

BACK TO OFFICE REPORT

JULY16-27, 2008

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

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A. Background:

Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone share common borders as well as intertwined histories and conflicts. A striking feature of these countries of the Mano River Union is that the states were so weak, that unlike other conflicts in Africa, the states were no major parties to the conflicts and could not bring much support or protection to the exposed and vulnerable border communities. The post-conflict areas and regions, mostly rural, still bear the brunt of these conflicts and lack minimal social services including education.

The current status of the education sector in Sierra Leone is characterized by a multitude of post-conflict challenges: frequent disruptions to many children's schooling due to population displacement, a devastated school infrastructure, displacement of teachers and resulting difficulty in maintaining records and paying salaries on time (or at all), a serious lack of basic furniture and teaching and learning materials, overcrowding in many schools in safer areas, and disorientation and psychological trauma among a large segment of the population, especially children.

The weakened institutional capacity of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) to manage the education system, a serious lack of information and data to plan the provision of services, and poor coordination of the various initiatives among numerous actors in the sector compound matters. These issues are all inter-related, and together manifest as problems of access, quality, equity, efficiency and management.

At the same time, in the main cities and urban areas, adolescents and young people have few outlets to channel their legitimate hopes and aspirations, and remain exposed to wrong choices and influences. What should be the future economic and social forces of the country are in fact a ticking time bomb of violence, social disruption and fragility. Some 70 per cent of Sierra Leone's 5.3 million citizens are living below the poverty line and 26 per cent can be classified as extremely poor. Regional inequities persist in poverty levels, with 15 per cent of people living below the poverty line in the capital Freetown, compared to respectively 79 per cent and 70 per cent for the rural and other urban areas.

Youth unemployment and underemployment is a key priority for both young people themselves and for the Government of Sierra Leone. A recent Youth and Employment Study found that over three quarters of young people (15 to 34 year olds) worked in the agricultural sector, with around 60 percent of the working 15 to 24 year olds and 40 percent of the 25 to 34 year olds being unpaid. The low productivity and incomes in the agricultural sector have exacerbated the migration of youths to cities and urban areas to seek employment opportunities. Most of the youths still remain unemployed and have joined the ranks of the urban poor.

Focus groups from the Youth and Employment Study found that, while some youth would like increased skill development training (especially in areas such as business development), they tend to experience a gap between skills and available resources: they are trained but lack the tools to practice their trade, there is no demand for their skills in their community, they lack resources to start their own business, or they lack resources in order to be certified to exercise their trade.

The states of the Mano River Union therefore still face security threats and do not have well developed long term economic strategies. For instance, there were a number of events in 2007 that necessitated a higher alert in terms of emergency preparedness. The unstable situation in Guinea represented a serious risk and the government of Sierra Leone planned for an influx of refugees. In fact, the insecurity threat was foreseen in the Peace Consolidation Strategy (2005).

Peace Consolidation Strategy (PCS)

The Peace Consolidation Strategy (PCS) developed by Government and UN partners in late 2005 following broad-based and high level consultations identified six broad threats still facing Sierra Leone. These are as follows:

- 1) **Continuing challenges to internal security exist as well as insecurity emanating from a still turbulent sub-region.** Sierra Leone's security is directly affected by the sub-regional security situation in the wider Mano River basin sub-region, comprising Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, plus Côte d'Ivoire. Potential instability in Guinea could pose security threats to Sierra Leone. The unresolved territorial issue between Guinea and Sierra Leone over the border village of Yenga in the eastern part of Sierra Leone remains a flashpoint.
- 2) **Serious challenges to a national dynamic of reconciliation remain.** Political parties seem willing to utilise confrontational mobilisation and denial of political space for opponents as means for political competition. Given high levels of illiteracy, unstructured radio programmes particularly may hamper a broad understanding of issues and reconciliation.
- 3) The **lack of a momentum for accountability is comprised chiefly and foremost by endemic corruption**, which remains the foremost challenge to the effective performance of state institutions, and hence the single biggest contributor to the growing public alienation from the political process.
- 4) **Insufficient respect for human rights and the rule of law** is also covered in the Peace Consolidation Strategy.
- 5) **A widespread sense of economic disempowerment stems from the massive unemployment and from the perception that the State is yet to take focused steps to stimulate economic activity** either through direct employment creation or through the stimulation of private enterprise. As a result, current unemployment, particularly among the youth is estimated at 60 per cent-70 per cent.
- 6) Finally, the Peace Consolidation Strategy points to the **lack of a national infrastructure for peace** as a distinct challenge. The country suffers from a lack of capacity for mediation at all levels of government and society. Basic skills and institutional mechanisms for constructive negotiation and mediation are lacking in practically all public institutions, and in political and civic organizations. Apart from a new programme at the University of Sierra Leone, such skills do not form a part of primary, secondary or university curricula, informal education or professional training programmes. In the absence of these capacities, even modest disputes can spiral into significant tensions or violence.

Common Country Assessment (CCA)

The 2006 Common Country Assessment (CCA) concluded that Sierra Leone made significant progress to recovery and development, concurrent with maintaining and progressively consolidating peace since the peace agreement of 2002. The recovery and development indicators are impressive: real GDP growth was in the double digits during 2001-2002 and has been around 6 per cent-7 per cent in recent years fuelled by broad recovery in agriculture, mining construction and the services sectors. Government and development partners agreed on a medium term recovery strategy that focused on the twin macro-economic objectives of sustaining high real growth and maintaining a stable macroeconomic environment. The strong growth should be seen against the background of a vastly contracted economy: in real terms the 2004 value of the economy was only three quarters of the value of the 1985 economy.

Strategic governance issues were also addressed to strengthen the foundations for sustained recovery, including public sector governance and public sector reform, decentralisation, empowerment of local communities, strengthening of the justice sector and strengthened financial management and procurement. Tangible progress and robust strategies coexist with persistent fragility, including continuing threats to internal and regional security. There also continue to be challenges to peace and reconciliation.

Accountability issues, the weak administration of human rights and the rule of law are also areas of concern. Significant economic disempowerment persists particularly for many women and young people. Considerable regional inequities and disparities still exist between the rural and urban areas. While much progress has been made in terms of agricultural recovery and production, food security concerns persist with alarmingly high levels of malnutrition, which in some districts require a continued but selective emergency response.

Critically, peace consolidation, reconstruction and development are threatened by pervasive unemployment, particularly among young men and women. Widespread poverty remains a major concern. Many invisible scars from the recent conflict remain in the form of significant mental health challenges.

Gender inequality in Sierra Leone, which is significant and pervasive at all levels of society, constitutes another indicator and cause of the persistent fragility of the country's predicament. Many laws, particularly customary laws that affect the majority of women, are discriminatory. Women are also poorly represented in decision-making bodies at national and local levels. Customary practices further constrain women with 62 per cent of women (15-45 years old) being married before 18 years of age. The maternal mortality ratio is the highest in the world. Adult literacy rates are low generally but significantly higher for men than for women.

The CCA assessed the situation of Sierra Leone vis-à-vis the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the prospects for progress against the targets of the MDGs by 2015. The assessment grouped the MDGs in three categories: (1) **Goals difficult to be met**: which includes MDG-1, eradicating poverty; MDG-4, reducing child mortality, MDG-5, improving maternal health and MDG-8, developing partnerships for development. The second category (2) comprises **Goals likely to be met with special efforts** and this category includes MDG-2, achieving universal primary education, MDG-3, promoting gender equality and MDG-7, ensuring environmental sustainability. The third category (3) comprises the **Goals likely to be met with sustained efforts** and includes MDG-6, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

The relationship between the pillars of the ongoing Poverty Reduction Strategy and the agreed priority areas of the 2008-2010 UNDAF is shown in the table below:

Sierra Leone's Poverty Reduction Strategy Pillars		
1	2	3
PROMOTE GOOD GOVERNANCE, SECURITY AND PEACE BUILDING	PROMOTE PRO-POOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH FOR FOOD SECURITY AND JOB CREATION	PROMOTE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
UNDAF Outcomes	(1) Governance and Human Rights	(3) Maternal Health and Child Health Care
		(4) Basic Education for All
		(5) HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria and related diseases
<u>Crosscutting issues</u> : gender equality and gender empowerment, capacity building in support of UNDAF priorities, monitoring and evaluation, data for development, development communication, conflict sensitivity and peace consolidation, partnerships for development and environmental sustainability.		

Sierra Leone has been ranked as the last country (177 out of 177) in the 2008 UNDP Human Development Report. The situation regarding the MDGs today remains unchanged from what was reported in 2006.

Over 2000–04, the largest multilateral donors to education in Sierra Leone were the World Bank (through IDA), the African Development Fund, and the European Community; the largest bilateral donors were the United Kingdom (through general budget support), Germany, and Norway. Currently, the largest basic education project in Sierra Leone is the Rehabilitation of Basic Education Project (commonly known as Sababu) for which US\$40 million was committed by the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

In comparison to other countries, the EFA FTI Secretariat found that Sierra Leone had relatively few donors for education. The analysis found that bilateral agencies tend to congregate in the same countries. In fact, Sierra Leone was one of only 11 countries that had no bilateral partners contributing more than an annual average of US\$1 million in 2002 and 2003. A fiscal challenge faced over 2007 has been the shortfall in external budget support provided by donors. This was triggered by an IMF report on absence of audit of government accounts since 2002.

UNDAF (2008-2010)

The UNDAF for the period 2008-2010 takes account of Sierra Leone's current Poverty Reduction Strategy, the plans to upgrade this PRS during 2007 to a follow-up PRS for the period 2008-2010, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the obligations flowing from international conventions and human rights instruments. The Common Country Assessment (CCA) undertaken in 2006, which includes a detailed assessment of the challenges for Sierra Leone to reach the MDGs, forms the basis for the UNDAF. The CCA, in turn, bases itself on many source documents and also benefited from various country assessments conducted by other donor agencies, the 2006 annual review of the PRS and the outcome of the November 2006 Consultative Group (CG) deliberations. The context of the new UNDAF comprises the two Security Council Resolutions (1620 and 1734), a Peace Consolidation Strategy and the country's pioneer engagement with the Peace Building Commission.

The CCA concludes that the country made significant progress towards development and peace consolidation since the peace agreement of 2002. However, progress coexists with persistent fragility, including continuing threats to security. Enduring other issues, such as unemployment, poverty, low literacy, gender discrimination, high maternal and infant mortality rates, and severe infrastructure bottlenecks translate into a major challenge that aspirations for a better life and a "peace dividend" may not be realized in line with the expectations of the majority of Sierra Leone's citizens.

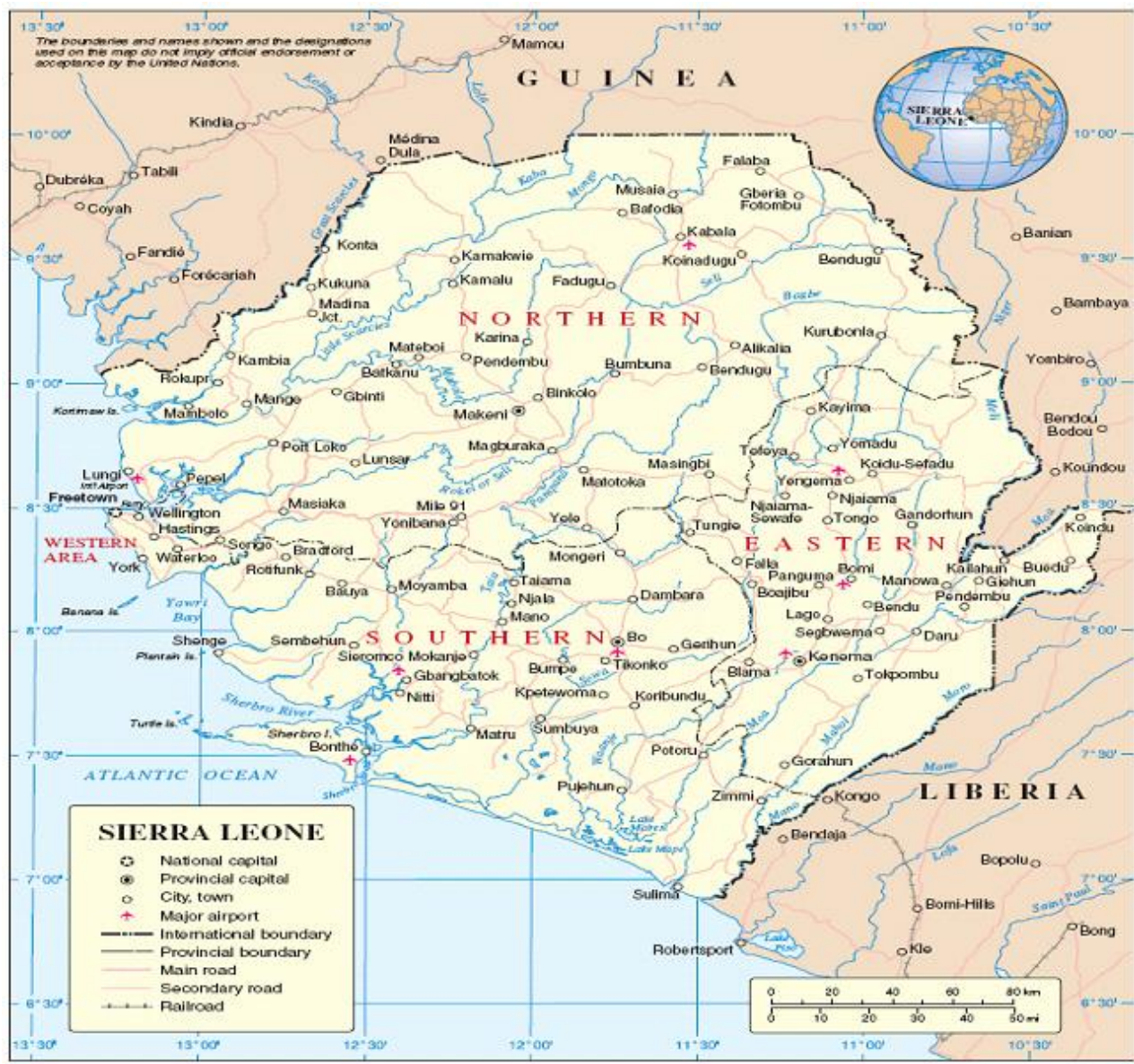
The UNCT and senior Government officials reviewed the CCA during December 2006. A thorough review of all the MDGs and a discussion of recent trends resulted in a consensus on new priorities to be considered for the 2008-2010 UNDAF. These include: (1) Governance and Human Rights; (2) Shared Growth, Food Security & Livelihoods; (3) Maternal and Child Health Care; (4) Primary Education with special emphasis on Girls Education, and: (5) HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria and related diseases. Crosscutting issues include gender equality and gender empowerment, capacity building in support of UNDAF priorities, monitoring and evaluation, data for development, development communication, conflict sensitivity, peace consolidation, partnerships for development and environmental sustainability.

The 2008-2010 UNICEF Country Programme will also contribute to the five priorities of the UNDAF.

Education for All

Some 69 per cent of primary-school-age children attend primary school, with significant regional disparities (urban, 85 per cent and rural, 63 per cent). Gender gaps have nearly disappeared in primary education but persist in secondary schools. Barriers to girls' education include early marriage and teenage pregnancy, a largely unfriendly school environment and cultural and religious biases. Almost 40 per cent of children in primary school are over-age and about 40 per cent of teachers are inadequately trained and qualified.

Children are exposed to violence, exploitation, abuse and deprivation. Almost one half of children aged 5-14 years are engaged in some form of child labour, with regional disparities (urban 27 per cent and rural 57 per cent). About 11 per cent of children are orphans and 20 per cent do not live with their biological parents. Sexual and gender-based violence remains a serious concern. In terms of universal primary education, Sierra Leone qualified for Fast Track Initiative (FTI) funding as of 2007. The programme of cooperation led the production of an Education Status Report and the Education Sector Plan in one year, a remarkable event for a "fragile State".



Map of Sierra Leone

UNICEF support

UNICEF supports the Education sector program through the core area of universal primary education.

An important change for the programme in 2008 is that it will no longer focus only on education interventions, but will include two other components, notably Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and Child Protection. This is based on lessons learned from the past about the need to converge and develop an integrated programme around key priorities for children in Sierra Leone, in this case increased access, retention and completion of education.

The main focus areas are the following:

1. National policy
2. Capacity building for quality education
3. Access to primary education, especially for girls
4. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene



Out-of-school girl in Kambia outside a primary school

The Mid Year review of the Education programme clarified the low rate of expenditure (20 per cent) and explained that it was due to lengthy internal contractual processes. At the same time, the World Bank has delayed the signature of the FTI grant agreement, and funds have not yet been allocated to Sierra Leone. The review highlighted key issues such as the need for additional funding to meet the educational needs of out of school children; issues of data collection, child labour, vocational education, children with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children, and teacher recruitment and training. The following areas of emerging issues were identified: teacher training on child-friendly schools, and child protection for cross border issues.

Challenges:

The challenges met in programme implementation are the low motivation and commitment of government officials. The Country Office felt that there was inadequate political will, as well as low morale at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). It was therefore difficult to identify focal points for programmes. Furthermore, the MEYS is understaffed. A situation compounded by low female participation and activity at all levels, rendering it difficult to support girls' education. There was also inadequate community participation in programmes, especially in school construction. The decentralization process and the roles of local officers at provincial levels remained unclear, rendering implementation difficult. Finally, the delay in signature of the FTI grant agreement represented yet another hurdle.

Lessons learned:

- NGOs who work only in the districts where they are based do better quality work.
- UNICEF's involvement of partners from initial planning stage ensures that objectives are achieved.
- Including children's voices in studies yield positive results.

Way forward:

- Strategic plan to support the capacity of the MEYS
- More gender training for all stakeholders
- More intensive community sensitization for every programme
- Efforts to be made in bringing together the local councils, provincial districts, MEYS HQ for role clarification and programme implementation
- In view of UNICEF's role as lead agency and HQ's strategy of strengthening upstream work, there will be greater emphasis on policy and Education Sector Plan (ESP) follow up.
- Broaden partnerships as UNICEF cannot do everything alone.

B. Purpose of the Mission:

- (i) Participate in the 2008 Basic Education Mid-Year Review with particular focus on: a) Child Friendly Schools (CFS) b) School Fee Abolition Initiative c) Working Upstream
- (ii) Discuss financing and expenditure rate issues in the education programme.
- (iii) Introduce to Sierra Leone Country Office and explore level of support for 2 innovative programming initiatives on education and conflict prevention: a) *Learning along Borders for Living across Boundaries* b) *Talent Academies*
- (iv) Engage with government officials, local authorities and communities to explore interest in these initiatives and possible ways of taking them forward.

The *Learning along Borders for Living across Boundaries* initiative and the *Talent Academies* initiative are designed to support education, security and development in post-conflict countries in West Africa (Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire).

Following internal discussions by the visiting team with the UNICEF Representative and his staff, discussions were held during meetings with senior staff of the Ministry of Education, as well as UNCT partners, researchers, and non-UN partners active in education.

C. Conclusions:

I. Comments related to the Mid Year Review of the Education Programme

a) UNICEF's Global Chief of Education, Dr. Cream Wright commended the role of UNICEF Sierra Leone as a lead partner in education and supported the integrated approach introduced in programming. He congratulated the office on its excellent support to government for securing FTI endorsement of the National Education Sector Plan; and committed HQ's support at the global level to the timely transfer of FTI funds to the country.

b) With regard to CFS, the country office was provided with an update of the global strategy for roll-out of the CFS model; as well as guidance on implementing CFS model in Sierra Leone.

c) Drafts of upcoming publications on School Fee Abolition prepared jointly by UNICEF, World Bank and other partners were shared.

d) Guidelines on upstream work and partnership issues (The Education Strategy) were provided; as well as guidance on UNICEF's position and a global strategy, and the necessity of clarifying roles and responsibilities of partners.

II. Positive response from government, communities and other partners (UN, NGOs, etc.)

The meeting with key government officials was held to introduce and explain the two initiatives that aim to provide education, promote recovery and development within a secure environment to post conflict populations (*Learning along Borders for Living across Boundaries*) and to address the needs and aspirations of adolescents and youths who have missed out on schooling and development because of conflict (*Talent Academies*). The presentation was very well received and assimilated by all counterparts including the NGOs and local communities. They raised pertinent questions on the long term sustainability, and welcomed the mind shift in rethinking education and development that the concepts hold, and also the practical feasibility of implementing the initiatives and their social outreach.

The Deputy Minister, Dr. Lansana Myalley, enthusiastically welcomed the *Learning along Borders for Living across Boundaries* initiative, which he saw as contributing not only to education but also to national and regional development and security, and spelt very good progress. He explained that the ministry has been trying to reach the border communities, but the lack of roads and infrastructure makes it difficult. Bringing education to these areas under the *Learning along Borders for Living across Boundaries* initiative might bring incentives and accelerate development. He recommended that there be a continuum to primary schools and that these should feed into secondary and post secondary schools with the same facilities as the primary level high-quality CFS. Concerning the *Talent Academies*, he suggested that there be two Talent Academies catering for the same disciplines e.g. Arts and Drama, in several countries of the Mano River Union, otherwise the Talent Academies might be overcrowded. He highly recommended that the initiatives be presented to the minister and said that he would also write a brief note for the minister.

The UNHCR Country Representative, Valentin Tapsoba and the UNHCR Head of sub-office in Kenema, Gabriel Bangui were both keen about the two initiatives and recommended that they be presented to the UNCT as well as to the National Commission for Social Action (NACSA).

A key NGO partner would be Plan International-Sierra Leone who is keen to set up High quality CFS particularly in Kailahun along the border with Liberia.

III Outstanding questions and concerns by the UNICEF Country Office (priority, capacity)

The UNICEF Country Office's concern was that it had already committed to a number of priority activities which it was having difficulty implementing, mainly due to government's low capacity. However, the CO also has limited immediate capacity. The CO said it would follow up on the *Learning across Border for*

Living across Boundaries initiative with Liberia and Guinea, and would also look at costing before engaging with Government. With regard to the *Talent Academies*, it would document the Craig Bellamy Foundation soccer academy (based on experience of the UK-based NGO Right to Dream in Ghana) as a starting point for a Sports Talent Academy. The Country Office has contributed US\$100,000 as start up funding to the Craig Bellamy Foundation and will be contributing banners. The basic education, teaching and programming components still need to be developed though and it is unclear who will be responsible for these components.



Children, parents and community leaders asking for education, learning and development in Kambia

The CO will explore carefully how to integrate the two initiatives within the Education Sector Plan, reflecting however that when it comes to implementation, the government does not deliver. The education reform is presently stalling and the education budget has been reduced.

The Country Representative thought that it would be important for the education ministers of the four Mano River Union countries to come together to discuss the initiatives at sub-regional level.



**Adjacent Boys' and Girls' toilets
(Gbalamuya Primary School)**

IV Visit to the border - Disrupted schooling

The field visit's objective was to discuss the initiatives with provincial officials, teachers, parents, youths and other stake-holders, as well as to conduct some basic reconnaissance regarding potential sites for the location of border schools, standard of living in these border communities and level of local skills available to participate in these initiatives. The initiative was welcomed by the community, as well as the local authorities.

The field visit was to the district of Kambia in the north-western part of Sierra Leone. The town visited was Mputolo, one of the country's border towns with Guinea. It takes 5-6 hours (depending on the road condition and the driver's skill, of course) to get here from Freetown. It is a typical African bush – dirt roads everywhere, no electricity, water comes primarily from the river; women carrying children on their backs with a lappa (a single sheet of fabric) and men playing football. There are signs of NGOs who have been here in the past, but at present there are only a few remaining, including Action Aid. The team met with the District manager of Action Aid, as well as the Director of Kambia district. The district suffers from very few educational facilities, with children having to walk long distances to get to school. This has resulted in a high drop out rate, teen pregnancy and additional burden on families. The lack of secondary schools also means that children have to cross the border to Guinea to receive some form of post basic education.

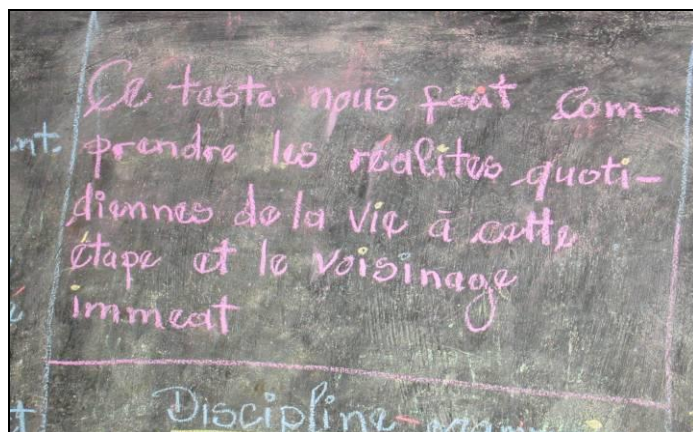
The Provincial Chief declared that they were ready to give land for the schools to be built and that the community would contribute to construction and labour.



Site location by the community for a much needed girls' secondary school in Kambia district

The team also crossed the border with Guinea to Forécariah-Pamelap, which Dr. Cream Wright had visited on his previous trip to Guinea. He was instantly recognised by the police border authorities who clearly remembered the objectives of his past visit and linked it up to the *Learning along Borders for Living across Boundaries initiative*. In 2000, rebels invaded Forécariah, a region one hour away from Conakry, the capital

city, and only a few minutes from Sierra Leone. In the small town of Pamelap all the infrastructures were burned down or destroyed – schools, medical centres, recreational centres, government offices.



Classroom French language lesson in Sierra Leone “to understand the daily realities of life here and across the border”

D. Next steps:

☉ **Need for further Advocacy to:**

- (i) Secure Country Office commitment
- (ii) Maintain government interest
- (iii) Maintain community momentum

☉ **Decision to be taken by Country Office in consultation with government**

- (i) Decision on whether to go ahead with these initiatives
- (ii) Border areas to be covered by the *Learning along Borders for Living across Boundaries* initiative
- (iii) Number of CFS in each border area
- (iv) Types of Talent Academies (2) for the 2nd Initiative
- (v) Location of the TAs to be established
- (vi) Consultations with youths on Talent Academies
- (vii) Roles and responsibilities for government’s lead and UNICEF’s facilitation

E. References:

- Prospects and Opportunities for Achieving the MDGs in Post-conflict countries: A case study of Sierra Leone and Liberia, M. Humphreys and P. Richards, October 2005.
- UNICEF Sierra Leone, Annual Report, 2007.
- United Nations Development Assistance Framework Sierra Leone 2008-2010