

REPORT OF FOLLOW UP VISIT TO BO CITY COUNCIL February 19th to March 3rd

Recap

In November 2007, I visited Bo in Sierra Leone with 3 local government officers and a planner from Warwickshire. Our mission was to work with Bo City Council to put together an Action Plan for improvements to Bo City's services, building on their priorities and needs. This was part of a Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and One World Link (OWL) initiative to enhance local government through international partnership.

During the ensuing months, a 3-year Action Plan was put together, led by the Bo Mayor Dr. Wusu Sannoh, and Deputy, Bo councillors and Melvin Caulker, Bo council's Chief Executive Officer and the Environmental Health Officer. The plan was framed to satisfy the requirements of the Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project (IRCBP) Decentralisation Secretariat (Dec. Sec.) 2008 action plan with future funding in mind.

This visit was made with a number of objectives. I was to introduce the new Chairman of One World Link in Warwick District - Chris King (*see photo with Nicola Cumberledge (WCC) and Samai, our steady guide*) - to all the leaders of different aspects of the link in Bo and to life generally in Bo and surrounds. I was also there to introduce Nicola Cumberledge to Sierra Leone in general so that she could appreciate the setting for the joint Bo Warwickshire Action Plan. We also wanted to catch up with the latest on the funding of local government activities now that the new national government has had time to settle in.



The first week I was preoccupied with One World Link activities but did have a short meeting with Wusu Sannoh and Melvin Caulker. Their main message was that so far the Action Plan was fine but they did not want the Central Dump to be a priority in the plan. Although politically important because it affects the lives of many Bo citizens very badly, they felt nothing could be usefully done with it until there was an efficient landfill site to receive rubbish. After that Melvin Caulker was ill in Freetown and also announced he was to move permanently to Freetown the day we were leaving as he was to take up the post of Permanent Secretary to the Minister of Tourism – a shock and a loss to us. However we were assured that he would be replaced with a new chief executive officer by 10th March when a 2-week training session for new local government administrators was due to take place at the Bo One World Link Centre.

On February 25th Chris and I were joined by Nicola who is an accountant at Warwickshire County council. We spent a day together in Freetown paying courtesy visits to the DFID country director – Richard Hogg who is about to be posted to Bagdad, Emmanuel Gaima of the Dec. Sec. and the Deputy British High Commissioner, Rachel Cooper. We also visited the VSO country programme officer on OWL business. Our final visit was to the UNDP DACO (Development Assistance Coordinating Office) which had maps and a lot of administrative information on all the councils in Sierra Leone.

The outcome of the Freetown calls was that most of the current British personnel are due to relocate except for Rachel Cooper and Chris Gabelle (DFID governance and

working with the Dec. Sec.), so there will be a bit of a hiatus as the new staff arrive and find their feet. It was not possible to meet Mr. Gabelle but we arranged to discuss our programme with him by phone and e-mail.

Once back in Bo, Nicola and I planned to have further talks with the Mayor, and Nicola with all the finance personnel, i.e. the Ugandan VSO internal auditor and finance staff of Bo City Council. Nicola will record her experiences in a report to complement this one. Our first day at the council on 27th February was brutally curtailed by an unpleasant gathering of APC youths armed with stones and wishing to intimidate the Mayor and Deputy to prevent them standing in the elections in May. There was an unpleasant fracas; the Mayor was arrested/taken in for police protection. Schools, the council and businesses closed for the day. The Mayor's Red Cross friends plastered his cut finger while he was at the police station (until 4pm). Most irritating was the waste of his time (and ours) and the mindless damage to the newly painted council offices (see pictures below).



News from Bo City Council

Since our last visit, Bo City had received only one remaining quarterly payment from the government instead of the 3 which were due for 2007, so it had not been able to fulfil the development plan as agreed with Ward committees. The Council had also had a grant from the Dec. Sec. to improve their offices and public places so there was a lot of painting going on.

A much needed funeral van has now been acquired.

The Treasurer had not been replaced but is due to be any time now, and the Mayor hopes to see much improvement in this department. The presence of the Ugandan VSO in the finance office has made a significant difference, as has the legacy of Phil Triggs' visit.

Eric Moosa has prepared all the appropriate documents for him to be put forward for a Commonwealth Fellowship scholarship to enhance his Environmental Health skills.

Governance in Bo

I met with 6 councillors including the Mayor and Deputy and asked them questions about governance in Bo City Council. The questions I used were taken from CIPFA "Delivering good governance in Local Government"

1. The councillors were clear about what the authority is trying to achieve and they were focussed on the need for service delivery as they were close to their ward committee members and answerable to them.

2. They wanted more information about how much money the council received from government grants so that they understood what the council could or could not do and to know that devolved funds were used appropriately.
3. They wanted to know more about how ministries were implementing their devolved functions.
4. They were concerned that 4-year election cycles meant their training and experience during the 4 years could be wasted especially if their party were beaten through illegitimate practices at the election.
5. Regarding the relationship between themselves and officers, they were happy with the mutual understanding between them. They said that in some councils members were not listened to but this was not so in Bo City Council.
6. They were happy with the openness of meetings and the opportunity to speak if they wanted to. They were concerned that the general public never attended their meetings even though they were free to do so. However that may be because the public has no speaking rights.
7. They have strong committees for each of the council functions and that is where most of the scrutiny is undertaken – effectively, they thought. However there was always room for improvement.
8. They felt they were well briefed orally at meetings, and that these briefings were reflected in the minutes (they do not receive papers before meetings apart from agendas).

It was agreed that member training would be very useful but not until after the May elections. Topics for training would be

- Financial management
- Environmental development
- Waste management
- Public awareness raising
- Project implementation/ scrutiny (e.g. of Bo/Warwickshire programme)
- Gender empowerment
- Valuation training
- Identification of training materials.

My impression was that despite the differences of resources available, the needs of members in Bo City were very similar to the needs of members in our local councils in Warwickshire. The involvement in the community through ward committees seemed to be effective and something from which we could learn.

Latest comments on Bo/Warwickshire Action Plan

We presented a printed draft version of the report/action plan to the Bo City leaders and to the Freetown based organisations. The Mayor, his Deputy and the Chief Administrator and Environmental Health Officer were all delighted with the Action Plan and it was also gratifying when we met a selection of Bo Councillors to find they were also very happy with it. I was told that there is a minute from a recent council meeting which has the Action plan accepted by full council. I have been promised a copy of this minute.

There were a few small changes of emphasis in the plan as presented due to further consultation in Bo.

1. Mayor Sannoh and Melvin Caulker had reflected on the weight we had given to scoping and working towards removing the Central Dump (which was burning

quite vigorously and acridly when we revisited it). This was because they are most anxious to see the implementation of the Waste Management part of the Plan. **This includes making the landfill site a going concern.**

2. Although the planning section of the Action plan highlights community development planning and this would be desirable, the priority for the Council at present is to produce a forward looking local plan so that if developers approach



the council, they can be directed to specific areas of the city for specific development. This will require an updated mapping of the City and a visit from a planner to work with the council on possibilities. **This should be costed (personnel costs, travel and accommodation) and inserted into the action plan.** While we were in Freetown we

visited the UNDP DACO and found maps that should assist with this together with the pieces of the UNAMSIL map which we carried with us to Bo. *(Picture shows map being put together on the Mayor's office floor..!)*

3. Emmanuel Gaima appealed for Warwickshire to put together **a training course for finance officers** not just in Bo City but for all 19 Sierra Leone councils. Nicola was asked to work out possibilities with Phil Triggs so that a number of modules could be put together and maybe implemented in short spurts so that our personnel could carry them out. Emmanuel Gaima hoped they would include some valuation training and IPAM procurement training. **The modules need to be identified and costed and to be included in the Action Plan as soon as possible.**
4. Work on improved domestic wells would be much appreciated. Would this be part of a CLGF good practice project? I was told that SALWACO is working on a water hydrant closer to Bo's boundary so we may not be needed for that.

Although Douglas Alexander had recently been to Freetown and had announced £32 million for water and sanitation in Sierra Leone, it seemed we could hardly qualify for any of it. It is assigned to 3 categories of assistance,

- Helping the Ministry of Water and Sanitation,
- Helping NGOs in rural areas
- And helping in Freetown slums.

It would be worth following up with SALWACO the detail of what they are planning to do re. bringing the water supply closer to Bo. The person involved is Philip Lansana (076317148)

Emmanuel's plan is to take all the key items from our Action plan and put them into his template for his 2008 action plan. He will then steer the plans through his system to get funding from the EU DFID World Bank trust fund. **The sooner we can complete this, the better.**

This will be complemented by the Commonwealth Fellowship place if we can get it, for Eric Moosa.

We also have the possibility of using the CLGF good practice funds to enable this to get off the ground and perhaps to pay for some of the financial and governance training and water work.

Conclusion

It was not possible to meet the Minister of Local Government as he was out of the country, but apart from seeing him, in the short time we had, I feel we fulfilled all the objectives of the visit and we should now be able to put together the final touches to the 3-year action plan and get it funded as soon as possible so that maybe a few strides could be taken before the May elections.

THREATS

It has to be mentioned that the disruption which appears to have been orchestrated by the APC party's resident minister could, if repeated, cause some serious dislocation to our plans. It is hoped that the elections will be peaceful and fully democratic, certainly DFID is investing in the elections to help them be transparent.

There is also the worry that the electoral officer who visited Bo just before we arrived, was advising quite radical alterations to the boundary with Bo District Council. If Bo City has to lose some of the area it has been serving and receives no revenue from it and the boundaries follow political lines, then that could affect the proposed local plan.



It is hoped that DFID and the British High Commission will pass on our worries to the appropriate authorities.

(Picture shows resident minister leading the crowd of disruptive youths)

Jane Knight 18/03/2008