

Final Report by Maria Franchi
Visit To Bo – November and December 2003

Introduction

I arrived in on Tuesday 28th November 2003. The programme for the first few weeks was decided at a committee meeting on the Wednesday and this included visits to all the local dignitaries, Secondary schools and Primary schools involved in the Link, and also the Kayoma Women's Group. This programme was again discussed at the meeting of Friday 14th November 2003. My working week was agreed to be – Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings spent doing visits, afternoons writing up, Tuesdays and Thursdays time off, Saturdays Kayoma Meetings, Sundays off. After my trip to Freetown, I designed my own itinerary based on follow up work and to tie up work initiated.

Aims of the Visit

1) School linking

To facilitate communication and understanding between schools who already have links to maximize mutual benefit in achievable ways

To research and obtain materials that will be useful for classroom teaching in UK schools and to explore what materials would be of value for classroom use in BO

To explore ways in which school linking can be developed.

2) Kayoma Women's Group

To assist the Kayoma Women's group to develop and identify means of implementing its goals and to assist in any other way

To liaise with the Warwick OWL support group and help it identify constructive means of support

To identify that Kayoma have satisfactory security of funds and that they have received funds already raised for the benefit of Kayoma by Warwick OWL

3) Community Centre

To assist Bo OWL to develop their plans for the Centre in any way that Bo OWL identify

4) Community Linking

To explore ways in which linking between community groups might be encouraged to develop

5) General

To reflect on the nature and purpose of the Link and report whatever observations or suggestions come out.

School Linking

During the first two weeks I visited all the linked schools, met with the Principals and Link co-ordinators with the schools. I generally had a guided tour of all facilities and in most schools had a chance to talk to the children. I delivered the work given to me by schools in Leamington to the relevant schools.

I learnt a lot about the school system here, the position of education and the government's plans (prompted generally by outside pressure, particularly E.U. funding aims). Like the other visitors I was appalled at the pressure that schools and teachers are under with huge classes, no resources and low pay. At the same time I was inspired by the way they manage to cope and overcome many of these problems.

I was shown many of the computers and books donated by the Link. To be honest, although gratefully received they have had minimal impact. The computers where working are unable to print, either because

they don't have a printer or because they are unable to afford the ongoing costs of ink cartridges and paper. Many of the computers were being used for office administration, but even here printing is limited. The books had been added to the school libraries in most cases, for use by students and teachers. Many are locked away with the school globe and other valuable equipment against thieves.

The government move to free primary education, which they are saying will extend to secondary for girls in the next few years, is putting the schools under enormous pressure, at both primary and secondary level.

I did see some equipment provided by the government in one secondary school. The rest seems to be provided by students, teachers or donors.

In the last week of term I revisited those schools with existing link schools to collect anything they wanted me to send back.

I did find that one school – St. Francis Upper – has benefited from a communication mix up and seems to be linked with four schools in Leamington!! I have tried to raise this with the committee and the Principal but it is an issue to be aware of in future.

Teachers Pack

In order to try to elicit cultural and local information for this pack I decided to convene meetings of teachers from each of the link schools. At the same time this served to raise awareness amongst them of the size and membership of the Link, and included information and skills related to teaching in the UK and teaching theory.

The teachers were extremely motivated to help although they complained in the evaluation of a lack of incentives – it is usual for NGO's to give money, gifts and food in return for attendance. The process of gathering information was extremely enlightening in the following ways –

- The teachers have a completely different approach to teaching and learning which became evident in collating information, imagining worksheets etc.
- The teachers hold most of the information they use in class in their heads – they have huge and detailed memories to compensate for lack of books – this limits their scope.
- Despite spending a good part of each session discussing and comparing the system in Bo with the UK, they can't begin to imagine the level, quality and quantity of resources available to us.
- The teachers welcomed the opportunity to meet and learn together especially in the context of group discussion and in the preparation of materials. They were all eager for this opportunity to continue.

In conclusion, although the sessions did provide some limited resources to be included in the pack, the major benefit was to the teachers here and to my increased understanding of their position and approach.

In addition to the information collected by the teachers I have taken photographs and video, bought examples of West African texts, listed and priced the core text books.

I have not made any attempt to collate the information, but have included in it some explanations of how the education system works here.

NB having members of the link in the Dept of Education and in Bo Teachers College has really benefited us – we could not have convened these meetings and ensured attendance without it.

Recommendations

- That the Bo committee continue to convene meetings of teachers from registered schools from time to time
- That a teacher from the meetings is included in the next visit to Leamington

- That the visit from Bo is set as the launch for the Teachers Pack in Leamington and they are also able to return to Bo with the Pack for teachers here.
- That work is undertaken to set up a review and development process for the Pack involving teachers in Bo and Leamington once it is published and being used

Women's Groups

I initially met with Kayoma and subsequently with 8 women's groups who are in the process of registering with OWL. Through this I think I gained a good understanding of the position of women generally in Bo and of the way in which the women's groups operate.

In particular my work with the women's groups has led to arrangements in training and micro credit.

Training

I delivered training to the Kayoma group in planning, to the executive in budgeting, and ran an open session for members of all the groups in Assertiveness. This was a fascinating and rewarding experience and the women assure me they will be putting it all into practice!!!

I was able to identify local providers of training for the women, to be organized through the Kayoma group in Business planning and skills and Leadership Skills.

I am sure that with Training for Trainers provided for the Kayoma women the training would be extremely sustainable and even an income generator. The women on the Kayoma executive are involved with lots of other groups and attend workshops regularly within and outside Sierra Leone. If this could be cascaded through Kayoma it would benefit the wider community greatly.

Micro Credit

I was extremely impressed with the government administration of micro credit schemes in Sierra Leone and was lucky to find out that one of the most successful schemes is operated by one of our linked groups based at MIA. We are now able to use their expertise to administrate any funds we wish to send. See detail in attached report.

The Future of Kayoma

I facilitated the opening of two bank accounts for Kayoma – a local savings account and a foreign currency account. The accounts have three signatories and will be used for local transactions, funds raised etc, and for the receipt of monies fro the UK. The foreign currency account has received a start up figure of \$200 as a n anonymous donation.

There is no doubt that Kayoma's structure and membership equip it as a possible umbrella group for other women's groups in the Link. If micro credit can be initiated through the MIA administration, it would make sense for the administration to gradually be passed to the Kayoma group itself if there was no conflict of interest. If the group can continue to attend workshops and can gain training skills or access to training, they could run workshops for the other groups' members as well as for themselves.

Because this would mean Kayoma having a large part to play in the Link, and because of issues of financial accountability, some formalizing of the relationship between the Owl executive and the Kayoma Executive would be mutually beneficial.

Recommendations

- Kayoma and OWL executive should discuss and agree some formalization of the relationship, particularly in terms of financial accountability
- Kayoma should be given responsibility for convening and servicing a network of women's groups registered with OWL, including liaising with outside agencies for access to training and other benefits
- Kayoma and the Support group in Leamington should agree system of micro credit and its funding

Other

Community Centre

I have been unable to move forward on any of the issues in regard to the Community Centre, mainly because of time constraints. However, I have noted that water, sanitation and electricity supply are going to be crucial and problematic for the centre. It seems that the building, equipping and setting up of the centre is a time consuming and expert job of project management and it would benefit the committee to have one person allocated to these tasks on a full time basis. I have managed to find out that funding may be available for the support of activities and even equipment in relation to the centre from DfID and a local national organisation NACBO. I have obtained the forms but will be unable to complete the applications before I leave.

Recommendations

- That proposals regarding various activities and equipment pertaining to the community centre be agreed and applications for funding be made
- That funding be sought to provide wages for a project manager for the final stages of building and initial stages of running the community centre
- That the committee considers carefully the issues and options regarding utility supplies to the centre bearing in mind its intended usage.

Community Linking

I have spent a lot of my time promoting the Link within the community and have also tried to put people in touch with each other when I have known they have similar interests or concerns. However, I am very aware that the executive members of OWL in Bo are very well connected and have a vast knowledge of the local community activities and the people involved, and are in a position to enable OWL to capitalise on this.

Recommendations

- That members of OWL concentrate their efforts in relation to any projects, on identifying and using their contacts and knowledge of the resources and capabilities of any other registered groups that may be beneficial to the Link.
- That any knowledge and skills gained within the committee and Kayoma be spread through internally run training

General Remarks

I have had an extremely educational and hugely enjoyable experience in Bo, thanks to the efforts of the committee and the friendly and open nature of the people I have met. I will never forget this trip or the knowledge I have gained.

I have tried my best to meet the brief given to me though at times this has been frustrated by time (especially BMT) and resources.

I hope I have made some contribution to the standing of the group in Bo through the work I have done, and that what I have learnt can be transferred to the committee in Leamington.

I would like to thank my sisters Theresa and Catherine, David and Jo, as well as the whole committee for their generous hospitality, their patience in the light of my constant questioning and interrogation, and their friendship.

My overall impression of the work that they are doing here has been one of admiration and respect, in the light of extremely difficult circumstances. I believe that their contribution to their community is committed, energetic and extremely beneficial.

Conclusion

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Summary

The majority of the aims of my visit have been met but my overall feeling has been that the time was not long enough. I have had the opportunity to get to know the people and situation here in Bo well, which has given me an insight into the possibilities for development that could not be facilitated before the end of my visit. I hope that I have equipped and enthused the groups enough to continue in my absence and I have assured them of my eventual return!

The future development of the areas I was asked to work on will depend on the ability of the groups to build their capacity in terms of continuing to develop and cascade their skills and knowledge within the link.

