



One World Link



The friendship link between Bo in Sierra Leone and Warwick District, UK
Registered charity No. 700714 www.oneworldlink.org.uk

Chris King
Visit to Sierra Leone
February 4th-20th 2011

John Myers and myself flew out to Freetown along with William Alpha, Bo Chief Administrator, who'd been on a two week capacity building visit to Leamington. We arrived on Friday night and enjoyed the usual mobbing in the arrivals area, but because some of our luggage came onto the carousel only at the last, we seemed to have even more attention than usual,- so much so that William discovered that his fine overcoat purchased for his winter visit to the UK was pinched in the melee.

After a night at the Five Ten hotel, the teacher's union hotel arranged for us by VV Bokearie, John and I met at the hotel with Michael Dennis, the Global Schools co-ordinator at the British Council and discussed the teachers visit and issues around support and communication. That was followed by lunch at Lumley beach with Anders, UNDP, and William and the driver, giving us the chance to have a general catch up chat; the what's going on in Freetown chat, the politics, the aid environment, what various people are doing. It was immediately apparent that for all the aid community in Freetown, the future is uncertain. Everything,- personnel, strategy, income streams, all under review, and this uncertainty is making day to day processes even more difficult than usual.

Knowing that I'd be seeing Anders again in a few days when I would return to Freetown to do the rounds, we took our leave to head up to Bo before dark.

Getting around in Sierra Leone is fast changing: whereas a couple of years ago the big issue for us was the state of the road from FT to Bo and hence how long and uncomfortable that journey would be, now the road is entirely remade and the journey can take less than half the time that it did, especially if your driver believes he's on a Grand Prix circuit, which most of them now do. Now the challenge is negotiating Freetown. EC funds are being used by Chinese contractors to work on a number of fronts simultaneously, widening main arterial roads in the city. The brief is to widen the carriageways by 10ft both sides and remake the roads with culverts either side. The Chinese put 10ft blades on their bulldozers and just drive along the existing road side, smashing down whatever they encounter. Not infrequently, stretches can be seen where to one side of the road is well in excess of 10ft open space, and by bending slightly into that space, structures on the other side of the road could be left in one piece.....but no. That seems too easy. Anyway, it's difficult to describe the disruption that this work is having on life in the city. Everyone despairs of the hours that are now spent sitting baking, in stationary traffic.

Chairperson: Chris King
19 Beauchamp Hill
Leamington Spa CV32 5NS
tel: 01926 421093

Secretary: Alan Moss
11 Leicester Street
Leamington Spa CV32 4TF
tel: 01926 332828

Treasurer: Ian Bayliss
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As ever though, arriving in Bo is a great pleasure. And here too the upcoming 50th Independence anniversary celebrations have spurred on significant road improvements, making moving around much, much easier. (Fortunately, there's no widening to be done here).

My first task was to bring the two computers that WCC had provided to the Mayor. Whilst in his office, he also asked me to give him an account of William's stay with us and our visit together to JCB headquarters. I caught up with Jo Pyne and we made a plan to visit the Salini workshops at mile 91 together when that could be arranged.

The next day, I made the first of two trips to the Bo hospital. William Alpha took me there and introduced me to the Matron and the hospital administrator. This was a spur of the moment visit to fit William's schedule, and in fact neither had time to see me then, so William walked me round showing me the range of improvements that had been made. It was remarkable. I'd last visited three years ago and the place was barely recognisable such were the improvements. The hospital had two years ago been brought under the administration of the city council, and they'd been able to use World Bank funds made available to them under the Decentralised Source Delivery Programme. This coupled with the free health care now available to children under 5, pregnant and lactating mothers, has transformed what was a dead and very depressing place into something entirely bustling and full of life.

Back down in Freetown, I visited the following:

DFID. They are undergoing a root and branch assessment of their priorities. They were planning to have a new 5yr programme out on March 1st. In the meantime, they are continuing to put resource into preparing for the 2012 elections (I tried to find out what that expression actually meant, since I heard it a lot, but am still none the wiser). I will get in touch with them after March 1st.

World Bank. They are concentrating on two areas: 1- governance and the next year's elections, and 2, monitoring and impact assessment of their Decentralised Source Delivery Programme, which allocates directly funds to each of the 19 area Councils in Sierra Leone for Water, Health, Education and Solid Waste. Bo has seen much benefit from this.

They are also putting considerable effort into bringing together the major donors with the SL government with a view to developing a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to directing funds at the local rather than national level. Interestingly, it seems that that it is SL govt that is dragging their feet over this.

EC. Also reviewing their priorities. (Perhaps not surprising since it's mainly their funds that have been behind the 30yr hyro project that still is not on line) But in principle, they will be concentrating on major infrastructure (roads, power etc), fisheries and food production. They're working on the upcoming elections, supporting non-state- actors and rolling out the SCP,- the Smallholders Commercialisation Programme. This aims over 5 years to set up in the

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region of 1000 Agricultural Business Centres throughout the country, more than one per chiefdom. The aim of these is to provide a support network for the development of a more strategic approach to food production.

British Council. Had a very positive meeting with the new director Louisa Waddington, in the company of Michael Dennis the Global Schools Co-ordinator. They've now entirely disposed of their library but have invested in a comprehensive IT centre which is available to the public, and they are expecting to go live at the end of March with their 'Teaching English' Radio programme. They are enthusiastic about what we're doing in the Centre in Bo, and are keen to support the idea of the Centre becoming a resource Hub for Bo. Michael Dennis has already given two or three GSP workshops there and she's more than happy for our mail service to use the British Council as it's SL staging post.

UNDP. Our Waste Management Project is now officially closed. Although Keith Wright is as enthusiastic as ever about the pilot we've done, he does recognise the difficulties that have been thrown up, and tacitly agrees that UNDP were not equipped to be the body to deal with procurement for such a project. He can see this model being rolled out throughout the country, but only if the framework were to be agreed by Freetown, and as things stand, that doesn't seem to be on the cards. For some reason, that level of co-ordination is elusive. They want to be involved with the upcoming project evaluation (May?). As for future plans, they presently have no funds and are waiting for news of what they are to be working on. They too are 'involved' with preparation for next year's elections.

UNEP. UN Environmental Project. They have their eyes open for various initiatives regarding sustainable energy and resource management. I'm in contact with their man regarding PV and BioDiesel projects in country and on the look out for any support they might be able to offer.

British High Commission. In the person of Ian Hughes, a friendly, interested and helpful man, and a very good source of information. Very interested to hear what we're doing and to hear about our experiences with other organisations and ministries. He would like us to be around for the 50th celebrations when the HC is organising a big party for the Queen's birthday, (She won't be coming) but since his funds won't extend to paying for us to come out, then ours certainly won't either!

Back up in Bo I spent more time in the hospital getting facts and figures and pictures so that I can make up a presentation if needed, to help me in making a case for finding a link hospital or university medical faculty in the UK. I caught up with Jo Kobbah, longtime OWL founding

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father who's living in Freetown at the moment, but I'm trying to encourage him to spend more time in Bo where he can give more support and advice to the BoOWL executive.

I spent a day with Eric Moosa visiting the landfill site, the new hydrants and fire engine supply tank, a day visiting the Salini Contractor's works depot at Mile 91 to make sure they could be used to repair the JCB when the time is right. I spent time with the Mayor discussing the city strategic plan, hopes and plans for OWL and his future plans. Next year is a significant one for OWL in Bo, since three very significant figures for us are all leaving the council,- The Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Joe Pyne, (both for whom their term of office is up) and also William Alpha the Chief Administrator.

I visited Rashid Ansumana at his laboratory at the Mercy Hospital. Rashid has been the driver behind our being able to use the GIS data that he collected so that we could allow the maps to be made up. He is very willing to manage the collection of more of this data if we can find funding to roll the mapping initiative out to other parts of the country. And in between these meetings were the on- going meetings with OWL officers and most particularly VV Bokearie, Wiri Jalloh, chair of the City council Education committee, Michael Dennis from the British Council, two meetings with the OWL Youth Group, a representation from the Blind School, a visit with Paul Fish to discuss Bio Diesel, his providing laptops for the Centre, and to meet the deputy of Bo District Council and to and so on.

There is a lot going on on many fronts: the landscape is always changing. People come and go, initiatives need constant attention and feeding, and the need to communicate with the offices and agencies in Freetown remains essential. But it's exciting seeing the changes and hearing the variety of ideas and initiatives that always seem to be bubbling just below the surface; OWL is keeping abreast and more and more becoming associated as an organisation to be noted and taken account of.

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March 2011.

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