

My Life in Africa

By Suliaman Fadika / transcribed by F. Paddock/ 5/21/12

My name is Sulaiman Fadika. I am from Gambia. I was born and I grew up in the village of Taibatou. All the people in Taibatou are farmers. They farm rice, groundnuts and cassava. Me and my family are groundnut farmers. Groundnuts are what we call peanuts. It's a hard job. It takes a lot of time.

I started farming when I was 9 years old. I started out holding the collar of the donkey while my big brother operated the plow. You have to keep the donkey going in a straight line. Sometimes, when I was tired, I would leave the line and cross over lines we already did. Then my brother would yell at me and say, "Are you Crazy?" Then he would take a stick and throw it at me and hit me and yell, "Are you sleeping?!" Sometimes, if my brother traveled, I would hold the plow or planter and my little brother would hold the donkey's collar. One day, my little brother got off line and I threw a stick at him and wounded him. After that I never threw a stick again but I still would yell when he got off line. We would plow or plant all day, back and forth over the field from 7 in the morning to 7 at night. After planting and the plants were growing, we would have to cut the weeds for 4 hours every day. We started at 6 in the morning. Then my sister would bring breakfast. After we ate, we would go back to work for another 3 hours. Our mothers and fathers have their own land. When we finished with one, we would go to the other and do the job again. You have to cut the weeds over and over or groundnuts and cassava will not grow when the weeds choke them out

At about 6 in the evening we would be done and we would come home and take a bath. First we had to go to the well and draw water with a little bucket out of a deep well and fill up the big bucket to take home. Then we would wash our bodies. After that we would eat dinner that was cooked by my mom. Sometimes she would fix rice with some sauce like peanut sauce or we would have futo. Futo is made with rice, goat meat, cassava flour, and a sauce made with tomatoes, onions and sometimes fish. After dinner we could go to a friend's house or go to sleep if we were tired because we have to get up on the next

day at 6. If we choose to go to our friends' house, we cook China green tea, play music on the cassette tape player, drink our tea and chat.

After the crop is grown large enough, we take one month to relax. During this time, we go and cut firewood for my mom. If she don't have that she can't cook for us. We cut enough to fill the donkey carts twice. We check the peanuts and crops to see if they are ripe. Ripe plants are pulled up and dried on the ground. Then we put them in a circle pile. We take busaran and beat the dried plants. Busaran are sticks we cut from trees. When we cut them we leave part of a branch so it makes a hook. When we beat the plants, the nuts fall off onto the ground and we use the Busaran hook to pull the plants away. We give the plant part to our animals. What is left we put into baskets called "Sinsor". We shake the basket and toss the peanuts up. The wind blows away the groundnut flower and pieces of plant. We put the cleaned peanuts in a big bag. When the bag is full it weighs as much as a man. It takes two people to put the bag on the donkey cart and take it home. We put the bags into a store building made of mud bricks. I helped my family make the bricks and it is hard work! One time I had to make over a thousand bricks and it really hurt my back! To make the roof, we cut coco wood trees and split the trunk into about 50 sticks for the roof. The roof is covered with corrugated metal. But I don't make the roof because there are special people who have the skills for that. When the store room is full, we fix the door with a lock so no one can get in. If you want some peanuts to sell or to cook, you go and get them from the room.

Two times a year, government people come to buy our peanuts. They come in March and again in May. You make more profit if you sell your crop in the May to June time. Then they don't come back until next year. When they come they set up a temporary buying station in the middle of the village. To sell our peanuts, we load up the donkey cart and take them there. If we have 20 bags in the storage building, we only take 5 to sell so we have enough left to eat, some to sell to the village and 2 bags to plant the next season.

I like farming with my family. I love my village, Taibatou and the life there. I enjoy peanut farming: the planting, the picking, the selling and I love my donkey cart. Now my whole family is here in the United States but we will always remember and love our home and village in Gambia, the cows and donkeys and the way of life.