

ONE, WORLD LINK - Warwick District/Bo District  
as seen from the Bo End, 1983

I visited Bo as Co-ordinator of One World Link in May 1983 to find out the effects of the Link at the Bo end.

Method of Enquiry

1. Questionnaire.
2. Interviews/conversations with key members of the Link.
3. Discussions about Link at O.W.L. Committee and general meetings (two of each).
4. General impressions.
5. Answers to questions raised by Michele Wates (Community Links Researcher).

Ideally this survey would have been done by a Sierra Leonian but there was nobody available at this stage and I can only suggest that because this was my third encounter with the Bo end and because I know some of the Sierra Leonians very well I was trusted enough to be told the truth, There was a certain resistance to question the link too much. The general feeling was that it is a relationship which is pleasurable and useful so why ask all these questions?

1. Questionnaire

I took 100 copies of a questionnaire, 50 for pupils and 50 for adults. They were designed with the help of a Sierra Leonian studying in Britain. I received back 8 from adults and 4 from pupils. The low response reflects the resistance and confusion about my purpose in making such enquiries. It also reflects the difficulty of communication in Bo. It was not possible in a month to visit all the Link participants so the questionnaires were distributed at a general meeting (twenty-four present) and through the committee. Most of these people were teachers with frantic end of term problems (exam supervision, common entrance preparation etc.) and the questionnaire was not a high priority.

Only one out of the response expressed disappointment. This was Hannibal Kamara a weaver who has been very disappointed because he hoped get a, link with a weaver and some financial backing, or at least a market for his goods. None of this has happened so far and he is losing interest after two years in the Link.

For the rest (both adults and pupils) the consensus seems to be that the Link is good, the cultural exchange is valuable and the friendships are appreciated. The recurring problems are finance and delays in

communication both in Bo and with the Warwick District end.

## 2. Interviews/Conversations

I talked at length with the Chairman and Secretary of O.W.L. in Bo and with Mr. Braima of the Methodist Primary School which is linked with Milverton Combined School in Leamington and has had a visit from a teacher at Milverton. They were all totally positive about the Link and wanted it to continue. The Chairman prided himself in being fairminded and wanted the whole operation to work correctly and efficiently. The secretary seemed happy to put in the hard work demanded of him.

When I talked to Mussa Conteh, a well respected member of the Be Community in Sierra Leone, his reaction was that the Link is a positive step in a situation 'Which is fraught with slow progress or no progress. He is keen to see development education developed in Bo and to build up a greater awareness of North/South issues. Dr. Nuli Lemoh, another honest and respected person, said he saw the Link having the benefits of any relationship but that like a relationship it was not possible to predict to where it would lead. He feels the Link is very important for both ends as a means for awareness building.

Over and over again the people I spoke to stressed that they thought contact between people and the increased understanding between them must be good. When I asked about their being westernised -is a result, or their relationship being unequal, they dismissed these thoughts as not being true, or worth discussion.

## 3. O.W.L. Committee Meetings

The biggest problems for them were finance and getting volunteers to run the Link committee (similar problems to ours), the frustration of delayed post and letterwriting and extending the membership to more people. They worked hard at their meetings to try and find solutions to these problems. They are going to split Bo into zones for contacting people and they will use Mussa Conteh as a channel for communication with us.

Behind the scenes there had been difficulties in choosing people to visit England but the choice once made was accepted and it did not seem to have jeopardized the harmony of the committee.

## 4. General Impressions

I was asked to speak to a number of groups in Bo: about the Link e.g. the workshop and the accounts office at Tikonko Agricultural Extension Centre, a group of nurses at Bo Hospital, the League of Friends and a Lady Teachers' Union. There were some strong questions about our intentions and expectations. For example, "What do you want from the Link? Is it Government sponsored? Why do you not think we should develop like Britain?"

However, at the end of all these meetings interest in being involved in the Link was expressed and two of the groups sent me letters to take back to England to set up links for them.

Myself and Sheilagh Holmes who came with me were asked by six schools and other organisations from a football club to an adult literacy group to find links for them. In other words we were being sought rather than imposing our ideas on them.

There were two individuals besides Hannibal Kamara who had been disappointed by the Link, a boy scout and a guide leader. However, they are still in favour of the Link and the latter continues to attend Link meetings despite numerous domestic problems.

The great effort made by Link participants to attend meetings (after long walks in the sun and a hard day at school) impressed me a lot and showed how keen they are.

My impression of the motivation for participating in the Bo Link was that the people there share our desire to promote better understanding in the world and not just to receive things from us.

It could be said that they belong in order to get a visit to England, but I do not think they see it that way. They know the number of tickets is limited and they are democratic their choice of who visits. Although admittedly it is taken as a right that only-committee members will be considered for visits using tickets obtained by us. There are also privately arranged exchange visits. Although goods have been sent to schools and the hospital they accepted that this could stop if our transport arrangements stopped and they said this would make no difference because it was not what the Link is about.

I think it should however be acknowledged that there is now chemistry glassware for some secondary schools which they would not have had, some schools are better off with more books in previously non-existent libraries and the hospital has a few more drugs to administer and the Tikonko Agricultural Extension Centre has two extra bikes, a projector for health extension work and some extra tools.

The less concrete benefits which the teachers value particularly are that their pupils are having an opportunity to write English with some purpose and to practice their English. They had a question in the Common Entrance exam "Write a letter to your penfriend in the U.S. telling about life in Africa" and obviously the Link participants had had plenty of practice with this. As one aid worker (30 years in Sierra Leone) said "One can never know what benefits accrue from the Link any more than I can measure the effect of my time here".

What I did pick up was always more positive than negative despite many questions aimed at finding negative feelings. For example, Would you mind if the Link stopped? Do you think there should be a limit on the duration of the Link?

5. Questions raised by Michele Wates (Community Linking Researcher)

(a) Idea and Early Stages

From what I can gather there was a feeling of puzzlement and suspicion when I first wrote to people in Bo but after visiting them and getting to know them they were convinced that the Link was a good idea. Some committee members have been with the Link the full two years of its existence. There did not seem to be any difficulty/disagreement about the initiative we presented. The participants at that stage were mainly school teachers and one nurse.

The "standing" in the community of the key individuals is mainly that they are respected teachers and headteachers. Their expectations like ours were to strengthen the Link and to exchange as much information and understanding as possible. I think some were waiting to see what they got out of the Link but many from the start saw the opportunity of improving awareness of each other and each others cultures.

(b) Consolidation

Since the Link was formed there have been six visits to Bo and two visits from Bo, excluding many visits by six Bo people resident in England. There have been meetings at both ends discussing issues and life in the two countries. The schools involved have increased from the initial twelve to coming up to twenty. The library and medical links have grown and other links have been suggested. The initiative for all of this has come from both sides but more from our side. Even so our initiatives have needed the full co-operation at the Bo end. The school links have worked best. The failures and disappointments have been through delayed or undelivered post and lack of suitable links found.

I feel that in two years the initial expectations have been exceeded in that there are deep flourishing friendships and at both ends however difficult things have been, nobody has withdrawn from the link.

Attached to this paper is a report about the link written by Mrs. Karama after one year of the Link. It does not go into a lot of depth but the general optimism is typical of all the people I have spoken to.

(c) Community Involvement

The sections of the community involvement are mainly already leaders in various community activities like the Red Cross, League of Friends, Churches Adult Literacy work as well as being teachers and nurses.

So far there is scarcely any expatriate involvement - just one secondary

school head. People have been drawn in mainly by word of mouth. Nobody has been resistant to becoming involved but as at our end it is not everybody's interest of "cup of tea".

Once people have joined they have stayed or their school has continued to send a representative to meetings. The people who are least involved in meetings are village teachers and medical staff because of transport problems and pressure of work respectively, however their links remain strong.

There is no set up for publicity in Bo other than letters and circulars and these are used somewhat erratically.

(d) Structure

The Bo committee was formed because I asked them to form one so that we had a central core of people with whom to communicate. I half expected it would not happen and am therefore very pleased that the committee not only functions but has grown over the years to nearly thirty strong with a small executive.

(e) The Future

The aims for the future of the Link in Bo are to increase the membership, to set up an exhibition about Warwick District, to improve communications and to keep the Link going.

There are no anticipated limits on the duration of the Link because much of it is the development of friendships.

In the long term individual links are likely to grow at their own pace, some will flourish and some will falter. The Bo end suggested that we do more to increase family and person to person links.

There is a desire in Bo to set up a resource centre there and we did discuss three way links perhaps linking with another African country but this will need a lot of thought and interest from them first.

(f) Perceptions

Perceptions of the U.K. are slowly improving or being altered particularly through the visits but this has been slow and there is a real need for someone at the Bo end to give talks in schools and elsewhere about life in the U.K. Information picked up from letters is sometimes muddled.

What hits the Sierra Leonians most is the fact that people in the U.K. do not know much or anything about Sierra Leone. They are surprised to hear how expensive life is here but many (who have not visited Britain) seemed to hang on to their rather glamorous view of the U.K. Only time and more contact will modify this.

Some were surprised to find we felt we had a lot to learn from them and seemed pleased about this.

(g) Evaluation

The consensus on what Bo felt they were getting from the Link was a better knowledge and understanding of Britain and help with their work by exchange of professional ideas and resources.

Most felt that Warwick District would benefit from looking at another culture and the understanding gained from that.

Many thought they had gained by meeting each other and the Link was a new focus in Bo for receiving and exchanging information and ideas.

Finally a comment from one of the questionnaires.

"Whoever conceived the idea of One World Link has done more good to the emerging generation than the man who perfected the nuclear bomb. The O.W.L. is a sure way of promoting international co-operation and I only pray that it will embrace all the children of the world and not THIRD WORLD countries only".

JANE KNIGHT (Mrs.)  
O.W.L. Co-ordinator  
July 14th 1983.

JK/DH/July 1983.