

REPORT ON WATERLOO PARTNERSHIP VISIT TO SIERRA LEONE: November 2015

GENERAL COMMENTS

Not surprisingly, Ebola (“The Crisis”) dominated life in Sierra Leone. The probability of another case emerging was on everyone’s mind. Caution was the watchword, with most people avoiding contact and it was difficult to remember not to hold out a hand in greeting. Everyone was friendly and welcoming and I had to remind myself that each person had lost a relative or friend. Veronica Buckets were everywhere though now they contain clean non-chlorinated water and there is a soap dispenser as well. My temperature was taken at the airport, at the entrance to all Government buildings and at a Police road block *en route* to Makeni.

The Waterloo Partnership (WP) continues to play an important role in the Waterloo community where it is respected for the many positive contributions we have made. Much this is due to the leadership provided by Badara Mansaray (BM), who understands the needs of the community and the optimal ways for the WP to interact with them.

This was a useful visit. It is essential that WPUK maintains a profile in Waterloo through visits as least once a year, not only to review our work there but also to encourage and maintain a productive working relationship with our WPSL colleagues and with officials in various quarters.

I was accompanied on parts of my visit by James Bunn (JB), Consultant Paediatrician at Alder Hey Hospital, Mark Whitby (MW) Civil Engineer and Chair of CODEP, and Katherine Whitby, Gap Year student, MW’s daughter. Their advice and support was greatly appreciated.

The following summarises the projects I visited during my visit.

SCHOOLS

Bolima Primary & Secondary School was founded in 2015 by the local community for children orphaned by Ebola. There are 6 classrooms; WP funded the doors, windows and cement floors, and shared the cost of a toilet. All teachers are unpaid volunteers, including the Head Teacher, Sylvester H. Koroma. The classes are full and they plan to build a separate Primary school.

Word of Life Pre-Primary School: This open plan building funded 3 years ago by WP is full and they asked for support for additional classrooms. At Kalafai School a tall picket perimeter fence now protects the property. It was lunch time and we were greeted by a crowd of

children and the Deputy Head, Abraham S Mansaray. The six classrooms built by WP in 2008 are fully used and there is an urgent need for more classrooms.

At the request of Ian Price I visited Bread of Life School where new building is being constructed with a school at ground level and a church above. John Power asked me to visit Hope School, where the school building, an old corrugated iron structure, was packed with lively children who sang for me. It is due to be demolished and rebuilt further down the road on land purchased by the late Fanny Ann Doherty.

Home Economics Centre. The HEC, run by Mrs Lamin, plays an important role in education and is visited regularly by pupils from 13 local schools, with as many as 100 children at a time attending weekly for classes on food & nutrition, family resource management, clothing & textiles, and family life education, including HIV and birth control. I brought a case full of sewing and art kit. The building is cramped and the facilities, including the furniture WP provided a few years ago, are run down.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

Student Nurses: Cynthia Reffell takes her final exams for SECHN qualification in May 2016 and will do unpaid nurse placements for 6 months while awaiting the results. If successful she can apply for a place on a 3-year State Registered Nurse (SRN) course. [Cynthia failed some subjects in May and her future training has yet to be decided].

Betty Nicol began her preliminary nurse training in May 2014 but this was interrupted by the Ebola crisis and was eventually completed in April 2015. Her 3-year training as a State Enrolled Certified Health Nurse (SECHN) began in November 2015 and will run until 2019. She is enjoying the course - her aim is to be a doctor

Sacred Heart School, through David Moorehouse, has generously committed to fund both these students.

ENTERPRISES

Farmers – Market Gardening: Two groups were visited:

At Fulatown I met the leaders of this group who farm a large area alongside the Graingbaima Stream on the fringe of Waterloo township.. The fields, which are well tended, were flooded during the heavy rains but some of the maize crop survived. Other areas had been replanted with maize, cassava, greens etc and are also doing well. The stream is crossed by a rickety footbridge and a new bridge has been requested. At Water Street, Lumpa, the

fields are doing well. The farmers here made a strong plea for funds for seeds and tools to be made available by early January, the optimal time for planting.

Bakery: This is fully operative, producing around 400 loaves a day as well as cakes. There is still no running water at the bakery, largely because of the difficulty in building a well on the rocky hillside.

Car Mechanic: This business is doing well and Mamoud Conteh continues to train about 8 youths at a time. He hopes to start a car-wash business but there is no fresh water on site and he asked for help to build a well.

PHDA: The new chair of this organization, Mohamed Kamara, asked WP to review the possibility of financial support. I had been told that the main activities are a Welding Shop, Blacksmith's Shop, and Tailor's Shop, but the only evidence of activity was at the Blacksmith's. The men I met were keen to get moving again. They have established a school for 100 local children.

BRIDGES

All 'WP' bridges were in use by all manners of traffic. Oroko bridge: At each end of the bridge, heavy rain has washed away part of the approaches. MW, who was impressed by the quality of the bridge, recommended constructing a gully across the road to drain rain water away from the bridge. At Mano Cornor the bridge, which is used by traffic to a local market, is intact and the railings have been repaired following damage by a truck. We have advised speed bumps and bollards at each end. The Williams Street bridge is intact. The road becomes eroded at the bridge; concrete 'wings' might prevent this.

WELLS

The new well opposite Hope School has a solid surrounding wall and is in constant use.

EBOLA ORPHANS / Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC).

A meeting had been arranged for me to meet the orphans and their guardians at Monkey Bush, a relatively new and very poor neighborhood. After the speeches I showed them the video made by our schools, which they enjoyed. I then visited five homes, all modest mud-brick buildings. In each house there were the guardians' own children plus several orphans, of whom one in each home was registered with Aminata Mansaray (AM). The food we funded was being shared between all the children in the household, as were the school uniforms.

In all, there are 154 Ebola orphans in the 45 homes we support in Monkey Bush and Benguema.

HEALTH MATTERS

Waterloo Community Health Centre : A major rebuild of the Centre was being undertaken, funded by the United Nations Population Fund, who would also provide furniture. Other needs at the Health Compound are a perimeter security wall around the compound and a ward to which patients could be admitted for a short period. The latter required approval by the Chief Medical Officer, which we obtained. The midwife, Sister Princess Bangura, was due to retire at the end of December and two midwives currently working with her will take over. Throughout the Ebola crisis she continued to deliver patients without a break, including high risk women that no-one else would touch. I privately gave her one of our Certificates of Appreciation and funds I had collected for her. I also visited Fatima, widow of James Jajua, late head of the CHC who died of Ebola, and gave her donations from the UK.

The community at Mano Koya, New London asked for a health clinic, including maternity care, to be built here as it is a significant walk to the main Waterloo Health Centre.

Meeting with the District Health Officer and Chief Medical Officer.

I had meetings with the District Medical Officer Dr Thomas Samba, his Deputy Mrs. Aminata Chisi, and the Chief Medical Officer Dr Brima Kargbo. The latter was interested in our activities and made instant decisions:

- There was no objection to building a Health Centre at Manor Koya, New London (see above). He agreed that Midwifery should be phased in once the clinic was established.
- He approved the building of an inpatient ward at the Waterloo CHC.
- He confirmed that there are plans to build a District Hospital in Waterloo Township, once the site has been agreed.

WPSL:

I met members of the WPSL Management committee at BM's house. After an introduction by BM, I made a speech in which I referred to the 10th Anniversary and the work done during the Crisis. I presented a Certificate of Appreciation to over 20 people who had assisted Badara with food distributions and in other ways during the crisis. This was greatly appreciated. During my visit, I had several meetings with BM and AM at their home, where I was always made welcome.