

TO DO!2000
Contest Socially Responsible Tourism

Award Winner

The Village Community Project
TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP

represented by

Sulayman Sonko, Project Manager of the Community

Tumani Tenda, Western Division, The Gambia

Rationale for the Award

by

Klaus Betz

1. INTRODUCTION

Investigations into the candidacy of TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP have been carried out between November 22nd and 29th, 2000 in The Gambia. At the request of the Institute for Tourism and Development the data concerning the concept and objectives of the project as stated in the contest documents could be verified in situ without any problem – with the following result: The authorised appraiser suggests honouring the Village Community Project TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP with the award TO DO!2000.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 THE COUNTRY

The Gambia is the smallest country on the African continent, and with its surface area of 11,295 square kilometres is about half as big as the German Federal State of Hesse. It has a population of roughly 1.3 million people and runs along a 30/50 kilometres broad stretch of land, from west to east, following the Gambia river over a length of 480 kilometres. The official language is English. From the north, east and south, The Gambia is enclosed by its neighbour Senegal. In the west it borders on the Atlantic.

The population is composed of various ethnic groups which have and practice their own languages and dialects. The biggest ethnic group is the Mandinka, other large communities are the Fullah, the Wolof and the Jola. More than a quarter of the population lives near the coast, clustered around the urban centres of Banjul (the state capital) and Serekunda.

The main export goods are peanuts, cotton and fish. The year-round tourism with some 400,000 arrivals annually (visitors from neighbouring countries, business people and holiday makers) is an important economic sector, the main emphasis being on the coastal areas.

2.2 TOURISM

Events in The Gambia often take place in two worlds: one which is “seemingly African” in a touristical sense and the other which is focused in the everyday life of a West African country. The reality can be seen in the dusty side roads in urban Serekunda, which is ridden by poverty. One family hasn't got the money to pay the electricity bill, the other cannot afford to buy foodstuffs: Dinner consists of two tins of sardines and some bread. The quality of drinking water is dubious, the air is polluted through old cars, which are quite often imported or brought in from Europe.

What “appears” to be “Africa” is situated in the tourist centres along the Atlantic coast – in and near Bakau, Kololi and Kotu. It is west of Banjul and Serekunda that one finds the big tourist resorts that can be booked through European travel agencies. This is an area where tourists can enjoy the sea and the beach, the kind of holiday one can just as well find in other destinations (such as in the Caribbean).

In order to give people the feel of being in Africa (with tourist guides emphasising it as “typical Africa”) this “mysterious dark continent” is brought right into the hotels or to the vicinity – in the

form of drummers, singers, artists, fashion shows or by establishing handicrafts markets near the hotels. The meals offered are predominantly West European (mainly imported food) but once a week the hotels offer a so called "African buffet".

Presently the majority of visitors come from Great Britain and Scandinavia; charter flights from the German speaking countries fly to The Gambia only until spring 2001. Regular flights of European airlines either fly directly to Banjul or via close-by Dakar in Senegal (fast bus or boat connections).

If at all, the interior of the country along the river Gambia can only be reached through guided tours with air-conditioned busses and guides employed by the respective tour operators. This means that tourism is somehow similar to a "closed shop" where local service agencies find it hard to get a foothold. It is against this backdrop that one must understand the negative response of The Gambia's government when, at the end of the 1999 season, a German tour operator announced its intention to introduce the principle of "all-inclusive" holiday offers. The possible consequence of this may well be that there will no longer be charter flights from Germany.¹

A lot of local people conceive these "two worlds" in other contexts as well. "We still have the extended family system and not the nuclear family system", says a staff member of the Non-Government organisation "Tourism Concern Gambia". This is why the entire family depends on every single job in tourism, and therefore "it is in our own interest to see that The Gambia is renowned as a safe tourism destination", said the person I discussed this issue with.

These considerations go back to a "word of warning" published in a British newspaper in 1994, where The Gambia was described as unsafe, which in turn led to a reduction in the number of tourists from the United Kingdom (the most important country in terms of visitors to The Gambia). The main reason was the problem of the so-called "bumsters", or beach boys, which led to molestations of tourists, theft and in some instances allegedly even to assaults. But the actual "bumster" problem (regardless of the awkward issue of "female sex tourists") results from the fact that young men who have been unemployed for many years and who do not have any perspective for employment are turning to this obvious form of "last resort". In autumn 2000 those responsible for tourism in The Gambia had nothing better to do than to demolish or burn down every single beach bar along the coastal strip (meeting points for the bumster scene). However, this also made the regular bar keepers, waiters, cooks and small traders redundant, who are said to have been working without licence.

This whole structure is something like a wall barring the access to this small but very interesting country, and, similarly, it also prevents the local tourism industry from getting access to the source markets. For, it is true that once you leave this pre-fabricated Western-European tourism setting The Gambia can be explored in a completely different way. For instance, through the Association of Small-Scale Enterprises in Tourism (ASSET) which currently has 37 members (see Appendix 1), including a number of different hotels, lodges, restaurants, tour operators offering excursions and representatives of handicraft artists. ASSET has developed through the initiative of "Tourism Concern Gambia" and with the assistance of the British or international development organisation VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas), and it clearly

¹ After having finished the investigations concerning the project resp. this rationale, it became known that the government of The Gambia cancelled its decision not to allow "all-inclusive"-offers.

identifies itself with the “Guidelines for a sustainable development in tourism” (see Appendix 2). The title of the ASSET agreement is: “The Tumani Tenda Declaration”.

3. THE TOURISM PROJECT TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP

3.1 HISTORY OF ITS DEVELOPMENT

TUMANI TENDA is a Jola village with around 300 inhabitants living in seven extended families. Six among them profess Islam, one Christianity. The small hamlet (some 25 kilometres from Brikama and three km from the nearest tarmacked road near Kafatu, and without electricity and telephone) was founded only thirty years ago. It was then situated right in the jungle, at a branch of the Gambia river (whose water at the site is still saline). TUMANI was the name of a peanut picker in this area, TENDA means river bank or beach.

The founder was the late Alhaji Osman, a Koran scholar who is revered by all the families even today, and who, after having immigrated from Casamance (South Senegal) to The Gambia with his wife, sons and daughters, wanted to establish a village in the place of present-day TUMANI TENDA. With other families as followers, a community evolved which could be described as a religious but open-minded community embracing certain values: such as a responsible attitude towards the available living environment (lebensraum) (i.e. “integrity of creation”) a humanely conceived and socially responsible style of living, respect for the elderly, honesty, independence, self-sustainability and a sense of community. In a nutshell, the remote town of TUMANI TENDA is the realisation of a utopia which until recently was all but known in the West.

Compared to the conditions in other areas of the country TUMANI TENDA is a rather prosperous and economically quite self-sufficient community, whose inhabitants are in full employment. It owns altogether 140 hectares of land, of which 89 hectares are sustainably cultivated with a species-rich forest that is continually upgraded with seedlings and serves as a “pharmacy” and natural water reservoir. Animals are not hunted to preserve the richness of the species. One

can see fields extending in every direction with rice, maize, millet, peanuts, water melons and manioc, next to vegetables, herbs and spices with a variety of Mediterranean and tropical plants.

TUMANI TENDA has its own kindergarten and a primary and lower secondary school. There is enough (and above all) clean drinking water which is regarded as very valuable (!). Everywhere palms, baobab trees, acacia trees have been planted and bananas, oranges, lemon and grapefruits are growing. The village is protected by a ring of 30-year old, high and shady mango trees (micro climate); it owns 200 cows, many chickens, sheep and goats, salt is being produced from the nearby river, there are fishes, and in the mangrove woods oysters are growing (whose shells are burnt to chalk) – all of this is communal property, tended and maintained through community work.

All the produce from this property is marketed on behalf of the community after it satisfies its own needs. Any cash money taken in is paid out to private persons according to a distribution list (to persons above the age of 18) or else to the community treasury. The treasury then covers all costs, such as doctors’ bills or hospital stays or else for professional or religious travels (for instance the “haji” the pilgrimage to Mekka). Also financed are the fees for schools up to university. A case in point is Sulayman Sonko (32), the English and French speaking

director of the village owned TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP, who received financial support for his studies in economics at the university of Dakar. In turn, he regarded it to be a matter of course to return to his home village and to stay there after he had finished university.

3.2 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

In terms of community structure TUMANI TENDA is governed by its “Alikalo” (chief), a respected and dignified “elder” who, in agreement with the village council, sets the course. The imam, too, brings his influence to bear. One can be elected member of the village council from the age of 20, and great emphasis is placed on the fact that each family and each generation is represented in that council. In specific cases, when particular issues are at stake, even youths and children are listened to. Since the success of the community is dependent on a consensus being reached, a continuous communication and voting process takes place, and this greatly relativises the patriarchal image (the ratio is 30 men against just under 70 women and 200 children – under certain circumstances polygamy is possible). For example, the banking transactions, book keeping and the treasury are administered by a woman.

All of this is explained to TUMANI TENDA visitors, and gradually they are also shown these processes, for the visitors do not only experience a remarkable hospitality but they are sometimes – depending on their attitude – also treated like village members.

Yet, the guest house of the TUMANI TENDA tourists is situated in the ECO-TOURISM CAMP, about 500 m from the centre of the village and built under shady trees at the river bank. It is made up of five mud huts thatched with palm leaves and grass and three reed buildings which can altogether house a maximum of 40 persons. Each of these houses was designed and built by a village family (kunda). This is why the round huts are named after the families and have names, such as: Jarju Kunda, Mendi Kunda, Sonko Kunda or Sanyang Kunda. One of the buildings is named “Helge Kunda,” after a Norwegian who lives in The Gambia and whom the villagers of TUMANI TENDA had contracted as an advisor for the establishment of the camp.

In a half open restaurant, constructed with loving care under and around a baobab tree, the guests can take all the meals if they so wish, meals which cover the whole spectrum of the village cuisine (clean, fresh and very tasty), with all the ingredients coming from the gardens and fields (bio-farming). There is fish and rice with lime, meat dishes with potatoes, onion sauce and tomatoes, chicken with peanut sauce, rice and bitter tomatoes, as well as couscous, oysters, millet porridge, self-baked bread and a lot of fruits. As a concession to the visitors cooled soft drinks and beer are also available. As to the villagers they prefer water and (sometimes very strong) green tea.

A one week stay with half-board per person and without guided tours costs about 1,000 Dalasi (roughly 166 DM), for full board one has to pay 1,200 Dalasi (just about 200 DM).

Accommodation in the mud huts is simple but very clean and neat (with small terraces, benches of mud, beds built from a mud corpus with the mattresses set into them and a mosquito net covering them. Light comes from gas and kerosene lamps, the water for the camp is controlled through a solar-run pump. Since the entire camp is meticulously cleaned and swept every day there are no problems with so-called pests. There is no garbage or litter lying around. The hygienically clean toilets and showers are situated in a separate building and the waste water is purified through a three chamber soaking pit.

3.3 OBJECTIVES

The TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP which opened in April 1999 is seen as a possibility to earn additional income for the community. So far the guests of the camp have consisted mainly of larger student groups from Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands (for several weeks at a time), as well as individual travellers (two to four day stays) and day visitors. On the other hand, the centre is also becoming increasingly recognised as a training centre for environment issues or as a case study for sustainable agro-forestry (TUMANI TENDA is known all over the country). Still, the centre would like to see more visitors. Not so much during rainy season between May and October (because the fields and the harvest have to be attended to), but rather during the dry season between November and April. Target groups could well be eco-tourists, ornithologists, people interested in culture and study tours, student groups (e.g. geographers).

In the long run, the community can accommodate at least 10 guests per day during the dry season. In just about two years, some 250,000 Dalasi (DM 42,000) flowed in the village treasury from tourists; this money financed the kindergarten and the school (apart from the villagers' own contribution). This type of income is thus also re-invested in the further development of the community.

3.4 TOURISM OFFERS AND ACTIVITIES

TUMANI TENDA offers its visitors a whole range of programmes and workshops, for some of which a fee has to be paid (between 4 DM and 7 DM per hour.) For instance, there are guided forest walks, and on request one can also get some information on traditional healing practices (medicinal healing). Canoes, or rather dug-outs, can be hired and expert staff of the camp take nature lovers and ornithologists to special observation points. There are batik workshops and, depending on the season, lessons can also be taken in "salt boiling" or soap making. Visitors can accompany the fishermen, help the women with oyster collection, or make a tour through the medicinal plant and vegetable gardens. Sometimes, the women also perform Jola songs and dances and at certain times one gathers around the fire in the evening together with the visitors and the elders tell stories about the Jola culture. This is meant as a way to disseminate Jola culture to the outside and to seek to promote intercultural understanding. At the same time it also helps strengthen and maintain their own cultural identity.

4. APPRAISAL OF THE PROJECT

The comparison of the activities of the TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP with the TO DO criteria for a socially responsible tourism results in the following appraisal:

Contest criterion:

Involvement of the different interests and requirements of the local people through participation

From its very conception to its realisation the TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP is an absolutely participative project. The interests and needs of the local population did not really have to be considered in a special way since they were part and parcel of the concept. In practical terms the entire village population able to work has been involved in the realisation of

the project – through their services rendered, through the material supplied, through the design and construction of the camp, by establishing the gardens and by working out the tourist programmes for which guides are responsible, taking turns according to their knowledge, strengths and special subjects.

Contest criterion:

Strengthening the awareness among the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural life

When TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP was conceived and realised the people did not succumb to a naïve understanding of tourism. On the contrary: Right from the inception there has been networking and consultancy with the outside world through a specially founded village committee, such as with Tourism Concern Gambia, with the development agency VSO and with well-versed European residents. It was also discussed within the village how to respond to positive and negative influences. One of the most essential (inner) protective walls to fend off detrimental influences is the pride of the village, the self-esteem in the light of the work performed and the certainty not to have to ask for assistance. On the other hand the people are open to other lifestyles or methods as long as these do not run counter to their own culture or lifestyle.

Contest criterion:

Participation of a broad local population strata in the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism

Since all the income of the TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP is credited to the community treasury, the money earned practically remains in the village, that is all the seven extended families get their shares. From a cultural point of view the tourist programmes are an integrated component of everyday life events or of lifestyle. There may therefore even be a conversion. Positive effects on social and cultural impacts are brought to bear on the visitors as well as to the hosts. Often curiosity prevails among the members of the community with questions arising regarding the lifestyle in Germany, such as how does one build a house there, how can a house be constructed on a hill side, how, from a technical point of view, can it be heated? Besides: The people of TUMANI TENDA listen to the “BBC World Service” on their radios and they also have television sets (12 volt batteries).

Contest criterion:

Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improvement of working conditions in relation to payment, social security, working hours, education and further training

This criterion does not apply to TUMANI TENDA since there are no employer/employee structures. After all, each individual within the extended family is simultaneously an investor, employee and/or shareholder in a community based on reciprocity. Regardless of this fact the “jobs” at the Camp are distributed according to the rotation principle (among the women responsible for the kitchen) or on the basis of liking, knowledge and ability (both for men and women in the case of guided tours through the forest, garden, medicinal herbs, batik workshop etc.).

Contest criterion:**Reinforcement of the local culture as well as the cultural identity of those living in tourism destination areas**

The cultural “Jola identity” of the TUMANI TENDA people is still intact and there is, therefore, no need to have it strengthened. It has kept its authenticity and it revolves around the values described earlier on. This also means that “being Jola” (encounter of Koran and Bible) can among other things be defined as follows: “If you do me good, good will be done to you. If you do me evil, evil will be done to you”. Another response is: “It is not good to live on other people’s sweat, we always have to depend on our own sweat”. People visiting TUMANI TENDA will experience the encounter at the same eye level – warm-hearted, open and friendly.

Contest criterion:**Avoidance or minimisation of social and cultural damage caused by tourism in destination areas.**

Damages that could be caused by tourism can in the case of TUMANI TENDA be avoided before they actually happen. The most important measures have been and still are: to clearly define the target group (see above), to offer a programme that is compatible with village life, to ask the visitors to respect the faith of their hosts and to maintain an appropriate standard of dress. In order to avoid the bad habit of begging, which can be found in other villages visited by tourists, an information pamphlet handed out to all visitors requests them not to give anything personal to any of the villagers (sweets, biros or money). Those wanting to support the community may do this exclusively via the Chief, the “Alikalo”, that is through the village development funds.

Contest criterion:**Application of new methods in qualifying partnership and co-operation between the external tourism industry and the local people**

TUMANI TENDA is a paragon for the rural part of The Gambia. Along the big river (with its fantastic potential for boat trips lasting several days) an increasing number of camps and lodges are springing up. Some of them have signed the TUMANI TENDA DECLARATION, some partly orient themselves towards the principles laid down there (Appendix 2). Should the procedures described there find acceptance it is quite possible that a kind of tourism evolves which is clearly more considerate towards and compatible with the local conditions – in contrast to the development along the coast.

TUMANI TENDA ECO-TOURISM CAMP does not consider co-operation with big travel agencies (“..We don’t want busloads”). So far, there are only few contacts abroad (universities, small, specialised agencies), but within the Gambian tourism industry one is looking for contacts and possibilities of co-operation – mainly among the members of ASSET. This organisation is just about to build up a marketing or promotion pool (among other things via the internet homepage www.go.to/asset) in order to function as a central and first contact/mediator for enquiries coming from abroad.

Contest criterion:**Creation of other favourable conditions conducive to a socially responsible tourism development in destination areas**

The present tourism policy of The Gambia seems to get closer to the direction propagated through ASSET and TUMANI TENDA. This means: Strengthening the smaller local tourism agencies and tour operators, developing an environment-friendly and socially responsible tourism, and opening up the country's interior. For instance through the ASSET member "Gambia River Excursions" which intends to link lodges and camps such as TUMANI TENDA over the water route.

Contest criterion:**Projects and measures entered for the contest must be in line with the principles of environmental compatibility**

TUMANI TENDA per se is already a good model to demonstrate environment-compatible procedures. This can be seen from the construction of the camp where local and regenerative material is used, or from the protection of the indigenous fauna and flora, from the cultivation of foodstuffs or the limited admission of cars. In village life "environment" is part of the education, and the visitors are encouraged by the example that's being set.

CONCLUSION:

This form of tourist communal property is so far unique in The Gambia (and probably in all of West Africa). The conception of themselves and the self-confidence of the TUMANI TENDA people which go along with this must be regarded as an inestimable value. They can indeed live in dignity.