

## Contributing to standard of living in Gambia

Michel Huijser has been coming to The Gambia since 1993, when his father was Honorary Consul for The Gambia. He worked in the shipping and transport industry until 2002, all the while staying in touch with The Gambia. Then in 2004 he came into contact with some fishermen there, one of whom was a South African, who convinced him of the tremendous need for financial support for fishing activities providing important export earnings for The Gambia and its population.

### Contribution to a better standard of living

Michel Huijser: 'When you have been coming to Gambia for as long as I have, you inevitably develop a bond with the friendly population and every time you can see with your own eyes how difficult life in Africa can be for the vast majority of the population. If, in this way, you can contribute something to improving the standard of living there, that is wonderful, of course. The support was soon found to turn into even more support and eventually into building my own factory, so I could have everything well under control.'

Starting points for setting up the Gambian-Dutch company were boosting jobs for the local population and supplying sustainably harvested fish.

The Atlantic Seafood Company (TASC) is a fish processing company with its own factory located in The Gambia, West Africa. Without any experience or subsidies owner Michel Huijser began processing fish in this West African country in 2004. After starting in a rented factory, it soon appeared that the local standards did not meet European processing standards.

Upon this, he decided to build a whole new factory fitted up according to the strictest requirements from Brussels. Once the new factory was completed, TASC began targeting the market for Atlantic sole and cuttlefish. These products have been exported to EU-countries and South Africa for supply to various wholesalers and the hospitality sector since 2006.

The Dutch entrepreneur continues: 'Whenever I am in Gambia and talk to the workers, I can hear them speak with pride of 'their' company, I can feel their commitment and all kinds of suggestions for improvements are offered.

Over the years I have seen many changes for the better for the inhabitants. Salaries have gone up, companies – including ours, of course – pay social security contributions to the public authorities. Up to four years ago there were no such certainties.'

### The Atlantic Seafood Company promotes sustainable and socio-economically responsible fish

'The company is successful in the field of people, planet and profit. We only use freshly caught fish, taken and landed by traditional, local fishing. The canoes – in Gambia they are called pirogues – go out to sea in the morning, carrying on board the ice supplied by the factory, and return to shore in the afternoon to deliver the fish to the factory by trucks of The Atlantic Seafood Company,' Huijser says.

The fish are caught in a responsible manner using static gill nets. What's more, the processing factory is seen as an example to other fish processing companies in West Africa by EU delegations and the Gambian government.

Not less than 80% of the workers is female and the factory offers direct employment to 120 people, while some 1000 to 1500 fishermen indirectly depend on the catching and processing. In the factory the sustainably caught fish are processed into Atlantic sole fillets, ready-to-cook soles and cleaned cuttlefish for the European and South African markets.

In 2008 the Gambia sole fishery was among five trial projects selected by the MSC to test the possibility for small-scale fisheries to get MSC certified. This project is now partially finished and the prospects of getting the Gambia sole fishery MSC certified are very good.