

The transformation of an illegal dump site in Bo

A twenty-acre piece of land was leased out to Bo town in early 1950s for development into a public park. During the Civil War this land, called 'Bomeh' became a dump site but now, step by step, its original purpose is being realised. A report by Derek Greedy

Under the original lease the town council was to pay annual rent to the three land holding families.

The transition of Bo from town to city status, the degeneration of Sierra Leone into 11 years of civil



Smoke rising from the permanent fire on the old site - a serious health hazard

war and lawlessness and a lull that ensued prevented the town from fulfilling its obligations. Some land holding families and town officials informally took repossession and hived off the land for private development.

The 20-acre parcel of land was encroached and transformed into mixed development, leaving only 3.6 acres that was turned into an illegal dumpsite, a hideout for criminals, and some small scale businesses.

Waste piled up over the years to more than three metres high, temporary structures continued to spread on top of the waste piles, some sections turned into open defecation sites while other areas remained under continuous fire making it one of the worst pollution sources in the city.

Reclamation process

The law of Sierra Leone gives the right to an individual to take ownership of a piece of land if he/she has been operating illegally on it for more than 10 years without objection from any claimant. Even though it was not clear how long the illegal settlement on Bomeh dumpsite had been, the repossession had to

be a negotiated. A working committee comprising the land holding families, paramount chief, the Bo city council, the civil society, Environmental protection agency among others was set up and headed by the senior district officer. The team made an assessment of the illegal settlement (including actual ownership) and their values at the Bomeh site and a time line for relocation including nominal compensation rate to enable occupants to remove their structures. A development design was prepared and approved by the working committee. Political goodwill was

sought by organising a delegation to the Vice President to present the proposed design for Bomeh and hence the reason for his

support. One of the business owners at Bomeh disputed the development and associated relocation and sought court protection against the project listing the Paramount chief as first respondent and the Mayor of Bo city council the second. The level of interest and rejection from across the stakeholder committee against the case forced the court to visit Bomeh site from where the chief judge ordered immediate clearance and restoration of the site, basing judgement on the potential environmental and health hazards. All the illegal



Site clearance and construction of a box culvert

structures were marked and official notice for site clearance issued, compensation dates set and a contract issued to commence site clearance.

Challenges

Waste volumes on areas under structures were much greater than had been envisaged during project formulation and budgeting. The project transported 30,000 tons of waste, as provided for in the budget, but this only covered the 1.5 metre top layer. More than 2 metres of clearance still remained before they reached the level upon which the planned facilities could be installed.

Most parts of the are site on high water table and swampy ground and therefore needed a high volume of backfilling as well as fencing and levelling.

The entire 3.6 acres has been cleared of all illegal structures and 30,000 tons of waste cleared. Additional funding was needed to pay for the site clearance, backfilling, levelling and fencing.

In order to keep costs down manual labour under the United Nations Food for Work scheme was to be used to screen inorganic waste.

The proposed recreation facilities have been reviewed to reduce costs.



Illegal structures voluntarily moved by owners after negotiation and nominal compensation

“the chief judge ordered immediate clearance and restoration of the site, basing judgement on the potential environmental and health hazards.”

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A refresh for the OWL Centre

The One World Link Centre in Bo has just benefitted from some significant investment.

The OWL Centre on Mattru Road in Bo forms the hub of OWL's activities in the city. Originally completed in 2007 it offers two conference / meeting rooms of different sizes, an office for OWL and a six-bedroom guest house. It is where OWL members and friends visiting from the UK always stay in Bo.



The One World Link Centre in Bo

The OWL Committees in both Bo and Warwick agreed that after ten years some investment was needed, both to maintain the centre and also to improve facilities it can offer. The meeting rooms in particular are an important source of income and are well used by groups requiring meeting space in the city.

Under the management of Maada Fobay and the Bo OWL Committee, we have recently purchased: a large television (with a digital satellite subscription - particularly useful for showing educational programmes for teacher training), a data projector and screen, some moveable display boards and new curtains. The centre has also been repainted and in the yard the concrete surface has been replaced and the murals repainted. (The one of Jane Knight now has a distinct regal look to it!) Improvements have also been made

to the solar lighting. Further planned improvements include buying more chairs and tables for the meeting rooms.

Jane, Mair Evans and Phil Clarke were able to view these improvements on their visit in November. They were both impressed and encouraged to see the Centre looking so good and - more importantly - being well used with the conference rooms in regular use by other organisations.



The refurbished sitting room

Teachers to visit Bo

Primary school teachers from the UK will visit Bo in February as part of the annual exchange.

This year Tim Bladon from Ferncumbe, Siân Atkins from St. Margaret's and Claire James from Wellesbourne will be visiting their link schools of RC Model, BDEC Messima and UBC Lower respectively. This will be a first time experience for these teachers and will be supported by Paul Atkins and Tim Hussey who have made visits in the past. The teachers will be spending their week in classrooms learning from the joys of class sizes of around 70 and hoping to share practice that is relevant.

They will also be delivering workshops to all of the link teachers the OWL Centre in Mattru Road. This year they will be sharing current ideas on the teaching of phonics and mathematics. Paul and Tim will be visiting all of the remaining schools to include them in the link programme. They will be working together on a joint project based around the theme of recycling. Paul also plans to visit several Secondary schools that currently have a link with those in the Warwick and Leamington district to develop the collaboration further. Plans are being developed and there is a great deal of excitement in the air!

Linked schools exchange stories

The idea was born last June when Bo Headteacher Amelia Bockarie arrived at Lillington Primary, her partner school, with a hand written, beautifully illustrated story to share with the children at the Day of the African Child



Like many of the West African stories we have enjoyed the main characters were animals and the story had a strong moral teaching point. We realised that an exchange of stories between partner schools would make a very good project and provide schools both sides with a re-usable resource to help pupils gain insight into each others' cultures. Some of the Warwick and Leamington schools illustrated traditional stories such as

Goldilocks, Jack and the Beanstalk and Little Red Riding Hood while others let children invent their own tales. These books were sent out with the group in December who returned with packages from all 15 Bo link schools, enabling schools here to share stories from Bo just a few weeks later. It really is ideal when pupils can see this fairly instant 'result' in terms of an 'exchange' with their peers who live just 3,500 miles away!

Chairman's Notebook



Our link thrives and has expanded into wider areas of friendship and partnership during 2017.

That is all very positive, particularly when seen against the devastation caused by the Ebola emergency of 2014/15.

It is appropriate to reflect on this now as we are at the conclusion of the 2-year post Ebola support programme of funding. As well as the £427 million expended on fighting the outbreak itself, the UK government committed an additional £240 million to 2017 to support the county's recovery. This was targeted at supporting survivors and projects to help many structural problems, including those in education, the health system and sanitation.

With this additional commitment now coming to an end and increasing pressure on aid funding, it is to be hoped that the needs of a country with so little continue to be recognised by countries with so much.

OWL not an aid organisation, but we have played our own small part in recovery through our own very personal and committed friendship links during a very difficult time

I hope that not only can we continue to make an impact ourselves, but also help others to see how understanding and supporting a community with many needs is beneficial to all.

John Archer, Chair OWL

Day of the African Child - a great celebration

Can you imagine 500 primary school children sitting together in complete silence for a full minute? They had just listened to a poem "I am an African Child" and heard about the day in 1976 when schoolchildren were killed during protests in South Africa and they were sitting in silent reflection. The rest of the day started with a grand parade when pupils from fifteen schools trooped round the field at Lillington Primary School with banners proclaiming their links with schools in Bo as part of our education programme.



The parade

The children were then divided into groups for a series of contrasting workshops. In two rooms there was quiet as they listened to African stories told by teachers visiting from Bo. They were making plenty of noise in the drumming workshops as they learnt to play rhythms on djembes. In two halls there was drama as they acted out a cliff-hanger story about a boy

stuck in a tree surrounded by crocodiles, a snake and a lion; how could he escape? Nearby there was vigorous dancing, and in a marquee there was equally enthusiastic singing. In the field outside children were having races bowling hoops and carrying water.

There were formal proceedings, too. The visiting teachers had brought letters from the Sierra Leonian children as gifts for their linked schools and received reciprocal gifts to take back with them. Pupils from each school presented petitions to our MP, Matt Western, to pass on to the Prime Minister, to press for education for all children, everywhere. Finally all 500 children joined in the songs they had learnt earlier in the day – what a loud and happy sound to round off the day!

Supporting a growing city: planning the future of Bo

Three members of One World Link have recently returned from Bo where we have been helping prepare a plan for the growth of the city. Philip Clarke reports.

Bo currently has a population of 175,000 people according to the latest 2015 census, but experts predict that this will grow dramatically over the next few years to as high as 583,000 by 2045. That's a growth of over 330% in 30 years!

As reported in the last newsletter, OWL has linked up with Prince Charles' "Prince's Foundation for Building Communities" (PFBC) to help develop a toolkit for use by town planners in countries across the developing world in cities, like Bo, facing rapid urban expansion. Although this is likely to eventually be an on-line resource, PFBC

We were encouraged to find a real and genuine enthusiasm across both councils to develop a vision for how Bo may grow

suggested Bo as a pilot city. So it was that Jane Knight, Mair Evans and I flew to Bo in November to organise and support a two-day workshop being led by PFBC.

Developing a planning framework for Bo as we would understand it in the UK is extremely challenging as there is no effective planning laws to control land



Practical exercises at the workshop

use. We were all the more encouraged, therefore, to find a real and genuine enthusiasm across both councils to develop a vision for how Bo

may grow and think about how this may be achieved.



Maada Fobay introduces the workshop with Bob May working for PFBC

This was actually the second PFBC planning workshop in Bo. An initial two-day workshop had taken place in May 2017. We were not able to be present for this, but provided the resources for the event including plans of the city prepared by John Archer on previous visits. The purpose of this second workshop was to build on the work of the first and - importantly - to test the ideas out with a wide-ranging group of stakeholders including landowners and government departments.

The workshop took place on 4th and 5th December 2017. We spent the previous week making all the practical arrangements and working with staff at both councils to make sure that the right people were invited. Although the workshop was aimed directly at the two local councils (Bo City and Bo District Councils) and leading local stakeholders, we were keen to use OWL's profile in the city as way of encouraging support for the event. The conference facilities at the recently upgraded OWL Centre provided an ideal venue for the event which was attended by almost 50 people over the two days.

At the workshop itself, we discussed a "vision" for Bo, agreed where major growth should (ideally) be directed and

began to consider the practical infrastructure and other implications of this. A first priority growth area is the land around the airstrip and close to the campus of Njala University to the south-west of the city, and we undertook a site visit to this area.

The morning of the second day included a stakeholder consultation meeting at which 30 people attended.

It was great to see OWL fully involved in hosting the event.

The vision and emerging plans were shared and there was a full and frank exchange of views on how this work could be taken forward.

The workshop was a great success. Whilst it remains to be seen whether Bo is able to bring to fruition the ideas



Field work

that were generated, we did come away greatly encouraged by everything we saw and shared. There was a genuine understanding of the benefits for everyone if local people can work together to agree where and how growth will occur. There was an enthusiasm from council staff to make this happen.

It was also great to see OWL fully involved in hosting the event. We have committed to continue to do what we can to support this important work moving forward.

Other news in brief

Facebook Page Revived

The One World Link Facebook page has been updated and is now active. It currently includes pictures from recent visits and information about our current activities and events. This is a great way to stay in touch not only with our members in the UK but a direct way of sharing ideas with all those in Bo.

Please have a look, make suggestions, comment (and 'like') on the existing notifications, but especially include any of your own experiences with One World Link through pictures or comments. Also tag our page into any others that you think would be appropriate and help spread the word of the work that we do.

The page works at its best if there are constant comments made. Let's make this thing go viral!

www.facebook.com/oneworldlinkuk

One World Link's Social Evening

On 13th June OWL invited members, friends and the public to the Leamington Pump Rooms to share news on progress with OWL members and friends. It was hoped that our teacher visitors from Bo would also be able to be in attendance, but, unfortunately, delays in their travel arrangements meant that they did not arrive until the day afterwards! Nevertheless, a good evening was held at the Pump Rooms in Leamington.

We were treated to a presentation by Liz and Sunita on the teacher visit to Bo earlier in the year, including a very impressive video montage that captured the essence of Bo life. We also had a charming demonstration of Sierra Leone children's playground tricks from some All Saints pupils.

Helena White gave a very interesting illustrated talk on health and maternity issues in Freetown and Bo and updated us on her visit to the Children's hospital in Bo which we are working with to help improve its facilities.

After a break for refreshments, John Archer set out the current position on working with the Prince's trust on planning for growth in rapidly urbanising cities, using Bo as a test case for developing systems.

John also explained that Glenn Fleet and Derek Greedy had also recently visited Bo and Makeni to assist with the national roll out of the waste project, following its successful development in Bo.