

# One World Link

## Chairman's Report for 2014

This has been a difficult year for all associated with Bo. The problems created by the terrible disease of Ebola have caused a great deal of personal tragedy within Sierra Leone as a whole as well as within Bo itself.

The disease has become the defining characteristic of the year, at least from May onwards as the world gradually woke up the increasing disaster. I will return to that later.

However, it is also important to focus on the positives of our relationship this year. The Link remains strong and we have seen many initiatives still during the last 12 months or so.

Last year at the previous AGM we had the Mayor of Bo with us during his stay in Leamington. We developed our friendship and working relationship and we know that the link remains strong in Bo and the relationship between Bo OWL and Bo Warwick is held in high regard throughout the City.

Why is that? It is because of the sort of organisation that we are – focusing on long term friendship and partnership. Thirty years plus of involvement between us counts for a great deal and we have an equal partner organisation in Bo OWL with whom we work together closely as equals, share experience and, where we can, provide skills and expertise that Bo organisations can pick up on and develop themselves

That all still continued throughout 2104, despite the Ebola problems.

So what has happened during the year? A number of contacts and initiatives have taken place:

- A visit from three Bo teachers in early Sumer as part of the “changing Classrooms” initiative who visited their partner schools in Warwick District
- A very successful Day of the African Child celebration at St Patricks School – attended by the Bo teachers – no less than 500 children in excitable attendance
- Rebuilding of a wall at the Paul School for the Blind in Bo – financed by Rotary and the UK Blind Association and facilitated by the work of OWL
- Development of ideas for the refurbishment and improvement of the Centre In Bo, particularly looking at the potential of solar power.
- Waste project – a very major scheme in partnership with DFID, managed on the ground by WHH in which OWL is providing specialist technical support. Despite the current situation, the project is continuing and having a significant impact on the cleanliness of Bo Streets
- Individual contact between Bo Owl and Warwick OWL members continuing through a range of channels

However, some things have had to be put on hold this year:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the Local Government project. I was to visit Bo in December with two colleagues from Warwick District Council to assess the potential for further partnership working with the Bo City and District Councils This has been put on hold for now, but will take place when practicable.

- Teacher visits next year to/from Bo. With the current situation and with all schools being closed, this is being put on hold for next year. It is intended to return to organising visits later
- It was intended to have visits to Warwick from Bo Owl Committee members. This has now been delayed.

In relation to the current Ebola Crisis itself, we have been in contact with our colleagues and are receiving updates on numbers affected. It seems as though Bo itself has not been as badly affected by numbers of actual cases as other areas, though there are still many instances of individual and family tragedy as a result of the disease. However, civil society is badly affected, schools are closed, economic activity is significantly reduced and higher prices are making life difficult for many.

So what can OWL do? This is an unprecedented problem, knocking back one of the least developed countries in the world. We want to help and have commenced building up an Ebola emergency fund, but we also want to make sure that help goes where it is most needed. The message we are receiving is that in Bo at least clinical care and response is reasonably well catered for. However, there is a great deal of wider need as direct consequence of the disease.

The advice we have had is that we should be concentrating our efforts on the reconstruction that will be needed in the aftermath of the defeat of the disease. At that time, when the world's attention may well have moved away, there will be a great need to support devastated families, orphans and others seriously affected by the crisis who desperately need assistance to survive.

We propose to use our Ebola Emergency Fund in this way and will be receiving specific advice from our colleagues on this. So far the fund stands at approximately £1700 and we are very grateful to all who have contributed. We are very grateful also to the Mayor of Leamington who has very generously made OWL one of his charities to support during his Mayoral year and the funds that we receive from his activities will also go towards the Ebola Emergency Fund.

In summary, it has not been the best of years for Sierra Leone and Bo, but the OWL link remains strong and is just as important in bad times as in good.

It just remains for me to thank all the OWL committee members for their work in keeping the link going forward and all the Owl Members and supporters who have helped to develop this remarkable and enduring friendship. Thanks to all.