

REPORT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT VISIT TO SIERRA LEONE IN NOVEMBER 2008

Towards an effective waste management programme in 2 cities

Jane Knight



Mayor of Makeni outside his new City Hall.

PURPOSE OF VISIT

This was my 3rd visit to Sierra Leone in 2008 and the reason for this visit was to follow up the visit in July when UNDP in Freetown had agreed to a partnership programme for waste management in Bo and Makeni. This partnership included not only the Sierra Leonean actors in Bo and Makeni City councils but also Warwickshire County Council (WCC) officers and One World Link (OWL) representatives from Warwick District. The contract between UNDP, the two city councils and OWL was signed, and co-funding from the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) Good Practice Scheme had been agreed. Various machines were to be ordered and were due early in 2009. So this visit was an opportunity to bring all the key players together to make sure the local logistics and practical issues were all identified and addressed before the time came to actually implement the programme.

Because Makeni City Council had been a latecomer into the partnership, it was particularly important that all of the existing (Bo) partners were introduced to them and that a joint working plan could be developed. With this in mind UNDP had made additional funds available for a joint workshop between Makeni and Bo Council staff and members during our stay.

I arrived in Freetown in advance of the OWL/WCC team to catch up with Bo OWL and to make sure we had transport and accommodation etc. In place (and avoid previous near drowning !!) Johannes Mallah junior (son of our friend Mallah) and Joe Kobba were extremely helpful when I was in Freetown and by the time I left I had hired a vehicle and had several days' breakfasts organised as Our Cluny convent accommodation only supplied a bed . (Convent chosen because it was centrally placed and very reasonably priced.

BO OWL MATTERS

Arriving in Bo in the evening, I was whisked by the Bo OWL committee into the new women's centre

building behind the main community centre. There, in a colourful newly decorated room, was a delicious celebratory meal. I seem to be lucky with my arrivals coinciding with OWL ceremonial openings. The plan is for this to become a regular eating place for the community and for the Kayoma women to run it.



I met with the executive and youth committees during my stay. The teachers also had a meeting. They are planning what is required to make the resource centre operate for schools and the community. The youth group have exchanged messages with our youth representatives. However my general feeling was that this year's visit of representatives of the women, youth and executive committees to Leamington might be a springboard for some more concrete ideas to inspire the sub groups re. long term shared activities.

Bo OWL is very excited about the fact that OWL has been the engine behind the formation of the waste management programme especially with its prospects of reaching out to other councils in Sierra Leone. Mayor Sannoh from Bo City Council and the council agreed while I was there that there should be 3 representatives from Bo OWL on the local steering committee for the programme. A general meeting of OWL (*pictured below*) was organised to present to the membership all the details of the proposed waste management programme. I was very heartened by their genuine enthusiasm and excitement at the prospects of a cleaner healthier Bo.



I also used my time in Bo to visit Johannes Mallah and Moussa Conteh. Johannes had made no visible progress since I was last in Bo and it continues to be a great sadness to everyone to observe the debilitating effect of his stroke on his life which should now be a happy retirement. He is still trying to find some effective therapy. Moussa Conteh was taking a course of pills which seem to have put new life into him but he is also planning to have radiation treatment in Ghana.

With Bishop Koroma from Kenema also seriously ill in Rome, it was my saddest visit ever to Sierra Leone.

WCC TEAM ACTIVITIES

However the sadness was much compensated for by the progress made by the WCC team whose arrival and travels went so smoothly. Their professionalism throughout their stay and the effect on all the people they met was very inspiring. The team consisted of Glenn Fleet - WCC sustainability group manager, who had designed the waste management programme with Bo City Council on his last visit and Andy Smith – WCC European programme manager and a long time member of OWL who does most of the fundraising work. This was his first visit to West Africa. Lastly, but not least, was Kip Warr (OWL member) who has years of overseas development experience both for NGO (Oxfam) and private sectors and who is brilliant with computers. Glenn was our technical advisor, Andy took care of everything financial and Kip assisted with the facilitation of the workshop and drew up many useful documents.



The WCC and OWL team at work

While we were in Freetown we were fortunate to get a meeting with representatives from DFID, the EU, World Bank and the Decentralisation Secretariat. There were no concrete outcomes from that but they all expressed real interest in what we were doing and said we should get together again when we had completed our programme.

We followed up the other aspects of the WCC and Warwick District /Bo District joint action plan (planning and finance and sanitation put together in November 2007 visit) with Mayor Sannoh and with some planners we met in Freetown. There is still a strong desire to go ahead with these activities. While we were in Bo, Paul Fish who is working for VSO started the valuation of houses throughout the City. This will help to give Bo City council (BCC) a stronger income base in the future. George, a Ugandan VSO specialising in finance, arrived also when we were there. In Freetown we had a very friendly meeting with the VSO programme manager and she was keen for us to find a volunteer planner if it fitted with BCC. She also thought a volunteer for the Resource Centre could be possible if Bo OWL wished...

Some difficulties.

In July 2008, I worked on the original programme for waste management with Mayor Sannoh, and GaiaToschi from UNDP, with the full support of the Director (Bernard Mokam). It was a great shame to find Gaia was leaving to return to Europe. She has been a great colleague with whom to work. As she was trying to wrap up her many UN Capital Development programmes, she had a minimum of

time to work with us. Trying to arrange planning meetings with Aberdingi Sayid who was organising the joint workshop for UNDP was also difficult as he had other programmes to deal with.



Glenn and Gaia anxiously enquiring re. the procurement of vehicles.

We also had to introduce ourselves to Makeni City council and to bring them up to a full involvement in the programme which in the case of Bo City council had evolved over at least 2 years. We none of us had been to Makeni and we knew there could be political tensions. Our aim was to try and avoid any possibility of political differences which might affect the programme. UNDP wanted the workshop to bring the 2 councils together to be held in Makeni and that was not popular with Bo.



and the public and planning the detailed logistics.

I mention these difficulties because the reality was such that the workshop and all the meetings were very successful and fruitful - more than we had hoped for. The waste management programme cannot start until the two councils have acquired diggers, lorries, skips and trailer bikes. UNDP is procuring this equipment and paying for it. The likely date for the procurement process to be completed is around March this year. Meanwhile the councils will be setting up the steering committees, sensitising council staff

Visit to Makeni

Makeni City council - controlled by the APC (Bo is SLPP).- was included in the programme so that UNDP would be seen to be even handed politically. So our first task after meetings in Freetown was to get to know Makeni. We were given a very warm welcome by the Mayor of Makeni (Moses Sesay) and his staff. It was quite a surprise and great pleasure to discover that Moses is the younger brother of Patrick Sesay who is well known to some of us in Warwick OWL as he has visited us many times while he was studying mental health nursing in the UK.

We were shown some lovely expanses of rural land which a local chief had assigned to the council to be a landfill site. We were also shown the worst rubbish heaps in Makeni. We toured the market and were impressed with the volunteers trying to keep abreast of the rubbish with brushes and baskets.



Having had a good look round the City, we sat with councillors and staff and went through the proposed waste management programme. It was obviously all very new to them and we realised how vital the proposed joint workshop would be to bring everyone up to full understanding and successful implementation of the project. It took us nearly 3 hours driving on a very rough road to get from Makeni to Bo which made us realise that regular face to face contact between all the partners would be quite time and energy consuming.

JOINT BO/MAKENI WORKSHOP

When we arrived in Bo, we revisited the landfill site and made preparations for the programme and the workshop. Sayid came to join us and he and Maada and the OWL committee did an amazing job of organising food for 60, buying stationery and other preparations for the workshop.

On the 17th November buses and UNDP vehicles turned up with a splendid group of Makeni people, UNDP including their camera man to record all the proceedings .

The workshop took place on the 18th/19th November and it was very heartening that the participants attended both days. This shows how keen both cities are to make the programme work. It is very much bottom up.



Mayor Sannoh draws out conclusions from workshop findings.

After the various presentations to set the scene, with very good leadership in the discussions by both Mayors, the bulk of the work took place in intense small working groups. This was broken up by a visit to the smoky, smelly central dump (*see below*) which underlined the urgent need for the programme.



The bulk of the discussions were around what methods of sensitisation would be needed, what issues and problems might occur (from stealing of skips or the digger or fuel? to flooding of skips, to householders not separating rubbish?). There was also much discussion about how the councils could demonstrate from concrete indicators that the programme was a success? It was clear that in the interim before the arrival of the equipment, a lot more discussion would be needed by and between the councils and their citizens.

WHAT NEXT?

The plan for the November 2008 visit was to set everything in place for the rolling out of the waste management programme in each city as soon as the equipment had arrived. Then the second phase of the programme (funded by CLGF and UNDP) i.e. the training of all the different actors from drivers to chiefs and the public was to take place early 2009. The timing for this was dependent on the arrival of equipment. The procurement process is proving to be a tense nightmare as so far, there are only motor cycle trailers delivered and their specification is not what was wanted. The more the major machinery is delayed the more morale is likely to be lowered.

Once this problem is sorted and assuming the machines do arrive, the plan is for Glenn and his expert landfill site colleague, Derek Greedy, to return to Sierra Leone for 2 weeks to support and do training work. They will be accompanied by an OWL colleague hopefully to help smooth the process.

One of the lessons learnt from this visit which had not been sufficiently anticipated, was the significance of partnership working. The combination of WCC and OWL skills and the local knowledge and complementary and similar skills which they had, gave the whole activity a greater guarantee of success. All the issues and risks involved were thoroughly investigated and worked on if not completely resolved. The implication from this was that such joint working should continue beyond the planned 2 week visit for the training. It was agreed with Mayor Sannoh that if a longer sustained presence from the UK to work with his staff and with Makeni could be arranged it would help to avoid any major problems from derailing the project.

Returning to Freetown, we reported to Bernard Mokam at UNDP and he was very enthusiastic about our progress so far. He was most anxious as we all are, that this programme will be a showcase on how waste management can be delivered in Sierra Leone through effective partnership. If it succeeds it could be a model for other Sierra Leonean cities and UNDP have said they would mount maximum publicity to encourage replication. He agreed in principle that extended input from OWL/WCC would be worth pursuing and that funding could be available for it.

Our commitment so far and the support from UNDP and all the other actors make it vital that the programme is a success. We are therefore working on a funding proposal to enable the secondment of an advisor from WCC or OWL to work with Bo and Makeni City councils from the beginning of the training period to well into the rolling out period.

Later on in June/July, it has been agreed with CLGF and others that there should be a joint review workshop/evaluation of the programme attended among others by members of the Sierra Leonean Local Authority Association.

Much was achieved during this visit. The spontaneous cooperation and mutual support which took place between the two councils was exciting to witness. The action during the next few months will be crucial for satisfying the high expectation and vision which has been developed.

MAYORS TOGETHER CROSSING THE POLITICAL DIVIDE

