

# Interview with Johannes Mallah

(from Bo District in Sierra Leone linked with Warwick District) -  
interviewed by Jane Carroll

**"Johannes, how did you first hear about the Bo/Warwick link?"**

"I first came to know about the link a year ago when Jane Knight came to visit me in Bo. This link had been going on for nearly three years and I did not know anything about it. I felt a bit ashamed. However, I got to know about it reading some of the literature and I told her that I thought it was a good idea. It is good to know about each other's culture because there are so many misconceptions."

**"How do you see it now?"**

"I still see the link as being very good. It cuts across barriers and brings people together and makes people aware of their shortcomings at both sides."

**"What do you think about the aid element?"**

"If you look at the background of the typical Sierra Leonian, charity is an inbuilt part of our lives. We like to give gifts, to give our love, to give to strangers. So if in turn a stranger wishes to give to us aid, or charity there is nothing wrong with that."

**"But why to some people at the conference who are from third world countries feel so strongly about aid?"**

"Well, there are certain aspects of aid which I too, am against. For instance, I would be against collecting money in a random way to send to a group of people in the third world because they are thought to be poor. On the other hand in our schools there are basic materials which are lacking and if the people in the link can buy or collect books for us these will be very useful. Money could go to the wrong hands. I prefer aid in kind."

**"What do you think people at this end will gain?"**

"Well as I said, some people have a lot of misconceptions about our country. This link can be an educative process for people here to help change their attitudes. There are certain aspects of our culture which are so rich. A good example is our family unity and the extended family. You can learn about this from us. You put your old people in homes."

**"Do you think there are any dangers or corrosive effects by flooding villagers with information about our way of life?"**

"This linking should be a gradual process and should not bombard people with information too quickly."

**"What do you think about exchange visits?"**

"I think they are one of the most enriching aspects of the link."

**"Someone like you is educated, but what would be the effect be on someone who was not educated?"**

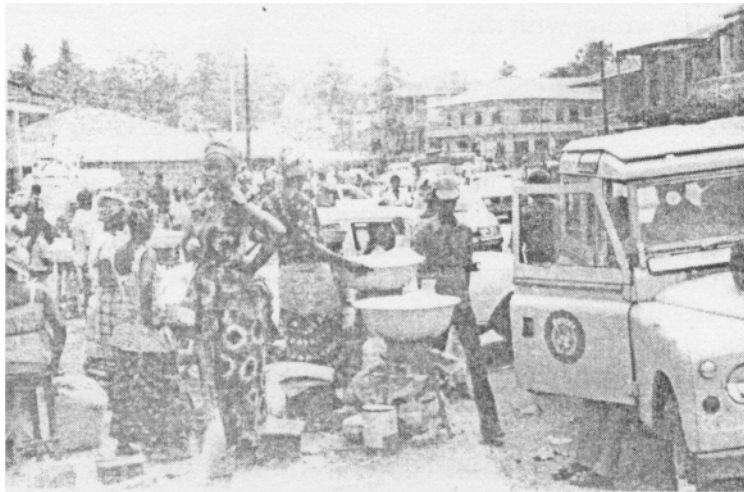
"I think it would be alright if someone explained beforehand what the link was about. It is important to get the right person at the overseas end to explain the real aims of the link. It does not matter who the people are as long as they are committed to the ideals of the link."

**"What do you think of the links represented here at Marlborough? Do you think they are going about it the right way?"**

"My first impression is that people have different links and different approaches. Some think that aid is the most important element. I think this can lead to patronising attitudes. Aid should only be part of it. Cash aid should only be sent to specific projects seen and known by the linkers at this end."

**"Can you give an example of patronising aid?"**

If I become friendly with someone here at the conference and he invited me to his house I would be very happy but then if he put money in my pocket I would wonder what he was doing. Is it because I am from the third world? Or because he thinks I am poor? He should have learnt to know me much more before considering such an action. Another example somebody said they had collected £2,000 and did not have anything specific to send it to. They must be clear what they are trying to do. It would be much better for someone to go out and get to know villagers who want a well or to meet farmers who may ask for tools. Then the community here would know precisely what was happening to their money and the recipients of their aid would know them as friends."



*A street in Bo*



*The Parade, Leamington*