuality: "Balafa be longo le bala," meaning, 'Familiarity leads to understanding'.

MBG interviewees were more likely to value **learning** within cross-cultural exchange, for example:

- a deeper understanding of Africa and Islam;
- a bridge-building exercise to increase understanding of the developing world.

Interviewees (from both places) who had participated in exchange visits were more likely to give specific examples. For example, one referred to learning about the dominant place of remunerated work in UK daily life.

### 5.2.2 Development projects

Several interviewees from Gunjur commented on specific **development projects**, a visible impact of the partnership. "It boils down to how we better ourselves materially," said one. Another described the purpose of the link as "to improve the living standard in Gunjur". Numerous examples were given by Gunjur interviewees, including the milling machines, the market building, the mango orchard and the safer wells, all associated with the work of the partnership.

MBG interviewees also emphasised the value of development projects, including construction of pit latrines, the women's garden and the classroom block. It was said that such projects add value by improving living conditions in Gunjur. Others recognised that an emphasis on development projects contrasts with the original partnership aims relating to connecting communities.

### 5.2.3 Exchange visits

An unexpected finding (that is, not anticipated by the researcher) was the large number of interviewees judging the **exchange visits** to be of central importance. From the perspective of MBG members, exchange visits (to Gunjur) provided an opportunity to participate in community life in Gunjur, with benefits such as:

- living in a family compound
- exposure to the realities of poverty
- contributing to project work

A few claimed that visiting Gunjur had made a lasting impact on their (or others') career decisions, including two who now worked in 'development-related' professions.

Comments by Gunjur interviewees also indicated a focus on benefits for individuals. Participating in exchange visits (to Marlborough) was said to:

- help individuals gain experience of the western world;
- build credibility with the Embassy, counting towards future visa applications;
- provide opportunities for training in UK colleges; community interviewees regularly cited cases of participants whose UK training had enabled them to take up senior positions in The Gambia.

One interviewee estimated that around three-quarters of exchange-visit participants (from Gunjur to Marlborough) were now resident in Europe or North America (around 450 out of 600). Another interviewee showed a photograph of his group in Marlborough High Street, from several years before – all bar three (out of twelve) had moved overseas.

One community interviewee acknowledged the contrasting motivations between partners. “Marlborough people come here for an experience,” she said, “but we go there for opportunities.” The MBG director defended the individualistic focus of these responses, asking “Why shouldn’t someone from Gunjur have the same opportunities to better themselves in a foreign land as someone from Marlborough?” Whilst equal opportunity may be a valid consideration, this is a conundrum for MBG. Rather than motivating a commitment to community development, might the partnership actually be providing an exit route for ‘well-qualified’ and ‘successful’ persons from Gunjur?

#### 5.2.4 Personal Friendships

Several interviewees (generally those from Marlborough rather than Gunjur) framed the partnership in terms of **personal friendships**. The practice of living in each other’s house or compound was cited as a factor in nurturing strong relationships. One MBG interviewee commented that the linking relationship attempts to be horizontal, whereas a donor-recipient relationship cannot be. “This is about partnership, not aid,” said another. Other benefits may follow, but the connection between people is central, others commented. However, it was also clear that host families benefited in material ways, not only through the weekly lodging fee paid by a guest, but in some cases through continuing support from that guest beyond the visit, eg. for school fees.

This slight difference in emphasis between MBG/Gunjur interviewees might simply arise from linguistic reasons, such as choosing different vocabulary to describe similar concepts. Or it could indicate that Northern partners (arguably with greater supplies of finance and leisure time) are equipped to contemplate concerns higher up Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. A third reason is statistical; even if an equal number valued personal friendships, they would be proportionally less frequent in Gunjur, a town of 25,000, compared to MBG, a 300-member organisation.

### 5.3 Summary – Purpose and Perspectives

Members of both communities valued the cross-cultural exchange and development projects made possible by the partnership. Whereas people in Gunjur were more likely to speak about material or instrumental gains, MBG members often emphasised linking benefits such as personal friendships and learning. Both communities placed a high value on the exchange visits. For MBG members, visits provided a short-term experience of a different culture. For people from Gunjur, exchange visits offered a route to the UK that potentially might lead to training and/or employment. Many individuals in both communities urged that the partnership continue, and the exchange visits be reinstated.

## Section 6: Roles and Relationships

### Research question 2.

**How is the partnership understood by GCL, TARUD and MBG, in terms of roles and relationships?**

### 6.1 Roles and relationships (literature and theory)

Having described the value-based perspectives of partners, the second part of this study investigates the distinct role that each partner plays, and the ways in which partners interrelate. Development management involves negotiating between groups and ideas. GCL, TARUD and MBG will have their own aims, approaches, working patterns, competences and weaknesses. How they bring these elements into their mutual relationships will impact on the strength of the partnership.

Human organisations do not exist in isolation. Development management takes place in a multi-actor environment. Indeed, the challenging issues facing the world today frequently require multi-actor solutions, involving organisations from the public sector, private sector and civil society. Consequently, the ways that diverse groups and individuals inter-relate are increasingly important.

Relationships between GCL, TARUD and MBG will impact on the nature, quality and collective outcomes of the partnership. Three common types of relationship, known as the 3Cs of inter-organisational relationship, are:

- **Competition;**
- **Coordination;**
- **Cooperation.** The expression '**collaboration**' is also used here, a specific category of cooperation relevant to partnerships.

Each of these implies a set of ideas and ways of relating, and can (loosely) be understood as the typical pattern of the market, state and civil society, respectively. In reality, any pair of organisations can interrelate in all these ways; even private companies collaborate, and development NGOs compete. In fact, Ranade and Hudson (2003, p29) confirm that all three types are commonly woven together in 'complex sets of relationships', which makes inter-organisational interfaces more difficult to understand and manage (but arguably more intriguing).

The relevance of the three ideal types to this partnership is briefly outlined below:

#### 6.1.1 Competition between organisations

Competition between organisations is beneficial for public action when it promotes individual choice, but can bring difficulties where the 'success' of one organisation has a negative impact on another. In Gunjur, competitive behaviour between organisations might exist not only for finances and resources, but also in terms of ideas, values, status and local support. Moore (2000, p92) warns that unruly competition can generate bad feeling and is likely to have undesirable consequences.

### 6.1.2 Coordinating the work of different organisations

Where multiple agendas compete, coordination can avoid conflict and take advantage of each organisation's distinct competences. Coordination is not about control or coercion (which are two more C-word relationship types), but is about facilitating discussions to generate innovative solutions in the public interest. In fact, understandings of the 'public interest' are constructed through interactions between stakeholders with differing motives, preferences and objectives (Robinson et al, 2000, p216).

Coordination can be beneficial to small, resource-poor and power-lacking organisations that have little power on their own (a description that might apply to one or more of these partners), but it can be elusive, requiring skills of negotiation and brokering. Coordination could well be a relevant concept in a multi-actor setting such as this, but bringing together distinct value-based perspectives requires sensitivity. Also, although coordination sounds attractive, some individuals and organisations prefer to retain their autonomy and therefore resist 'being coordinated'.

### 6.1.3 Partnership through Co-operation/Collaboration

Civil society groups like GCL, TARUD and MBG can represent diverse and even contradictory social interests. Therefore, Harriss (2000, p226) describes co-operation as 'mutual adjustment of behaviour over extended periods in pursuit of common goals'. This type of relationship is said to involve 'self-organisation', meaning that GCL, TARUD and MBG have chosen to work in this kind of relationship without obligation. (Whether it is fully 'voluntary' is debatable, since at least two of the three organisations were set up specifically to participate in this partnership relationship).

Harriss (2000, p241) writes that co-operative/collaborative relationships (such as partnerships) depend on trust. Trust is built, he claims, through an incremental mutual learning process involving discussion to reframe problems (such as dialogue between GCL, TARUD and MBG on issues affecting Gunjur). Zucker (1986, p54) adds that trust between organisations can depend on past experience (process-based trust), cultural or personal characteristics (ascribed trust), or through formal regulations (institutional-based trust).

## 6.2 Findings: Roles and Relationships

### 6.2.1 Roles

The distinct contributions of each organisation to the partnership appeared to be well understood. Interviewees from each organisation described the separate roles in ways concurring with their three separate bipartite Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).

For example, interviewees emphasised these roles:

**GCL** – linking activities in Gunjur, such as selecting host families, and organising and implementing activity programmes. **TARUD** – programme delivery in and around Gunjur. **MBG** – responsible for the Marlborough end of the link, which includes preparing groups for visits, organising programmes and host families for visitors, and supporting TARUD in development programmes (direct financial support, writing third-party grant bids, strategic programme discussions).



With the suspension of exchange visits, GCL has lost much of its previous role (that of selecting candidates for exchange visits). This partner has therefore lost some of its local status. “We have been reduced to tour guides,” one GCL interviewee complained. There was some disagreement over which of the Gunjur-based organisations should lead the process of selecting projects for visiting groups (this is discussed later under 7.2.3(b)). Another GCL interviewee thought that GCL should be given a role in monitoring these projects.

### **6.2.2 Relationships**

In general, interviewees (from each organisation) described the mutual relationships as good. “There is an overwhelming appreciation on both sides of the other,” stated one MBG trustee, representing a view expressed widely.

Despite this, many TARUD staff had no contact with anyone at MBG. For those that did, there appeared to be no fixed procedure in the pattern of communications. One programme coordinator sent regular reports to MBG, but another had no contact with MBG, and communications for that project were handled by the TARUD director. Similarly, almost all communications between GCL and MBG were handled by the GCL chair and/or linking officer, and the MBG director. This tendency to depend heavily on a few individuals could raise difficulties for those organisations, with the wider membership and staff members excluded from key communications and decision-making. Decision-making leaders also risk being inadequately informed of actual circumstances.

Despite sharing a MoU, the GCL-TARUD relationship is tentative. They operate in distinct roles, and collaboration is limited. Inter-organisational relationships are further discussed below in section 7.1. and in 7.2.3.

### **6.2.2 Summary – Roles and Relationships**

Roles of each organisation were clearly defined and generally well understood. There was some uncertainty over roles in relation to planning and monitoring of projects for visiting groups from Marlborough. With the suspension of exchange visits, the role of GCL has diminished, and the remaining mundane tasks do not motivate them. Long-standing collaboration has enabled the partnership to meet many of its objectives, but relationships between MBG the Southern partners depend heavily on a few individuals, with relatively little official contact between other members.

## Section 7: Constraints and Conflicts

### Research question 3.

**What constraints do TARUD, GCL and MBG face in contributing to an effective and meaningful partnership? Also, what constraints do the partners face in terms of working together?**

### 7.1 Conflicts and constraints (literature and theory)

The first two research questions examine the value-based perspectives of each partner, their roles, and their inter-relationships. However, values are not always entirely compatible, and relationships do not always function smoothly. Therefore, this third section examines the constraints that impede the Gunjur-Marlborough partnership in working for 'good change'.

#### 7.1.1 Tensions in collaborative relationships

Robinson et al (2000, p13) warn that 'partnership' is an overused term; it cannot be assumed that every so-called partnership is based on trust, shared values and consensus. Partnerships can be hampered by 'self-interest and short-sightedness' and differences in values and objectives need managing. Lack of transparency and the presence of hidden agendas can also impede partnerships (Penrose, 2000, pp248-249).

Donor-recipient relationships can be characterised by power imbalance, with Northern partners retaining control and making key decisions. Penrose (2000, p251) says that project emphases make this imbalance more likely; constant deadlines and inflexible activities leave little room for reflecting together and developing capacity. Such issues could arise in the programme-focused MBG-TARUD relationship. Power imbalances are discussed further in section 7.1.3.

Other tensions may arise from practical constraints, such as lack of clarity over roles or reporting requirements, linguistic or cultural misunderstandings, and delays in decision-making processes. Inexpertly applied accounting systems may cause suspicions of financial irregularity, and contrasting opinions of best practice may lead to disagreements over project methodology. Any of these could potentially impede this partnership.

Hewitt (2000) says that organisations can lack the capacity to manage inter-organisational relationships, and that such relationships "can only succeed when the parties have a clear idea of what they want and are prepared to invest resources into achieving that", a comment that refers back to the importance of vision and values. In addition to the ideological struggles between groups, Tensions in inter-organisational relationships also arise from institutional contradictions, which are discussed further in section 8.1.1.

### 7.1.2 Dialogue in inter-organisational relationships

Partnerships involve working together. Development management can provide an opportunity for learning, both for the actor and the beneficiary. Gone are the days when outside actors can define what is good for the other. North and South are part of the same world, the development of which is a shared responsibility (Quarles Van Ufford and Giri, 2003).

Effective communication about these shared responsibilities (between GCL, TARUD and MBG, in this case) is a crucial skill in cross-cultural partnerships, especially when it comes to areas of potential disagreement or conflict.

Isaacs (1993) outlines key differences between debate and dialogue, some of which are summarised here:

| <b>Debate</b>                                      | <b>Dialogue</b>                         |
|--|---|
| Listen to refute ideas of others                   | Listen to understand and gain insight   |
| Simple impassionate statements                     | Exploring the complexities of the issue |
| Predictable statements                             | New information surfaces                |
| Restricted within the established public discourse | Questioning the public discourse        |

Isaacs says that discussions between organisations sometimes fail because participants lack the capacity (or the will) to think collectively. Dialogue is about collective inquiry, and can produce an environment where participants create new 'shared meanings' together.

Part of this dialogue is about learning from mistakes. Korten (1992) stresses the importance of understanding mistakes as an essential source of information, and learning from them in order to take corrective action. Such behaviours, he says, are characteristic of a 'learning organisation'.

### 7.1.3 Power and empowerment

Some partnership relationships can be affected by power imbalances, where one partner has greater power than another. There is a danger that this power is used to coerce the other partner. Where there are strong power imbalances, relationships can become hierarchical (vertical, not horizontal).

The aims of North-South partnerships (and the aims of development more generally) often include the empowerment of those who are less powerful (materially, economically, socially, politically and so on). Some writers differentiate between different expressions of power:

- power to: increasing a person's capabilities
- power over: equipping that person to overcome social constraints (alternatively this expression can describe power held by one individual or group over another)
- power with: working together in cooperation

Power is a relevant concept for consideration in two ways. First, empowerment or marginalised groups might be the focus of partnership activities. Secondly, these expressions of power (power to, power over, power to) might also feature within the inter-organisational relationships that comprise this partnership.

## 7.2 Findings: Constraints and Conflicts

### 7.2.1 Exchange visits

The suspension of exchange visits is a significant pressure on the partnership. Visits now only occur in the Marlborough-to-Gunjur direction and partnership activities only occur in Gunjur. This is demotivating for people in Gunjur who might otherwise have anticipated a chance to travel to the UK, and there has been a reduction in participation in joint partnership activities with visiting groups.

### 7.2.2 Inequalities

Almost half (11/24) the respondents in the short community survey stated that linking benefits (eg. exchange visit participation or hosting a visitor) were preferentially allocated to subsections of the town. This raises the concerning possibility that the partnership might have inadvertently compounded (rather than reduced) inequalities in Gunjur. Members of the GCL executive claimed that improving fairness is a principal aim, and that benefits are now spread more evenly, a view supported by some community members too. Fair distribution of benefits should be an ongoing focus for GCL, and a public-relations exercise may be necessary to inform public opinion.

### 7.2.3 Inter-organisational relationships

Another category of constraints relates to relationships between partner organisations.

#### a) TARUD-MBG relationship

As the principal source of funding and the impetus behind many strategic decisions, the TARUD programme coordinators considered MBG to have greater power than TARUD. Examples were reported when MBG had responded positively to TARUD suggestions based on local knowledge (eg. scheduling GYDI events outside the rice-planting season). Other instances were cited when MBG overruled a TARUD decision (eg. scheduling meetings so that MBG trustees could attend, even when this caused delay).

MBG members stated that working together is not straightforward: 'We are different cultures; we don't always see things the same way,' one summarised, specifically citing approaches to deadlines and the importance of keeping accurate records as particular examples.

Another MBG interviewee commented that MBG had possibly been guilty of tolerating inadequate performance, possibly through well-intentioned attempts to avoid coercing their Southern partner. For example, TARUD annual meetings had not taken place and reports were submitted late. Repeatedly permitting such outcomes could be interpreted as condoning that level of performance. Indeed, it is possible that, in their determination to avoid coercing or pressurising TARUD and GCL, MBG may have allowed coercion to occur in the opposite direction; equality, trust and respect are not the same as always allowing the Southern partner to get their own way.

Some MBG interviewees acknowledged that Gunjur partners were obliged to conform partially to a Northern organisational model. They were expected to have trustees, committees, AGMs and bank accounts. Publishing an operating manual could be considered an exercise in control and power-wielding. MBG might consider how to empower TARUD by adopting systems that embody 'power with' concepts.

## b) Relationships within in Gunjur

Some Gunjur interviewees alluded to tensions between Gunjur-based organisations, including GCL, TARUD and VDC. One area of conflict surrounded the identification of projects for visiting groups. There was general agreement that this is a contested area, and dialogue necessary.

Some Gunjur interviewees also thought that Marlborough had too much influence over project choice. One MBG interviewee explained that Gunjur suggestions were sometimes rejected on the grounds of suitability or safety, or because alternative projects were favoured by MBG leaders. One consideration here is the extent to which projects are chosen for beneficiaries or for the convenience of Marlborough visitors.

### **7.2.4 Additional constraints on individual organisations**

Further constraints affect the ability of individual partners to contribute to the partnership. For example, some MBG interviewees cited **succession of leadership** as a concern, with the imminent retirement of the director. Others expressed that, without a new injection of **membership**, the organisation might not manage to continue. One expressed concern over what sometimes appears to be an **ad hoc set of strategies**. MBG is not a professional development agency, but an association of willing volunteers holding friendships with their beneficiaries. Whilst there may be advantages to **personal links**, they may also impede objectivity and reduce the likelihood of developing a professional working relationship.

TARUD staff experience difficulty in accessing appropriate high-quality **professional development** opportunities. Although MBG recognised their role to assist with capacity building, the MBG director stated a preference for funding TARUD attendance at local training rather than sending volunteers to deliver training that might be a poor cultural fit. Concern was expressed by trustees of both TARUD and MBG about the **strategic direction** of TARUD, including the future leadership of the organisation. With MBG intending to play a decreasing role, TARUD must learn to operate independently. Some interviewees were concerned that current director and programme coordinators might need further preparation before assuming that level of responsibility.

### **7.2.5 Summary – Constraints and Conflicts**

The suspension of exchange visits means that partnership activities are restricted to the Marlborough-Gunjur direction, threatening the reciprocal nature of the partnership. This has reduced local enthusiasm for joint partnership activities in Gunjur. A related constraint is that exchange visits are perceived in Gunjur as the sole important element of the partnership and this prevents dialogue on establishing alternative partnership activities. The partnership suffers some scepticism from some sectors of the town, demotivated by alleged nepotism in the previous distribution of benefits. Southern partners perceive an imbalance of decision-making power between Northern and Southern partners. Both TARUD and MBG suffer internal constraints, including concerns over membership and leadership succession (MBG), and shortages in funding of core costs and professional development (TARUD). Coordination between GCL, TARUD and VDC appears weak, and some competitiveness has emerged as a result. In particular, the relationship between GCL and VDC is unclear.

## Section 8: Objectives and Outcomes

### Research question 4.

**What is the nature of any gap between the objectives of any partner and actual partnership outcomes?**

### 8.1 Objectives and Outcomes (literature and theory)

The final research question returns full-circle to the aims of the partnership. This part of the investigation seeks to identify outcomes that do not match objectives, and additionally asks whether partnership activities have resulted in any unintended consequences.

#### 8.1.1 Institutions and Institutional Contradictions

In development management, the word 'institutions' is used to refer to a range of related things. Formal institutions are the firmly-embedded elements of a particular society, such as the legal system, universal primary education or democratic representation. Less tangibly, the word 'institutions' is also used to describe social norms and culturally accepted behaviours, such as the way a particular society treats its children, or patterns of worship or prayer, or certain forms of dress, or the rules and expectations that surround business transactions. Thirdly, the word 'institutions' is sometimes (less correctly) used as a synonym for 'organisations'. To avoid confusion, this meaning is usually avoided in development literature. The second of these meanings (institutions as social norms) is further considered below, with reference to Gunjur.

Brett (2000, p18) states that institutions are the 'norms, habits, customs and routines which govern a society'. These norms, habits, customs and routines all influence the structure of organisations and the behaviour of individuals within them. An appreciation of institutions is key to understanding how organisations behave and relate to each other. Crucially, the 'accepted norms' in an African community like Gunjur may be quite different to the norms of their Northern partner, and this difference can lead to misunderstandings between partners. Engberg-Pedersen (1997, p188) therefore refers to institutions not only as social norms, but also as 'shared meanings/understandings'. These 'shared understandings' provide a structure that helps produce predictable patterns of behaviour. Writers debate the extent to which people simply internalise and conform to these structures, or have a more active response to them by critically reinterpreting the world (Giddens, 1997, p705).

Engberg-Pedersen states that unintended consequences in development management can arise from institutional contradictions, especially when "resource-strong external actors intervene in local communities". When interventions challenge existing understandings, these changes may be resisted or modified, for both material reasons (eg. "This may not pay off for us") and symbolic reasons (eg. "We do not believe in things like that"). This can occur when the intervention has been planned by actors (however well-meaning) whose concerns, experiences and values differ from those of the intended beneficiaries. Put simply, those who designed the project may not have understood the local institutional context. It is necessary to engage with the social structures that define how things are normally done.

In a North-South partnership, partners are likely to have different sets of 'shared understandings' (as well as differing values as discussed earlier). Difficulties in communication, dialogue and decision-

making may all arise from these different understandings. Also, where project design primarily originates from the understandings of the Northern partner, the implemented project may be resisted, rejected or reinterpreted (modified) by the local populace, for either material or symbolic reasons as described above. The project may not work at all, or it may work in a different way to that intended, or it may have unanticipated consequences (either positive or negative).

One way to reinforce institutional changes when working in a small town like Gunjur is to establish a locus of support amongst influential individuals or groups. However, working through the established social system may reinforce rather than overcome the exclusion and/or subordination of Gunjur's less-powerful groups. Therefore, Cleaver (2001) prefers that development interventions work instead through the informal 'socially embedded' institutions through which people actually relate to each other. She argues that a genuine appreciation of local decision-making depends on understanding the complexities of social networks and power relations. Such networks and relations may be very difficult for outsiders to see and understand.

## **8.2 Findings: Objectives and Outcomes**

This section describes areas where interviewees reported outcomes that did not correspond with partnership objectives.

### **8.2.1 Exchange visits**

The suspension of reciprocal exchange visits is one way that outcomes do not match objectives. This issue raises dismay amongst Gunjur residents. "How can you have a link partnership without the exchange visit?" asked one. Another quoted from the Qur'an, "Mutual partnership brings respect and strength. Separation brings breakdown and disintegration."

Confusion is prevalent in Gunjur regarding reasons for the suspension. Interviewees cited the following rumoured reasons:

- the 'commotion' caused during the transition from GLC to GCL;
- the decision of The Gambia to leave the Commonwealth;
- four Gambian visitors who absconded during a previous exchange visit to Marlborough.

Interviewees from Gunjur were (unsurprisingly) not familiar with the UK political climate regarding immigration, and many interpreted the visa difficulties as unique to Gambia or even to Gunjur. Some believed that MBG had the power to reinstate the exchange visits, a misconception that could lead to ongoing disappointment.

A visit of the British Ambassador to Gunjur in April 2015 attempted to clarify the rules for obtaining visas. The Ambassador outlined recent changes in the procedure, explained the categories of applicant with a better chance (or a weaker chance) or a successful application, and emphasised the importance of completing the application form accurately and truthfully. He also answered questions posed by Gunjur residents. Those present at the meeting appeared to find the information clear and helpful. Further disseminating this information to the Gunjur community may help to ease misunderstandings and manage expectations.

MBG interviewees also had concerns about exchange visits, and several were disappointed with the suspension. However, others doubted whether exchange visits fulfilled the original objectives of linking. In particular, they had questions over the extent to which gains for individuals are converted into community benefits.

### **8.2.2 Project and programme limitations**

Some MBG interviewees described projects where outcomes had not matched objectives, including:

- a skills centre, built but never used;
- a carpentry workshop, set up but closed when tools were stolen;
- an internet café, never established despite computers being supplied by MBG.

The design of these projects may have insufficiently considered the local institutional context. What assumptions were made during the design process that might have been ill-matched to Gunjur? Is there any aspect that 'might have worked' in a different setting, but for institutional reasons did not work here? Interestingly, Gunjur interviewees never mentioned the issue of 'failed projects'. This could indicate weaknesses in the recognition of and response to mistakes.

Some community interviewees gave the impression they were grateful for any project benefits at all, without much concern over detail. Is there a role for MBG and GCL to help local people become critically demanding of the interventions designed to help them? Without critical awareness, might further projects falter, either in design or implementation?

### **8.2.3 Dependency**

A third objective-outcome disparity is the issue of sustainable development (the expectation) versus dependency (one outcome, as perceived by some MBG interviewees). Some MBG interviewees raised concerns that MBG support possibly promotes dependent attitudes and behaviours in Gunjur, such as a tendency to seek outside help rather than tackling issues locally. When chairs were required, for example, a request was sent to MBG, rather than considering employment for local carpenters. Other examples were cited of MBG 'bailing out' their Southern partners when in difficulties rather than helping them devise strategic solutions to problems. Another interviewee was concerned that the visitor-host family relationship can create dependency, due to the expectation of financial assistance.

## **8.3 Summary – Objectives and Outcomes**

High expectations amongst local people in Gunjur that the exchange visits will be reinstated do not match the reality of UK regulations. Some MBG members question whether exchange visits fulfil partnership objectives. In addition to many positive outcomes the partnership has also brought unintended consequences. For example, disappointing outcomes of some projects indicate insufficient consideration of the local institutional context, and more progress is required in ensuring that such pitfalls are used as material for learning. It is possible that some partnership activities have contributed to forming dependent relationships in Gunjur, both depending on outside interventions (rather than seeking local sustainable solutions) and in promoting personal friendships which involve gift-giving between individual families.



## Section 9: Discussion

### 9.1 Introduction

The findings presented in Sections 5 to 8 are critically evaluated in this section, and their implications for partners are discussed. Occasional references are included to the research literature presented earlier.

Recommendations for consideration by partners follow, in Section 10. Discussion activities for partners are published in a separate Discussion Document.

### 9.2 Purpose and perspectives

#### 9.2.1 Perspectives on the purpose of the partnership

Penrose (2000) cites the importance of congruence of mission, values and operating principles in a North-South partnership. Although there is overlap in the value-based perspectives of partners, there are philosophical differences, too. The question is whether each partner is able to engage with the needs and requests of the other, despite their different emphases.

One area of complexity is that MBG did not originate as a development organisation. The vision was a North-South partnership for learning, teaching, lobbying and linking. The move into development projects came later; it would be interesting to consider whether (and to what extent) this change has compromised any of those original aims. For instance, a shift to development interventions possibly alters the nature of the partnership from an arrangement where partners can attempt to have a horizontal relationship of equals, to one where the relationship might become vertical or hierarchical, as in a donor-client relationship. Mutual learning, cross-cultural exchange and personal relationships can all be expressions of a partnership of equals. However, some strategic decisions (such as funding preferences) may involve a more hierarchical relationship, with one partner having greater power than another.

#### 9.2.2 Exchange visits: for what purpose?

One highly valued feature of the partnership is the programme of exchange visits. In Gunjur, enthusiasm for exchange visits is overwhelming. Indeed, to some in Gunjur, 'linking' has become synonymous with 'exchange visits'. Some MBG interviewees also regarded these visits as the most important feature of the programme.

There appears to be a difference between Gunjur and Marlborough in how the purpose of these visits is perceived. MBG interviewees emphasised opportunities to learn, to experience another culture and to build relationships. Gunjur interviewees made no secret of the fact that participating in a reciprocal exchange was viewed as a chance to seek opportunities for self-improvement in the 'promised land' of Europe.

Now that exchange visits are suspended, it has become harder to raise enthusiasm for alternative partnership activities. The stark difference in emphasis does not necessarily make the exchange visit programme wrong, but it does imply that objectives, expectations and outcomes need carefully

managing. This also points back again to difference in what is valued. If people in Gunjur value the exchange visits above all else, then this means that MBG is currently unable to deliver the main outcome that their partners are seeking. It is interesting how strong the feeling over the suspension of these visits, when in statistical terms the actual number of participants in any given year was quite small and the chance of any given individual being involved was therefore quite small.

The high value placed on the exchange visit (and the strong disappointment in its suspension) is worth contemplating. Exactly why is this opportunity valued so highly by people in Gunjur? One factor appears to be the success of certain individuals who received training in the UK and who, having returned to Gunjur, are regarded as successful. But a greater factor is probably the large proportion of exchange visit participants who subsequently found a way to return to Europe and North America to live and work, many of whom now send remittances back to Gunjur.

This raises a question for the partnership. If one impact of the partnership has been to enable large numbers to leave Gunjur (likely to be the young, motivated members of the workforce), is this a welcome and desirable outcome that all partners are happy with? How well does this outcome match partnership objectives? In what sense is this 'good for Gunjur'? What impact does this have on those individuals themselves, on their families, and on the community as a whole? To what extent do MBG wish to support the individual aspirations of Gunjur community members, as opposed to supporting community-based initiatives?

Reflecting critically, perhaps the involvement of MBG members in exchange visits to Gunjur is also motivated by individual interests, not just altruism. For example, cross-cultural experiences and personal development are on offer there. Indeed, this is arguably how society functions, with people seeking routes to better themselves, albeit in ways that contribute to the wider community. Furthermore, the partnership does not carry sole responsibility for these 450 individuals moving away; it would be interesting to know how many would have emigrated anyway, even if the Gunjur-Marlborough partnership had never existed.

### **9.3 Roles and relationships**

#### **9.3.1 MBG strategic focus**

As a long-standing partner with an interest in a whole community, MBG's spectrum of involvement in Gunjur is broad, but their area of specialised focus is not clear and this has contributed to an ad hoc set of strategies. Perhaps this indicates a versatile organisation, able to address contrasting challenges. Or perhaps, being a small organisation, this lack of focus might contribute to some interventions being less effective than anticipated. Over time, strategies have changed from community-orientated strategies to business-related strategies for private sector enhancement, possibly indicating a shift in MBG values and ideology.

Individual MBG visitors to Gunjur may have their preferred or favourite programmes or strategies (eg. solar lamps, supporting businesses, literacy, the women's garden). MBG might do well to examine and consider whether visitors be guided to promote and support the key MBG emphases of that particular time, or whether individuals be given latitude to discuss and support any programme (actual or proposed) of interest to them. Without some form of coordination, there is a risk of presenting a confusing set of messages, to TARUD programme coordinators, for example.

The longevity of the partnership appears to have depended on the energies of a few individuals. A partnership that depends on energy rather than synergy is vulnerable if/when those individuals step

aside or retire. Doubts over the ongoing future of MBG are a threat to the future of the partnership. Whereas MBG trustees have plans to recruit a new leader and expand membership, it might also be important to discuss and anticipate alternative scenarios in the case that neither of those things are successfully achieved. Are there ways that MBG could continue with leadership responsibilities devolved to a number of selected individuals who, perhaps would serve in specific roles for specific terms?

## **9.4 Constraints and conflicts**

### **9.4.1 Inter-organisational trust**

Collaboration within a partnership depends on self-organisation by partners and the existence of trust. The pursuit of their common goals requires GCL, TARUD and MBG to “mutually adjust” their choices and behaviours. This may imply adjustment by TARUD and MBG to accommodate the values and preferences of the new (re-established) partner, GCL, and to clarify roles. Dialogue between these groups could identify which areas are prone to disagreement, leading to discussions about why those disagreements occur, and a quest for solutions. Isaacs (1993) says that when organisations are failing to think collectively, dialogue (rather than debate) can help partners gain insight and explore the complexities of the issue. Partners might do well to consider the practicalities of how such dialogue could occur, how frequently, about which matters, and who should be involved.

Trust arising from experience is known as process-based trust (Zucker, 1986). Whereas deep trust appears to have grown between MBG and the old GCL, the journey of building trust must restart with the re-established GCL. Dialogue might also help build trust between the various organisations in Gunjur, where some competitiveness exists. Competition has the potential to generate conflict and thus undermine the relationship, because transaction costs are higher where trust is low.

### **9.4.2 Grassroots movements**

One area for dialogue might be the subject of how GCL, TARUD and VDC can best serve the full community of Gunjur. To what extent do these committees truly reach out to and represent the whole community: to women and men, to adults and children and elderly persons, to persons with disabilities, to Gambians and non-Gambians, to Muslims and Christians, and to the various tribal groups. Alternatively, to what extent do these committees concentrate power and influence into the hands of a few, by centralising decision-making? For example, a proposal was put forward at the TARUD AGM in April 2015 for five permanent trustees. This could provide an opportunity to ensure that a broad range of groups have representation on the committee – alternatively, it could be an exercise in retaining and withholding power and influence.

A common theme in development is the empowerment of less-powerful people. It is quite understandable that those who are relatively more powerful in a community might wish to preserve the status quo, to keep things as they are. However, community development often involves (and depends on) giving a voice to those who have not had one before, listening to their concerns and needs, and helping them to pursue their goals. A valid area of interest for GCL, TARUD and MBG could well be how to build up skills and confidence in minority groups across Gunjur to be able to vocalise their needs and participate in dialogue relating to important issues in the town, region and country. This is a vision of grassroots movements comprised of ordinary women and men, fronted by

local persons who have the vision and courage to lead, seeking positive change in Gunjur. Ultimately, such groups should be leading local development dialogue, and no longer be deferring to the dictates of outsiders.

## 9.5 Objectives and outcomes

### 9.5.1 Institutional contradictions and unintended consequences

Understanding institutional contradictions can help to explain why some initiatives have unexpected consequences (Engberg-Pedersen, 1997). Taking account of learned lessons in future plans can help increase understanding of institutional landscapes. Korten (1992) refers to ‘learning organisations’ that use errors as an essential source of information, rather than denying or hiding them, or assigning blame. All stakeholders can continue to learn, including GCL, TARUD, MBG, and the Gunjur community.

The apparent attitudes of denial in Gunjur about disappointing outcomes (ie. an unwillingness to admit or discuss things that have not gone well) may indicate a shortcoming in acknowledging mistakes and learning from them. Or secondly, it might alternatively imply a fear of losing benefits if mistakes are acknowledged; this does not indicate a trusting mutual relationship of equals, but a hierarchical relationship based on a power imbalance. Or thirdly, it could imply that project monitoring and evaluation might be weak; rather than pause to learn from errors and take corrective action, MBG might have a tendency to race forward into the next project.

Engberg-Pedersen’s (1997) concept of managing meanings could be helpful in project design. Shared understandings in Gunjur affect how initiatives are received, from construction projects to business loans to exchange visits. An appreciation of the local ‘shared understandings’ in Gunjur will help MBG comprehend the institutional context in which they work. As an aside, MBG visitors also arrive with ‘norms, habits, customs and routines’ from their own culture, and an appreciation of these will help local people in Gunjur (eg. host families) comprehend their behaviour and comments.

The most recent MBG/TARUD programme, the business-related GYDI, includes a number of elements that could potentially be based on ‘understandings’ that are foreign to Gunjur. This implies that compliance with those novel ideas could be low, for either material or symbolic reasons (see section 8.1.1) (Engberg-Pedersen, 1997). It might be beneficial to scrutinise the GYDI together with local representatives, identifying assumptions and expectations that are compatible or otherwise with local understandings. For example, three potentially-unfamiliar assumptions might be:

- providing employment for non-family-members;
- budgeting for loan repayments;
- separating family finance from business finance.

In such a discussion, MBG representatives must be willing to admit that their assumptions (based on UK understandings of how small businesses should function and their place in the local and national economy) are culture specific and may not necessarily transfer to another setting. Representatives from Gunjur must be willing to challenge what they hear, and must not be afraid to speak up, even if that means contradicting the views expressed by influential persons from either Marlborough or Gunjur.

## Section 10: Recommendations.

### 10.1 Recommendations

This section contains a small number of specific recommendations for the Gunjur and Marlborough partners. These are recommendations that the author judged to be particularly worth mentioning.

By reading this report, especially the finds and discussion (Sections 5-9) the partners themselves will be able to generate further recommendations themselves. It is these self-generated reflections and recommendations that are likely to be most useful.

Furthermore, a set of discussion activities has been devised for the partners and is presented as a separate Discussion Document (see also Section 11). Some of these activities were discussed by representatives of GCL, TARUD, and MBG at a meeting in Gunjur on Saturday 11 April 2015. Partners may wish to continue those discussions at a time and in a manner that can be mutually agreed.

### 10.2 Purpose and perspectives

In the light of changing circumstances, it would be beneficial to re-examine the fundamental basis for the partnership, clarifying and declaring what it aims to achieve for each partner. Each organisation should specify clearly what they can bring to the partnership, and what they wish to receive. This will include discussing value-based perspectives on what the partnership is for, to reveal areas of commonality and difference, both essential in assessing potentially-fruitful areas for collaboration. In a reciprocal relationship of equals, partners should not fear each other, but should be able to discuss transparently their values and objectives.

In short, what is this partnership for? Does it exist to promote community development? In both communities or just one? Should the emphasis be on community development or opportunities for individuals? What does “linking” mean, and what activities does it imply?

### 10.3 Roles and relationships

The roles of each organisation are specified in existing MoUs. It would be advisable to revisit those agreements and identify which aspects function as anticipated, and which of them are now contested. It is necessary to clarify which organisation represents the community of Gunjur in this partnership. Of particular interest are the specific roles for:

- the newly re-established GCL, with new personnel;
- TARUD, seeking to develop its own independent strategy and vision;
- MBG, with a declining membership and doubts over succession of leadership
- VDC, who have an official civic role in the town but complain at being excluded from partnership decisions.

Dialogue might be helpful on the manner in which these organisations should relate to each other. In what areas do we have goals in common? How should we deal with situations in which we disagree? Does any organisation consider that any partner sometimes operates unfairly or unreasonably, or wields excessive power, or coerces another partner?

## 10.4 Constraints and conflicts

It is necessary to examine the capacity of each organisation to fulfil their roles effectively. For example, TARUD staff may need training for the technically-complex task of writing grant bids and reports for international funders. Capacity needs should not be assumed to exist only in Gunjur. A welcome reciprocal discussion for the partnership could be for GCL to assist MBG in discussion on how to increase their membership, for example, and realistic dialogue about the role that MBG can play in Gunjur in the future, given their capacity limitations.

## 10.5 Objectives and outcomes

It is good practice to review past experience and apply lessons learned to future planning. Taking account of local learning and opinion can help to avoid shortcomings in project design. Partners should pay attention to local circumstances and advice when introducing new or outside concepts. At the current time, this may apply especially to the GYDI, in which it may be valuable to seek advice from those with prior experience of designing and operating such schemes.

As regards the suspension of exchange visits, MBG must use this opportunity to learn exactly why the exchange visits are valued so highly, by listening to stakeholders in Gunjur. However, there is a key role for GCL in mediating between the disappointed Gunjur community and their Northern partner. Rather than simply join in the (possibly unrealistic) calls for the exchange visits to be reinstated, GCL have a role to play in communicating the reality of the situation to the Gunjur community, and in initiating productive dialogue in the quest for meaningful and valuable alternative partnership activities. This includes the task of disseminating to the community the news and information from the meeting with the British Ambassador in April 2015.

## 10.6 Recommendations for further study

The outcomes of this investigation provided answers, to some degree, against each of the four research questions. Useful insights were uncovered about the value-based perceptions on the partnership, the role of each organisation, on constraints and on the gaps between objectives and outcomes. More emphasis could have been given in the research to the practicalities of working relationships. Further analysis could have been made on the skills and experience of key persons, and on the capacity of each organisation to enhance the effectiveness of inter-organisational relationships and the quality of partnership outcomes.

These investigations brought to light questions that fell beyond the scope of this initial study but would nonetheless be interesting for further consideration. Future investigation into North-South partnerships could examine:

- qualities and strategies that encourage reciprocal relationships rather than dependent and hierarchical relationships;
- factors that encourage a person to strive for the development of their local community, versus factors that lead a person to leave and seek 'a better life' elsewhere;
- the structure and functioning of Cleaver's (2001) 'socially-embedded institutions' in Gunjur, and how these impact on the development of locally-held 'shared meanings'
- steps that Northern partners can take to encourage the development of grass-roots community movements, rather than continuing to depend on the expertise of external advocates.

## Section 11: Discussion activities for partners.

### 11.1 Discussion Document

A set of activities is published in a separate Discussion Document.

Some of these activities were discussed by representatives of GCL, TARUD, and MBG at a meeting in Gunjur on Saturday 11 April 2015.

The Discussion Document includes activities on the following themes:

- 01 Shared values
- 02 Inter-organisational relationships
- 03 Exchange visits
- 04 Learning from mistakes
- 05 The Babylon Syndrome
- 06 Gunjur Youth Development Initiative
- 07 Gender
- 08 Accountability
- 09 Distribution of roles, Who does what?
- 10 Inter-organisational relationships, GCL + MBG
- 11 Inter-organisational relationships, TARUD + MBG
- 12 Issues facing GCL, TARUD, MBG

## Abbreviations

|       |                                       |
|-------|---------------------------------------|
| AGM   | Annual General Meeting                |
| GCL   | Gunjur Community Link (since 2013)    |
| GLC   | Gunjur Linking Committee (until 2013) |
| GTTI  | Gambia Technical Training Institute   |
| GYDI  | Gunjur Youth Development Initiative   |
| MBG   | Marlborough Brandt Group              |
| MoU   | Memorandum of Understanding           |
| NGO   | Non-governmental Organisation         |
| PSG   | Project Support Group                 |
| TARUD | Trust Agency for Rural Development    |
| VDC   | Village Development Committee         |
| UK    | United Kingdom                        |



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