

## Marlborough Link with Gunjur – Lilli Loveday

Lilli conducted research to assess how the long established link between Marlborough and Gunjur, founded in 1982, has impacted on the role of women in the village. The research identified that the link with Marlborough and the work of the Marlborough Brandt Group has made important contributions to realising greater gender equality. This in turn has facilitated the attainment of wider development goals.

Women in the Gambia exist in a society bound by the norms of patriarchy and Islam which typically relegate them to positions subordinate to men. Though women have been formally recognised as being equal to men, there is still disparity between men and women on the ground. This is identifiable by the differences in the appropriate standards of behaviour between men and women, and in the levels of opportunities, resources and freedoms available to women.

In Gunjur, patterns are changing and over the last 29 years of linking, women's roles have changed. Through the Women's Livelihood programme, which is jointly run by the Brandt Group and their partner organisation TARUD, women are supported and encouraged to grow cash crops. This scheme not only provides them with the essential income to support their families, but also enables them to exercise increased autonomy and independence. This is having a positive feedback affect on male perceptions of women who are increasingly viewing them as valuable members of society and therefore affording them greater recognition.

Women expressed that they had been empowered to assert themselves and to better express their opinions. This has come about primarily as a result of the exchange programme which sees women being exposed to a society in which women are largely emancipated. Women have been encouraged to speak and the head of the women's community commented '*...And the role of women today – their stand is very firm, and they can speak, their voices raised...*'

The value of the link comes from the fact that it enables change to take place in a way which suits the local context. Not only are the link and the activities operated through it a driver for change towards a situation of greater gender equality, but the observed changes have been adopted because they resonate with the local environment. They come about not through imposition, but through acquisition at a local level.