



ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2004

Chair's Report to AGM 2004



Bill Evans

I trust everyone has had the opportunity to read the very comprehensive Review of the Year in the current issue of the Newsletter. I am very grateful to John Myers, our Secretary, for having compiled and collated that, in place of the customary Chair's Report. It means that my task today is to reflect on some of the highlights of the year. Those who wish to can go back to John's fuller review and a number of reports on individual activities.

Looking back over the past few years, it is amazing how far the situation in Bo has improved, so that it has become steadily easier to engage in regular and fruitful two-way communication with Bo One World Link and our other friends there. The most obvious evidence of this is in the number of visits that are now taking place in both directions. Some of these have been programmed to develop aspects of the Link, such as Maria Franchi's working visit to Bo last year and the month long visit by David Ngombu, Teresa Bangali and Joseph Bockarie to Warwick District. Others were more the result of serendipity – people travelling for other reasons who were able to help the Link.

In Bo, these have included:

The help we have received from Keith Hudson, a police officer who lives in Whitnash, who was on a temporary UN assignment in Bo:

A visit by Rosemary Parfitt from Warwick in support of the work of Hope and Homes for Children;

Short visits by Jane Knight and John McFarlane.

In Warwick District, we were visited by:

In November 2003, Mrs. Nancy Nicholas, the then Mayor of Bo;

Joseph Bangali, Director of the Creative Arts Centre in Bo;

Father Prince Brainard, a senior administrator for the Roman Catholic Church in Sierra Leone;

Johannes Mallah, a key member of Bo One World Link.

In my report last year I was urging support for the "Buy a Brick" campaign to raise funds necessary to enable Bo OWL to build a

multi-purpose community centre. It is good news that our friends in Bo OWL are now nearing the completion of phase one of the building programme. We have exceeded our fund raising target of £30,000. However, perhaps inevitably, the estimated cost has risen, and another £6,000 is still needed to finish some internal plumbing and wiring, the fitting of doors and windows, and, crucially, the erection of a security perimeter fence. Once the internal work and the windows and doors are done, Bo OWL can start to equip it and put it into use with community and income generating activities. However, funding Phase 2 of the Centre is presenting quite a challenge – we were not successful in a bid to Comic Relief which we hoped might help us. We would welcome help from people with appropriate fundraising experience. That said, it is very clear to me that the community centre project is proving a very constructive exercise in joint working between Bo OWL and Warwick OWL.

While David, Teresa and Joseph were with us in June and July they each carried out a very full programme. There is some detail of this in John Myers' Review of the Year, and a separate report has also been prepared. They were very much supported in their very successful programme in schools by the careful preparation and co-ordination of our Education sub-group, whose work has made good progress during the year. Brookhurst, Ferncumbe and St. Anthony's primary schools have each found imaginative and interesting ways to link with schools in Bo, in one case involving a direct phone link between James Plaskitt and a Bo MP. Three more primary schools are expressing interest and there are also promising developments in some secondary schools. To quote Brian Austin, the hard-working convenor of the Education sub-group: " It has been a heartening year, we are now re-establishing a firm base for school linking. We are developing a range of ideas and materials to support national curriculum topics, we will support the teachers' group, do direct work with schools, and we hope to see a reciprocal visit of teachers funded by the British Council happen during the next year".

We have a small but very hardworking women's support group for the work of the Kayoma Women's Development Association in Bo. KAWDA is affiliated with Bo OWL and they have initiated a micro-credit scheme. Our women's group was very much strengthened by Teresa Bangali's visit and is building a much wider awareness among individuals and women's organisations here.

We have continued to develop our local authority links, particularly in respect of Warwick District Council, Warwickshire County Council and Leamington Spa Town Council. Local elections have now taken place in Bo for the first time in over thirty years. The new chair of Bo Town Council is Dr Wusu Sano, a supporter of the Link and good friend of Moussa Conteh. We understand he has invited the present Mayor of Leamington, Mota Singh, to visit Bo shortly; it is hoped that Dr Sano will then accept an invitation to come here. This will be a significant development, but we want the growing links between the respective Councils to go beyond symbolical ceremonial gestures. We look for real co-operation that assists the linking of our communities, strengthens the regrowth of local democracy and public service in Sierra Leone, and is of technical and professional benefit at both ends.

Leamington Spa has a strong tradition of international twinning and linking. It is therefore pleasing that the new Town Council of Leamington has affirmed its friendship link with Bo by offering £1,000 towards linking activities. Our present intention is to use that sum to initiate an exchange in connection with work with young people. Warwick District Council remains sympathetic to the Link and ready to consider ways co-operation might develop. We are also finding helpful links with the County Council. There is at present a strong interest at national level in helping to build local democracy in Sierra Leone. The Local Government International Bureau has visited us to see our Link in action and we are looking for ways in which we can participate in various national initiatives.

These, then are some highlights of our progress during the year. There are other ongoing activities that are included in John Myers' review, which all play an important part in the life of our group.

It is part of my role to say thank you. If I started to do it on an individual basis it would take a long time and I would still probably leave some people out. Believe me, OWL has a committee of the committed, who are unstinting in their effort, and often generous in material giving. There has been an enormous workload involved in hosting our Bo visitors and I know that in some cases that has taken a real toll. Of course, in connection with the visits I am also very grateful to the dozens of other friends who helped, on whom our visitors very much relied. So to everyone who has played a part over the past year, thank you all very much. It has been good to see some new faces taking on some commitments, but, as every year, we do need more volunteers to come forward. Many hands either make light work or enable more to be done. But of course, as well as workers we need supporters who are willing to help us fund what we are trying to do. I know our Treasurer John McFarlane, will be eagerly looking for contributions, or even better, subscriptions. Thank you very much.

Bill Evans
15.10.04

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