

Welcome to Greater Senegambia

What? A new country in Francophone Africa? No, a very old one.

Greater Senegambia describes the culture of the Joly people. They live in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and the Gambia. Boubakar Barry, the Senegalo-Gambian historian, describes the region as Greater Senegambia. Greater-Senegambia was part of the empire of Mali (1250-1470). All its countries have a common culture – common music, common art and sculpture, common dance, common rituals, common food and strong family and tribal cultures. The countries were not countries in the Mali empire, They were communities. Colonialism changed that. It divided communities into nation states with different colonial languages. The official working language of Senegal is French. The official working language of the Gambia is English and in Guinea-Bissau it is Portuguese.

At a conference in London, experts from Senegambia and the UK met to discuss the influence of history and music on the three countries. There were discussions about the common culture in Bamana, a Senegambian language and in English and French. There was also music played by local musicians and griots. Griots were the old historians. They sang songs to the king and told stories about the history of the community. The conference also watched films. There was a film about the Sunjata Epic with musicians Lassana Diabate, Cherif Keita and Hawa Kassa Mady. There was also a film about the Casamance region of Senegal, called Kassumaay. Experts discussed Kankurang, the carnival theatre and gumbe music.

Greater Senegambian culture is important. It is a way of making the countries' cultures valuable. Many people from Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and the Gambia are leaving their homes and going to Europe to find jobs. There are only three expert players of the traditional Gambian Ngoni lute. If we support the traditional cultures and educate young Senegambians we can make the countries of West Africa stronger and more united, said Boubakar Barry.

New words for this article

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| lute | a traditional guitar |
| working language | the language of government and business |
| musician | a person who plays a musical instrument |
| historian | a person who studies and writes about history |

Comprehension Questions

1. What is the name of the Senegambian historian?
2. Four things happened in the conference. What were they?
3. What African language did they speak at the conference?
4. What problem do many people in Senegambia have? What do they do?
5. Why do children need to learn about Senegambian traditional culture?

Comprehension questions
 1 Boubakar Barry
 2 Discussions, music and films
 3 Bamana
 4 They have no jobs. They go to Europe.
 5 It is valuable.

Answers