

Peace Project to Rehabilitate the Infrastructure and Empower the Students of the Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood School.

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Where: Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood School, Boajibu Town, Simbaru Chiefdom, Sierra Leone

Project Overview and Our Motivation

The people of Sierra Leone have undergone a painful and brutal war for 10 years, and they are now in the process of healing. Yes, the war has ended, but peace is defined not by the absence of war but by restoring a community to the state in which it was before the war. A lot of schools were destroyed and, so far, the government and international NGO's have only been able to rehabilitate some schools in urban areas. Little has been done for schools in underprivileged regions in Sierra Leone. One such region is the rural areas of the Kenema District. The Town of Boajibu has only one primary (middle) school with 350 students (ages 6-15), 2 classrooms, 1 staff room and 10 teachers. These classrooms lack enough furniture and school supplies to adequately run the school. Most of the students take classes under the mango tree and palm tree in the school yard that serves as the extra classrooms.

Our project aims **1) to rehabilitate the infrastructure of Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood (SLMB) Primary School 2) to organize workshops that will enable the students to engage in constructive community service and 3) to highlight the importance of education in post-war Sierra Leone by establishing a scholarship fund for the schooling of underprivileged students in Boajibu Town.** The workshops are intended to encourage civic engagement in this society via the students and staff of the school. We believe that encouraging these students to work for the common good in activities which have a public purpose, such as environmental sustainability, malaria prevention, and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, will bring further unity to their community and provide a sense of responsibility for these students.

The lack of proper learning environment is the primary driving force behind this project. It is heart rending to see two students sharing one desk or students fighting over seats in their classes. We both remember how it was for us in middle school as we are both from the rural areas. We had to arrive at least thirty minutes before each class started to secure a seat. We usually had to sneak out of the previous class early to ensure that we were not seated on the floor at the back of the class. The situation in SLMB primary school is even worse as the students now have classes under mango trees.

The cultural setting of Sierra Leone does not include doing work for the common good of the community, so the society expects foreigners to do all benevolent works. After attending the United World Colleges and Macalester, we identified this deficiency in our society and we feel that it is our responsibility to at least try to change this to the best of our abilities. This desire motivated us to include a civic engagement component in our project to encourage students to work together in an environment conducive to learning. By working together for the common good of the community, students can bridge gaps that exist in communities that had been broken by the war.

Viability Project for peace

Sierra Leone has survived 10 years of civil war and needs to rebuild, particularly schools for children. We hope to accomplish two things: 1) literally rebuild and furnish the school, and, 2) get the children motivated in community service. Rebuilding and furnishing SLMB will serve as a stepping stone in rehabilitating other schools of the rural areas. We strongly believe that giving these students a purpose and a responsibility to their community will enable them and their families to fully embrace the peace that has been restored. We hope that this project will also attract potential NGOs to this region of the country. We have contacted the headmaster of the school, Mr Bundu Sesay, who gave us the approval to work with his students and staff. We also have a very strong member of the community, Mr Abdulai Barrie, who in many ways is a role model of his society; as a conservationist, he has agreed to work with us in getting the community involved in our projects, to host the workshops on environmental sustainability and to help us in the community service projects. Members of the NGO, Youth Action International (YIA) have also agreed to help us organize the workshops and implement the community service projects on environmental sustainability, malaria prevention and HIV/AIDS awareness. The Executive Director, Mr. Kimmie Weeks, a good friend of ours, has assured us that his organization will help us in any way. We have the support of all of our community partners, and we believe that the project will be a success.

Project description and timeframe

The project, which will run from May 22nd, 2008, to early August, will be implemented in three phases. The first phase will be the ***Preparation Phase (5 weeks)***, in which we will start making preliminary arrangements and working with our community partners. We will build desks, chairs and bookshelves and provide about 50-100 textbooks. A local carpenter will make the furniture with the student help, thus minimizing cost and empowering the children and the local economy. We will buy the books from Books for Africa (a MN NGO), and the Assistant Director, Deb McDonald, has assured us of the organization's support. We will also contract builders to put up one classroom structure. During this time we will also identify our community service projects in the town. The second phase will be the ***Implementation Phase (4 week)***, including the workshops with students and staff, engagement in community service projects and also students helping with furniture production. YIA officials and the two of us will facilitate workshops aimed at introducing the concept of civic engagement (working for the common good of the community) and how this can help us maintain peace in our communities. The workshops will also be open to the public. After the workshops, we would then engage in community service projects with the students in the town. We will lead small group reflection sessions, designed to enable students to evaluate and internalize their efforts. We also will present to the headmaster and staff a scholarship fund for students who cannot afford to attend the school but have shown motivation to pursue an education. Ten such students will be sponsored this year and two students will be appointed each year by the teachers and headmaster. We plan to open a bank account in Freetown to keep this fund going. The last phase will be the ***Evaluation and Follow-up Phase (1 week)***. Interested students and organizing officials will participate in a brainstorming session on the strength and weaknesses of the project and how to extend the initiative to other schools. We intend to collaborate with the local media to publicize the project and results. We also plan on writing a document that includes a summation of the community service projects, the strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for future projects.

Past experiences

Actively involved with a school based Global Concern Action Team in Li Po Chun UWC, Arthur raised awareness about atrocities such as natural disasters, hunger, and poverty that were threatening communities and nations and helped raise funds to sponsor various projects including tsunami relief. Zainab was a Wish Granter for the Make a Wish foundation in UWCSEA and acquired skills for organizing events which were further enhanced at Macalester. At Macalester she was a member of one of the Lilly's Project for Vocation and Ethical Leadership Programs, Lives of Commitment, which enabled her to combine community service with intentional reflection to answer questions about the purpose and meaning of one's work in a community. Through these experiences both of us have come to realize that being a global citizen truly starts at home with a responsibility to one's community and have developed effective ways to work with our peers. Together we hope to unite our skills and experiences to take on this project.

Anticipated Outcomes of project (Short and Long Term)

We hope that at end of this project, SLMB primary school students will have a more comfortable learning environment. For example every student will have a desk and a chair to sit on in class with notebooks and a library of books for use. But most importantly, we hope that the students and staff of SLMB will continue to engage in community service projects that will bring the society together. We hope that the teachers will be inspired to carry on with the projects we started. To further encourage students, we will be providing an annual award for a group of students who have shown commitment to community service. Furthermore the scholarship fund will enable poor families to send their promising children to school to at least receive primary education. The scholarship fund will be increased to give more students this opportunity in the long run. We hope to achieve this through continual fund raising activities in Sierra Leone and in the US. We will personally commit to contributing five dollars to this fund at the end of each month. We also hope to extend this initiative to other schools in this region and hope that students in SLMB will play active roles in ensuring that other schools benefit from the viable information they have learned about community service. Lastly we hope to have an information session here at Macalester College to inform fellow students about what we did and what role they might play in extending the initiative to other schools. Our project, then, will have both an immediate and ongoing positive effect on the children of Sierra Leone.