

BO - LEAMINGTON-SPA ONE WORLD LINK

Report of a visit to Bo on Sunday 7.6.92

by Noel Banks

1 Between 28.5.92 and 13.6.92 I visited Sierra Leone, as Engineering Adviser to WaterAid I was based mainly at Kenema in Eastern Province, where WaterAid has expatriate staff supporting village community-based water/sanitation/ health projects in partnership with the Eastern Province Water Division, Ministry of Energy and Power. On Sunday 7.6.92 I visited Bo, arriving at 10.00 and leaving at 13.00. I was carrying letters for Mr. HENRY SHAKU, Chairman of OWL, and for Mr. JOHANNES MULLER. These had been handed to me by Mrs. Jane Knight, whom I contacted at the suggestion of Rev. John Nightingale, Rector of Wolverton, where I live. Mrs. Knight told me that in pursuance of the aims of the Link, OWL Leamington Spa had sent money to support OWL BO's efforts to assist village people in the Bo area who had been displaced by Liberian forces in last year's incursions from that country.

Transport for my visit to Bo (a Landrover) was provided by WaterAid. The Sierra Leonean driver was most helpful.

2 I went first to the Bo Catholic Mission School, where an Irish nun directed me to a nearby catholic church, Mr. Shaku being at the service. He was not; I was told he was at Christ the King School (where he is Deputy Headmaster). He was not. I was told he was at another Catholic service at the large church of the Immaculate Heart (if I remember the name correctly). Having spoken to a gentleman on the church door who assured me that Mr. Shaku was indeed inside, I waited outside in the sunshine, listening to some lovely and energetic singing. When the service was over several of the departing congregation assured me that Mr. Shaku had been there. But he had not. Happily Mr. EDWARD AMARA was pointed out to me ('A friend of Mr. Shaku'). He introduced himself as the Treasurer of OWL;

Mr. Shaku was in fact in Freetown. Mr. Amara then took me to the house of Mr. Muller, but he was away attending a funeral. From there we proceeded to the house of Mr. DAVID NGOMBU, the Vice-Chairman of OWL, 'who has some photographs'.

3 I spent 1½ hours with these two gentlemen, viewing the photographs and being informed about the project. OWL BO is to send a report, 'but we are teachers, and have been busy with exams'.

Initially Mr. Ngombu seemed a little reluctant to allow me to carry away any of the photographs ('the Committee has not yet authorised it') but Mr. Amara managed to persuade him. The 15 photographs attached [*Note: the pictures are of poor quality and not attached to this electronic copy*] were selected from about 30, all taken by Mr. Ngombu, who has the negatives.

4 In April 1991 parts of Sierra Leone's Eastern and Southern Provinces were invaded by Liberian forces loyal to Charles Taylor who earlier had led a rebellion against President Doe of that country. (Doe was murdered. Taylor still controls most of Liberia except the capital, Monrovia). Reportedly Taylor's forces were joined, voluntarily or otherwise, by some Sierra Leone troops.

The invaders moved West, generally to the line of the MOA RIVER (see attached map). In the south they crossed it, and for a time held PUJEHUN They also held or closely threatened SUMBUYA and KORIBUNDU, the latter hardly a dozen miles from the outskirts of Bo. Large numbers of people fled before the advancing forces and Bo became packed with displaced persons. Troops looted the occupied villages and livestock were driven off. Many houses were burnt. For several months WaterAid withdrew its expat. staff - and other staff who wished to leave - to Freetown. The Sierra Leone army seemed unable to confront the invaders and there were reports of its troops looting deserted villages.

5 Detachments from Guinea and Nigeria, and from the former President Doe's army arrived shortly to assist the government forces and much military material was sent from abroad. By October most of the invaders were back behind the Moa River)

although shelling could still be heard in Kenema. (The situation has improved since then, but not greatly so).

6 Villagers had returned earlier to the area PUJEHUN - SUMBUYA - KORIBUNDU but their food stocks had gone and they were too late to plant their crops, usually harvested in November. Food and other relief was provided by several international agencies. The Catholic Relief Service was particularly active around Bo.

7 Working with CPS and employing the two f500 grants made by OWL Leamington Spa, OWL Bo have aided the villagers of MANO YOGBO in Bo District, and SERABO and KPELEMA in Pujehun District. The first £500 was spent on books and classroom equipment (eg. pencils) for village schools; the second on galvanised water-buckets, hurricane lamps and general household items ('we bought a lot of spoons'). Most of these items will have been imported.

8 The people of these and other villages in the vicinity are still in great need and in the country as a whole there is still suffering from the effects of the war. OWL Bo therefore asks if Leamington might be able to help with one or both of the following:

a) a further grant, to be used to supply deprived people with handtools for their farming

b) second-hand clothes (including children's clothes) to be distributed among the deprived people.

9 WaterAid sends several containers each year to Freetown, and conveys them onwards to Kenema. It would be willing to make space available for stoutly-bundled second-hand clothes, without charge.

Noel Banks

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