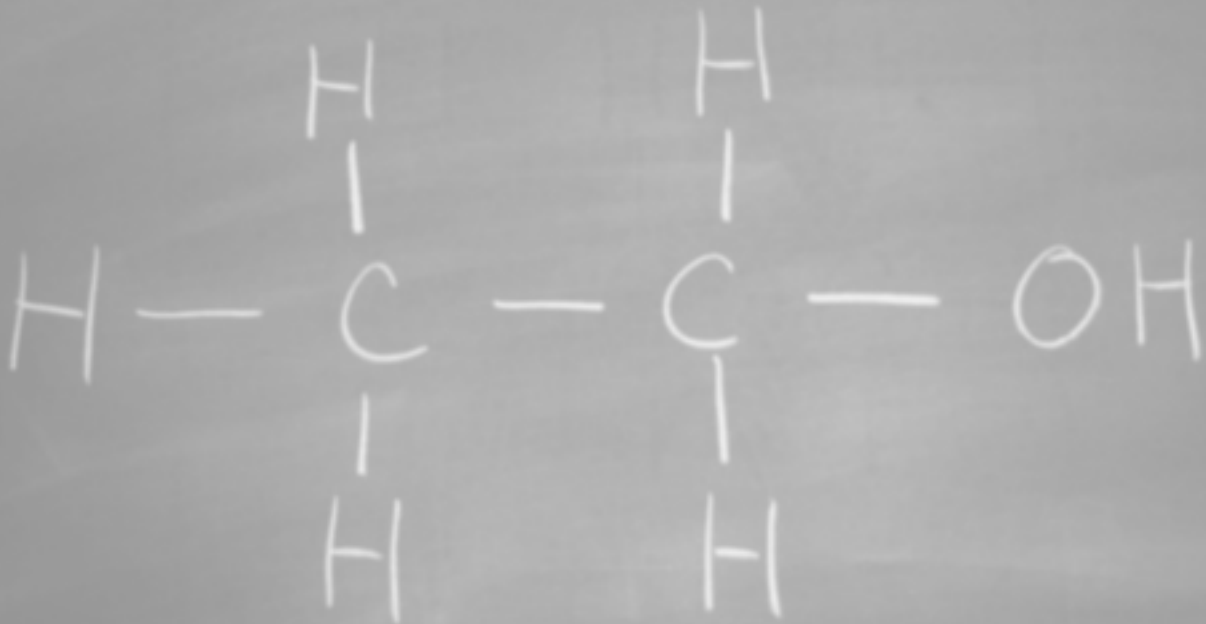




CIVIL
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- MANO RIVER -

Civil Peace Service Mano River Newsletter



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Editorial

In all societies, some people continue to grow wealthy through their control of land, while the lack of control of the use of land helps to keep others poor, but this is especially true of the poor in rural areas in Sierra Leone and Liberia since without access to land the single most critical component of livelihoods in rural communities people's survival may be called into question. Land in this context represents both an outcome of rural poverty and a root cause of this poverty.

Thus, it is crucial that as we attempt to achieve a balance or 'peace' between the economics and politics of national development, we ought to do so with the realization that we are walking a very tight rope. Concerns for 'catching up' in the so-called development race which is materialistic, technological and global, must be tempered with maximizing the 'good' life of the people in the Mano River Basin. This means our development must be people centered and contextual. Good economics must meet good politics! It is the mastery of this mix more than anything else that underpins the evolution of appropri-

ate governance rules and structures, and promotes sustained peace and stability of this sub-region.

The fact that we need local alternative development models cannot be overstated. It seems clear that the development trajectory we are now caught up in is quite very different from any other, anywhere. Insisting on applying old solutions to new problems leads us to the present challenges developed nations are already now experiencing. Their present it seems is our future! That is, if we pursue the kind of modernist globalist paradigm driven by insatiable desire for economic growth we are already in our future!

Our nations it seems are going into the future backwards. Another development is desirable, necessary and we must work to make it possible. Something more and something new are required.

Added to the quagmire of what we call 'development' is a bag of tools including direct foreign investment which makes it possible for the great multilaterals to even circumvent governments before talking about ordinary village folks; and now land grabbing, a rather



slippery and contested notion in a big need of further defining and operationalizing has been added. In what appears to be our marathon for development, people get pushed aside for profits, and unbridle economics define political expediency. The results is bad politics because it marginalizes already impoverished people the grassroots, bad socialization since it uproots the grassroots in the ultimate end there is no winner not even the multi-national corporations.

This edition of the Mano River Basin Civil Peace Service network newsletter highlights some critical issues in the region, emerging opportunities for eed partners and others to forge strategic alliances to facilitate peace building and provoke thoughts on possible implications these interventions may have on the peace and stability of the region.


Lancelot Mathews
New African Research &
Development Agency



Multilateral companies in Sierra Leone - ADDAX Bioenergy and the Magbass Sugar Complex

Sierra Leone, a country just emerging from war, is ranked among the poorest countries in the world. Moreover, the country is presently facing the challenges of economic recovery which keeps pushing it to the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index. In 2009 government made Food Security a priority due to the fact that many people have limited resources to purchase food. Post-conflict Sierra Leone has put an increasing emphasis on food security and the Right to Food.

Despite several strides made by government, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index for 2007/2008 saw Sierra Leone ranking last of 177 countries with per capita GDP of US\$806, life expectancy of 41.8yrs and adult literacy rate at 34.8%. In 2005, it was estimated that 52% of Sierra Leone's population lived on less than US\$1 a day. A most recent household income expenditure survey 2003-2004 showed 70% of the

population lived below the poverty line and the most acute form of poverty is inadequate food. 75% of the population of rural areas cannot afford enough food and therefore don't attain the minimum daily calorie intake of 2,700 calories.

Furthermore, as the world is experiencing food and economic crisis, governments, especially those of developing countries like Sierra Leone, are expected to expand their food production industries but this has over years been threatened by the influx of multinational companies that has posed serious challenges with local and small scale farmers in Sierra Leone in accessing lands for farming. These challenges expose a growing tension between land use needs and interests of local farmers that centre on food production and those of multinational companies such as Addax Bioenergy, Magbass Sugar Complex and African Minerals Limited, that have acquired large parcels of land for either biofuel produc-

tion or mining purpose which poses serious threats to Food Security and the Right to Food and the Right to own Land.

Sierra Leone has a total land space of 7,000,000 hectares. Of these 5,000,000 hectares is arable land and according to rough estimates, close to 1,500,000 hectares of these have been leased out or are on the verge of being leased out, and in almost all cases, the deals are done behind closed doors. By all indications, such so-called investors are taking advantage of the political will by government to give out unimaginable portions of lands to foreign direct investors none of whom have so far shown interest to invest in food crop production. Apart from putting poor local farmers and wealthy foreign investors in direct competition for land, this has also caused a situ-

ation wherein farm labour is being jeopardized which threatens the realization of the right to food in Sierra Leone. The wave of large land acquisition in Sierra Leone has also brought about a new form of land grabbing wherein lands are being removed from their original occupiers engaged in small scale farming, to be leased out to multinational companies for non food crop production and mining.

The Case Of ADDAX Bioenergy, Sierra Leone

In the two northern districts of Bombali and Tonkolili, people have leased 58,000 hectares of farm land to the Swiss-based oil company, Addax Bioenergy Limited. The said lease agreement has an initial lifespan of 50 years plus an additional 25 years, and shall be for

A new form of land grabbing

the establishment of massive sugarcane and plantation for the production of ethanol for exclusive export Europe. This deal which was entered into in a manner devoid of much transparency as it is considered to lack the informed consent of the people in the affected communities, has come under criticisms from concerned local organisations and international non-governmental organisations and individuals as well, who fears that the acquisition of vast portions of land for periods nearing a century and for growing crops that are meant to fuel European cars rather than for feeding the empty stomachs of the hungry masses, is itself a recipe for chaos and a serious obstacle in fulfilling the right to food in the future.

Land ownership is a crucial element of wealth, culture and livelihood for the rural population. Land ownership rights in Sierra Leone are traditionally transferred from within rural families over generations. The communal ownership of land doesn't transfer ownership rights to chiefs; it merely considers chiefs as custodians of the land and to act as leaders. Under such hierarchical social structures a dependence of land owners on their leaders cannot be overseen. Adherence of rural families to instructions and general obedience are strong elements in the rural reality. Therefore, the negotiation of lease agreement with land owners in the presence of chiefs, their representatives and or/other public official always bear the risk to undermine independence and self-determine decision making by the land owners. Those negotiations formats such as the one used by Addax and several other multinational companies would rather increase hierarchies, promote inequality and oppression in rural communities and do not serve open participation and free decision making on the basis of informed consent of the land owners.

Lack of transparency and un-

clear information as well as negotiation formats and contracting are major problems for the Addax case. Traditionally the rural communities agree on verbal basis. Written contracts and signing of documents are seen as only symbolic. Details are commonly clarified via verbal communication and agreement but this has not been the situation in the case of Addax as the affected communities still lack the clear understanding about details in the written agreement.

Again legal problems are seen on the one side of the issue, it is clear that there is no mediation mechanisms in place were dispute can be brought forward by the local people, as complaints arising from the contract can be only arbitrated in London. These affected rural communities cannot afford the resources to access the international courts. Corruption and the systematic under-evaluation of the value of land are crucial dimensions also in the Addax case and need to be considered quite carefully, especially when sustainable development for the leased land is the real aim.

Quite recently conflicts arose around the most fertile and productive bolilands surrounding the Lungi Acre village community, which according to Addax was part of the lands leased but however the community claimed this portion of land for its own use. Only intervention from authorities from the chiefdom as from the parliament cleared the situation. Unclear information about the exact locations of the areas of land leased and also timeframe for use of the land by Addax has also created insecurity and local unrest.

One of the core recommendations of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report, Volume 1, is the appeal to leaders to commit themselves to new principles of committed leadership. This appeal stems from the commission's conclusion, "that it was the years of bad governance, en-

democratic corruption and the denial of basic human rights that created the deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable". To this note, Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food (SiLNoRF) underlines the UN-Secretary General's concerns and recommendations to a cautious approach in the implementation of arrangements for exploitation of natural resources, as written in his fifth report on the United Nations Integrated Peace Building Office in Sierra Leone /UNIPSIL in September 2010. The caution should also be extended to the Addax project, as it has the potential to ignite inter and intra community and family conflicts and at the moment crisis prevention mechanisms are lacking.

In the midst of all these concerns, the lives of affected communities are still deplorable, as initial hopes of these communities is far from being met by Addax in their two years of operations. These affected communities were promised by Addax with jobs in place of their lands but presently there is growing concern and tension in the affected communities as Addax has employed only few people from within their communities. Again the earning level in the communities has dropped considerably as they earn low wages from Addax as compared to their previous engagement in farming activities from which they realized more income.

The Case of the Magbass Sugar Complex

In Kholifa Rowalla chiefdom in the Tonkolili district, a Chinese owned company, Magbass Sugar Complex has over thirty years occupied over 1, 500 hectares of land. The lands occupied by the company are used for growing sugar cane for the production of sugar and ethanol. Again the manner in which these lands were acquired can be considered as land grabbing as the process was not negotiated by land owners. In other words the lands were forcefully taken from the communities by the then government. In several consultations with

these affected communities by SiLNoRF is it has been proven that this situation has had adverse effects on the communities within the past years and even presently in respect of land ownership by locals for farming. These communities have also on several occasions, through protests, expressed their dissatisfaction over the manner in which the Chinese acquired the land at Magbass village. In recent protest involving land owners and the Chinese company, wherein the company wanted to take an additional land area of 500 hundred hectares which was not part of the lands leased by the Chinese thirty years ago, ended up violently with the Sierra Leone Police arresting and detaining the leader of the protest.

Again over the thirty years of operations by the Chinese Company, the affected communities still remain deplorable. Because of the growing interest in more lands by the company to enable them expand their production there has been a growing tension in the communities that has provoked several critical discussions and engagement among community stakeholders and the government. These discussions have been mainly focused on the need for a transparent negotiation by the government and that of the company.



The author of this text, Mohamed Conteh, is Executive Director of the organization Mankind's Activities for Development Accreditation Movement (MADAM), based in Makeni, Sierra Leone.



Background:

Mankind's Activities for Development Accreditation Movement (MADAM) was established in 1991 in Makorrgba village, Kunike Barina Chiefdom, Tonkolili District, in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone.

Initially MADAM supported farmers' groups known as rural peoples' organizations (rpos) and other people working in the agricultural sector.

In 1993 MADAM opened a small training centre in Makali, 50 km from the provincial capital Makeni. Carpentry and tailoring were the fields MADAM was focusing at.

The centre there had been looted by rebels in 1994 and 1995. The nearby Kangari hills, a forest area with a history of gold mining became the epicenter of the RUF (Revolution United Front). Therefore many people fled the region including MADAM's staff.

By the end of 1995 it was no longer possible to support people left behind. For this reason, help for the people of that region was offered in Mile 91 which is a small town on a crossroad which connects the Capital Freetown with the north and the southeast of the country.

The town was a sanctuary for 45,000 refugees. The council agreed to offer a piece of land on which MADAM built improvised facilities, which were first used as a training centre. With two borrowed sewing

machines, work started in Mile 91. The staff offered another two courses for carpenters and blacksmiths, which were supported by the British NGO "Tools for Self-reliance".

An additional improvised training centre was established closed to the Waterloo refugee camp, which is located just outside Freetown.

MADAM worked closely with other organizations which were active in that area. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) gave money and materials for more facilities, while CAUSA Canada supported MADAM by employing a psychologist for trauma workshops. In addition, the UN World Food Programme provided food to be used for the trainees.

The MADAM training centre was registered with the NCDDR (National Commission for Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration).

As a consequence, the training was only offered to ex combatants at the beginning. At approximately the same time, MADAM applied for funding from "Bread for the World" for the rehabilitation of child -ex soldiers.

Several groups of ex-combatants had finished their training by then. They received some tools as a starter kit from the NCDDR program.

In 1999 MADAM achieved the

status of a national NGO and established a liaison office in Freetown and additional training centres in Mile 91 and Waterloo.

"Bread for the World" sponsored the rehabilitation of child- ex soldiers as well as women and youths affected by violence during the war in the Mile 91 training centre while Episcopal Relief and Development sponsored the training of women and girls affected by the war in Waterloo. Between 2002 and 2003 the centre in Makali was re-built thus making MADAM to operate and run 3 training centres for both ex-combatants and youth affected by the war.

At that time three training programs were running in the three centres:

- Blacksmith and Toolmaker
- Dressmaker
- Carpenter

The courses lasted for eight months and 90% of the training was based on practical work.

After a one month introduction period, the trainees are trained on the job.

The result of this is that MADAM now receives orders for goods from both the local community and private individuals and produces them during the training program.

For example, in 2003, the blacksmith produced 500 bush

knives and hoes for the FAO and the carpentry workshop played a part in rebuilding houses in the villages, including the production of doors and window frames.

The training centre therefore functions as a small business, which finances itself through the profits made on its goods, training fees from the NCDDR and other donations.

During the starting phase there were three clear groups:

- Ex combatants, financed through the NCDDR program (soldiers who returned their weapons, would get a compensation)
- Child soldiers
- Non civil recruits (youth and women, who were kidnapped and forced to work for the rebels, they are mostly women from the nearby refugee camps)

Additional services by MADAM

- Job orientation
- Trauma healing workshops during training
- Advice and sensitisation on the topics: Gender, HIV/Aids
- Lessons for illiterate people in writing and arithmetic

At the end, the trainees will be increasingly involved in the whole production process. That means they are part of the decision making process and calculate prices, design products and decide which materials to buy.



Background Paper by ADDAX Bioenergy

Q&A: Addax Bioenergy sugarcane ethanol project in Makeni, Sierra Leone

Addax Bioenergy, a division of the Swiss-based energy corporation Addax & Oryx Group (AOG), is developing a Greenfield integrated agricultural and renewable energy project in Sierra Leone to produce fuel ethanol and electricity. The project will consist of a sugarcane plantation, ethanol distillery and biomass power plant and related infrastructure.

Feedstock	: Sugarcane
Plantation size	: 10'000 hectares
Milling capacity	: 200 Tons of cane per hour
Distilling capacity	: 350'000 litres of Ethanol per day
Power capacity	: 15 MW or 100'000 MWh per annum for export
Total investment	: about 200 million Euros
Workforce	: > 2000 direct employees
Production start	: 2012

The Addax Bioenergy project is supported by the Government of Sierra Leone, by the Chiefdom Councils and by the land landowners in the three chiefdoms who have welcomed Addax Bioenergy to develop its project in their area. The project is supported by European Development Finance Institutions and the African Development Bank and this is one of the reasons why IFC Performance standards and Equator Principles are applied. In order to meet EU law on sustainability criteria, the industrial and agricultural operating procedures adopt international best practices from the sugar industry and principles and recommendations from the Roundtable on Sustainable Bio-fuels (RSB) and the Better Sugarcane Initiative (BSI) of which Addax Bioenergy is a member.

Addax Bioenergy is also developing the cogeneration and composting parts of its project as a Clean Development Mechanism at Gold Standard (CDM). The co-generation project uses renewable sources of energy (bagasse and trash and, in a second phase, bio-gas) for power generation and will be based on more efficient boilers than prevalent in the region. The more efficient boilers aid higher power generation, which when supplied to the grid displaces high GHG emission intensive power from other sources of power generation (e.g. Diesel generators). Likewise the future composting project will prevent methane emissions that would have happened in the absence of the project through anaerobic decomposition of vinasse. The Gold Standard CDM assigns an additional label of quality on emission reduction.

Land rights in Africa and biofuels have been the subject of debate in the media and have raised many legitimate questions.

Addax Bioenergy has analyzed the concerns and from the beginning integrated the environmental and social sustainability criteria in its business model and project design. This was witnessed by the ESHIA process performed by Coastal Environmental Services and other independent consultants and as reviewed both through a public disclosure process as well as by independent international E&S consultancy Nippon Koei UK. The draft ESHIA report and specialist studies can be visited under www.cesnet.co.za/publicdocs.htm (...)

Addax Bioenergy and the Makeni project in Sierra Leone

Q1: Who is Addax Bioenergy ?

Addax Bioenergy is an affiliate of the Addax & Oryx Group (AOG), a Swiss-based, private oil & gas company founded in 1987 with a focus on the energy sectors in sub-saharan Africa. Addax Bioenergy was created in 2007 with the objective to develop renewable energy sources in Africa. AOG has more than twenty years of experience investing in Africa including Sierra Leone.

Q2: Why Sierra Leone?

Sierra Leone has suitable lands and climate to grow sugarcane. Less than one fifth of its arable lands of more than 5 million hectares are used for agriculture. The climate is favourable for sugarcane with high rainfall, year-round hot temperatures and sunshine. A distinct dry season allows for a long harvesting period but means that supplementary irrigation is required.

Sierra Leone is a partner country of the European Union and benefits from duty-free access to the EU market. AOG was one of the first private companies to invest in Sierra Leone after the civil war by renovating the Kissy Oil terminal in Freetown which has developed into a regional hub for petroleum products.

The Government of Sierra Leone has set up a policy framework to attract investments in agriculture and renewable energy and the local communities of Makeni have welcomed the Addax Bioenergy project.



Q3: Is Sierra Leone a safe place?

Sierra Leone suffered a terrible civil war which was ended by the intervention of the United Nations and the UK in 2001. Sierra Leone is now a democracy and the current president, former opposition leader Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, was elected in September 2007. The international community, United Nations, European Union, World Bank etc continues to support Sierra Leone in its reconstruction effort but the country is still at the bottom of the UN development index. The security situation has improved tremendously and it is possible to travel safely anywhere in the country. The rebel groups have all been dismantled and the Sierra Leone armed forces are trained by the British army. However, youth unemployment is high and poses a potential security risk. Therefore substantial private investment is required to create jobs and lift the population out of poverty.

Q4: What is the Addax Bioenergy project all about?

Addax Bioenergy intends to develop a plantation of about 10'000 hectares of sugarcane close to the town of Makeni in central Sierra Leone. The sugarcane will be processed in an ethanol factory to be built inside the plantation area. Addax Bioenergy will produce ethanol for export to the EU market and generate about 15 MW of excess power for the national grid.

Q5: Is the Addax Bioenergy project going to threaten bio-diversity?

As Addax Bioenergy intends to export the bulk of its production to the EU market, it has factored in the EU biofuel sustainability criteria which ban deforestation and the use of bio-diverse lands. Addax Bioenergy has therefore designed the plantation development to comply with these rules. The plantation area is a savannah-type land with very little tree cover and only small pockets of biodiversity which will be protected. An environmental impact assessment (ESHIA) according to World Bank standards was conducted by an independent consultancy and found the project to comply with EU criteria on biodiversity. There are no species of fauna and flora in the project area that would fall under the IUCN list of endangered species.

Q9: Will the sugarcane be planted in food producing areas and therefore threaten food security?

Addax Bioenergy has conducted an independent social impact assessment according to World Bank standards. Presently, only small parts of the project area are used for food production. A land use analysis has concluded that the most valuable food production are permanent rice paddies which are located in land depressions which capture run-off water and are therefore easy to manage by the local farmers. Addax Bioenergy has designed its plantation to get around the rice paddies which will continue to be farmed and be accessible by the local population.

Q13: What about the villages, are people going to be moved?

The plantation design takes into account the villages and development corridors around them. Therefore, no village will have to be resettled. Some isolated settlements may be asked to move but they will be offered compensation, i.e. either Addax Bioenergy will re-build the settlement somewhere else or offer cash compensation if that is preferred.

Q17: How did Addax Bioenergy acquire the lands?

The lands don't belong to Addax Bioenergy, they are being leased from the traditional landowners for a period of 50 years. Addax Bioenergy has from the start adopted a bottom-up approach, liaising directly with the communities and individual landowners. The landowners and the chiefdom councils were assisted by the reputable Franklyn Kargbo & Co law firm of Freetown in order to make sure their rights are secured. Government has played no role in the lease process other than making sure that the land law and the legal procedures are respected.

Q18: What is the compensation offered to landowners?

Addax Bioenergy has adopted the land lease price recommended by the Government of Sierra Leone for agricultural lands of 5 USD per acre or about 12 USD per hectare. According to World Bank standards, the land lease fee has to properly reflect the value of the lands. As this differs from plot to plot, a thorough assessment will be done in the implementation phase to assess if and what supplementary compensation is required.

Q20: What about the landless people? Will their rights be protected?

According to World Bank standards, nobody in the project area should be worse off than before. This aims at protecting vulnerable people like so-called land tenants who have been farming land or raising cattle on lands belonging to traditional landowners. Addax Bioenergy will make sure that these people can continue to live off alternative lands in the neighborhood or offer other compensation measures.

Q22: What is in it for the local population? Aren't they going to sacrifice their livelihoods?

The feedback received from the local population is overwhelmingly positive. They are not farmers by choice but by necessity and many young people leave the rural areas for urban centres. The people of the Makeni area hope to get lifted out of poverty by getting stable employment and training opportunities and benefiting from service demands through the project. Over 2000 people will be directly employed and trained by the company to work in the factory and the plantation. The project will become a major economic centre and generate many business and further employment opportunities for local businesses and outgrowers.



Empty Promises?

A critical view on the case of ADDAX BioEnergy

The Swiss firm ADDAX Bioenergy is investing 220 million euros in Sierra Leone. This money is being used to cultivate sugar cane—for biofuels in Europe. For this purpose ADDAX has leased 50,000 hectares of land in the north of the country. The lease initially runs for fifty years, with an option for another twenty years. President Ernest Bai Koroma expressed his optimism at the signing ceremony, saying that this was a good day for the government and the people in the north of the country. He praised the investment, calling it the biggest agricultural project in the history of Sierra Leone and claiming that ADDAX would become the country's biggest employer. Sierra Leone urgently needs development. It continues to occupy one of the lowest positions on the world hunger index: place 79 out of a total of 84. Unemployment and inflation remain extremely high. The country has the highest infant mortality rate in the world, the provision of medical care is ex-

tremely poor and some seventy percent of the population is illiterate. Two thirds of the population work in the agricultural sector, which is precisely where ADDAX is putting its money. The expectations being attached to the investor are big, especially given the fact that ADDAX is promising four thousand jobs and a better future. But will it make good on this promise? Members of the alliance for the Right to Food and the Christian Council have been asking around.

Heading for a better future?

The upgraded highway in the north of Sierra Leone seems to symbolize that the region is finally moving away from dirt roads and a climate of war towards a new and perhaps better future. But are the people in the villages on either side of the highway gaining anything from this development? Lungi Acer is a small village on edge of the highway. 450 people live here in mud huts without electricity

and without running water. There is a small primary school run by a single teacher but no money for a secondary school. People here were hoping to gain a lot from the ADDAX project.

“When President Koroma came here by helicopter, he promised us a hospital, electricity and modern housing. Nothing has come of this. Our situation is the same as when the project started,” complains one inhabitant.

For two years now ADDAX has been growing sugar cane near the village, and for two years the inhabitants have been hoping to see development. “Nothing has happened in the last two years,” says one with an air of resignation. Surely local people should be seeing some improvement in their living conditions by now. After all, this is one of the conditions set out in the contract between the government and ADDAX, which also places a strong emphasis on infrastructural development. But the in-

habitants of Lungi Acer have not seen any evidence of this and their complaints about the lack of engagement by ADDAX continue to fall on deaf ears. More jobs? Hardly!

The firm's original commitment to creating up to 4000 jobs also entailed provided training courses for the village's inhabitants. As yet this promise has largely proved an empty one. Out of 450 inhabitants, around thirty are currently working for ADDAX. The people are angry and feel betrayed.

One example is the promised employment of security personnel. “ADDAX promised to train people from the village,” says one young man during a meeting called to discuss the issue. Others in the group look grim. One middle-aged man exclaims angrily: “ADDAX should have trained our people as guards, not people from outside.” By outside he means Makeni, a city around twenty kilometres away from the village, where the

guards required for the project are trained. The village inhabitants have been ignored. Another example is driving staff. This subject again brings an angry reaction. Again expectations have not been met. ADDAX had urgently looked for drivers. So why had only three people from the village been given driving jobs, we asked. Because they said our people were not qualified, mutters one of the older men cynically. Five young men produce their driving licences to demonstrate that they are not going to let themselves be taken for fools. "Where is the training we were promised for electricians and metalworkers?" As yet the people have not received any answers to their questions, and their resentment is understandable.

Work safety?

A number of the young women employed to weed the ADDAX fields complain bitterly that they have not received any work gloves. One of them holds out her arm to us. The marks of a snake bite are still visible. Another young woman also bares here lower arm. She too has been bitten by snakes and her arm is also covered with insect bites. The women have asked for gloves to protect them, but gloves are only given out to blacksmiths. The women are disappointed. "I have nothing positive to say about ADDAX. Up to now my experience has been entirely negative," one of them complains.

ADDAX is putting inhabitants under pressure

ADDAX is in urgent need of good publicity. The firm is under pressure. "They are afraid they will lose financial backers if there is too much criticism of the project," says Lansaha Sowa from the alliance for the Right to Food. According to ADDAX, seven European development banks have so far contributed funding for the project. The firm therefore finds it very inconvenient when village inhabitants complain about the



Dialogue in Makeni, Sierra Leone - people had high hopes in the ADDAX investments

Frustration with ADDAX is obvious

project to journalists and members of aid organisations. Not long ago, people in the village were abruptly woken up at 1.30 in the morning to sign a petition claiming that their statements to a German journalist were untrue. "We didn't take back anything we had said," says one villager angrily. Widespread frustration and disappointment

Frustration with ADDAX is also obvious in the nearby village of Yainkasa. "When the president came here to the north he promised to free us from poverty and guaranteed us food security," says Ali Bangura, spokesman for the local landowners. Is that why he signed the agreement with ADDAX, we ask. "We wanted development. Now I regret signing. All their promises are empty," he says.

Empty promises?

ADDAX promised food security, and local people, relying on this promise, made their fields available for the project. And now? They do not even know whether

the fields made available for ADDAX will bring the same yield as before. The promised seeds also arrived too late. Planting usually begins in May but the seeds did not arrive until July. They are still waiting for the promised fertilizer. Now they are starting to worry that they will soon not have enough food. Inhabitants also complain that prices for rice and cassava have gone up. "When we farmed the field for ourselves we were not afraid of hunger. Now things are different," says Ali Bangura. Frustration over low earnings ADDAX apparently initially promised locals an income of 20,000 leones a day, which is equivalent to around four euros. Now the firm is paying 10,000 leones a day. But workers have to pay for transport to fields located seven to eleven kilometers away and for their breakfast and lunch. "We hardly have anything left for our children because we have to pay out most of our wages for food," say one young father. The firm had promised to provide free transport and a free midday meal. But this hasn't happened. Here too, ADDAX is putting pressure on workers, who are instructed to say in interviews that they are receiving free meals. If they refuse to do

so, ADDAX threatens to sack them.

Four weeks of work for a three-week wage

Workers are also subject to a complex system of remuneration that amounts to three weeks' work for two weeks of wages and four weeks' work for three weeks of wages. No one knows why this is the case. We ask whether they have talked with a lawyer and are met with sarcastic laughter. Nobody in the village is even acquainted with the lawyer appointed and paid for by ADDAX to represent the villagers' interests. The hope of training has also proved a dead end. As yet, most people have been working on a casual basis. "If ADDAX really wants to help us, then they should start providing training for the villagers."

Small-scale alternatives

A young woman in Yainkasa is dealing with ADDAX in her own way. She has seen how badly the villagers are being treated, so she has simply decided to continue growing food on the land that remains available to her. She is also selling charcoal in Freetown. She thoroughly objects to the activities of ADDAX.

In her opinion, the firm would do far more good if it invested in local agriculture than in the cultivation of sugar cane. She sees the consequences of the ADDAX approach.

Young people are placing their hopes in the firm and neglecting their work in the fields. She is satisfied with what she is doing and believes an increasing number of people are going to adopt the same strategy.

Growing impatience

The sense of frustration in the villages is growing rapidly. If ADDAX does not make good on its promises, it will soon not be able to work here, say the villagers. What will be the result of this escalating disenchantment? What will happen if no dialogue is initiated with the affected parties?

Riots in Kemedugu

Two hours by car from Makeni along a straight dusty road lies the village of Kemedugu. This is the region in which African Minerals operates, currently one of Sierra Leone's biggest employers. Its website reads: "Sierra

Leone—a special relationship."

Since 2003 African Minerals has been one of the country's biggest investors. It has also promised development, jobs and better infrastructure. Nevertheless, its operations have resulted in bloody confrontations. 500 people live in Kemedugu, but when we arrived there it seemed like a ghost town. Only a dozen inhabitants came out to meet us on the village square, and bullet holes from the last riot were still visible on a number of the houses.

Dispute over land

The protest is said to have been triggered by the firm's attempt to conduct surveys regarding the upcoming construction of a dam. One village inhabitant told us, "If they build the dam, we will lose water for our fields. We are afraid that we will not be able to grow enough rice."

According to the police a number of young men working for African Minerals attacked the firm's headquarters and set an excavator on fire. The police response was massive. They

stormed the village and destroyed a number of houses. More than eighty people were arrested and there were numerous injuries, some of them serious. The majority of the villagers fled to the nearby forests. Those who have returned to the village fear further attacks. As yet African Minerals has refused to respond to the request by a member of the alliance for the Right to Food for a statement regarding the incidents.

The investors are protected but who is protecting the inhabitants?

Although the background to the incidents in Kemedugu is different, there are certain parallels to the ADDAX case. African Minerals also has a contract with the government.

And according to the villagers the firm has refused to engage in any dialogue with them. They have attempted to communi-

cate with the firm on innumerable occasions and negotiate a compromise involving compensation for the land the firm is using—to no avail. The only result has been massive police violence. Chief Musa Turay is

unaware of anyone having received money.

The inhabitants wanted to negotiate prior to the beginning of African Minerals operations on their land.

When they attempted to stop the firm's operations, bloody conflicts ensued. Even though African Minerals also talks about infrastructural improvements on its website, there is no evidence of these in Kemedugu.

"We are afraid that our land will be ruined by African Minerals and we will not be provided with any compensation," say Musa Turay bitterly. They people are afraid they will lose their livelihood.

Dialogue could certainly help—in both the case of Kemedugu and ADDAX.

Young people are placing their hopes in the firm



Community members in Sierra Leone - the frustration about the recent developments is written in the faces of the people.



Tensions in Cote d'Ivoire

A structural danger for West Africa

The November 28 election in Cote d'Ivoire was meant to unify the country after a 2002-2003 civil war, but instead it resulted in deadlock as presidential challenger Alassane Ouattara and incumbent Laurent Gbagbo both claimed victory and named rival cabinets.

In the following Laurent Gbagbo refused to concede defeat after the election commission said the November 28 poll had been won by Ouattara with a total of 54.1 percent of the votes.

The president of the United States, Barack Obama, has backed Ouattara, leading calls from the United Nations, France, the European Union, the African Union and West African bloc ECOWAS on Gbagbo to accept the election commission ruling. The ECOWAS held an emergency summit on the situation in Cote d'Ivoire and communicated that even military action in the country might be

considered should Gbagbo, who has the backing of the Ivoirian military, not accept the outcomes of the electoral process. The political situation in Cote d'Ivoire has raised fears of renewed violence in what was once the showpiece of West Africa. It has also increased concerns among Cote d'Ivoire's neighbors that unrest could destabilize the region, cause wide economical damage and cause a refugee crisis in a region still recovering from three civil wars in the past two decades.

The country closed its borders to the neighboring countries and there were several people killed and more wounded in political unrests and clashes between riot police and protesting supporters of Alassane Ouattara in the nation's capital Abidjan. In early December about 1,000 people have fled Ivory Coast into neighboring Liberia since the second round of a disputed

presidential ballot in the West African country, according to an official from the U.N. refugee agency (UNHCR). In the end of December the numbers had grown to 18,000 that for refuge in the neighboring country.

The Liberian government has encouraged the use of host families to give shelter to the refugees rather than constructing refugee camps for the escapees from Cote d'Ivoire. In late December however, the UNHCR begun the construction of a refugee camp on Liberian ground.

Liberian president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf appealed to all Ivorian parties to exercise restraint and give mediation a chance for peaceful resolution of the crisis that will preserve the unity and territorial

integrity of the Ivorian Nation. President Johnson-Sirleaf has issued a stern warning to Liberians to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of Cote d'Ivoire. Reports had indicated earlier that former warlords have been contacted "unofficially" to intervene (see article on p.11).

Sirleaf's warning came on a day the situation in the Ivory Coast remains unchanged. Former South African leader Thabo Mbeki who strived to settle an the emerging conflict between Ivory Coast's presidential claimant Alassane Ouattara and incumbent Laurent Gbagbo, left the country without a clear success in his mediation attempt, but appealed to both for a peaceful solution.

Refugees arrive in the neighboring countries

On Life (After) War

The following interview has first been published in the Liberian newspaper Frontpage Liberia.

For the past five years, Thomas Yah-Yah Nimely says he has been busy engaged in farming in his hometown in Grand Gedeh County. The conspicuous closeness to the border with Liberia and the Ivory Coast now facing an intense post-election conflict has made Nimely, the former Foreign Minister in the erstwhile National Transitional Government of Liberia a consistent target whenever reports or speculations of crisis in one of Liberia's next door neighbors surface.

Nimely is the former leader of erstwhile Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), a rebel group that became active in March 2003, launching attacks from Cote d'Ivoire. It achieved rapid successes in its war against President Charles Taylor and is believed to have been created by the Côte d'Ivoire government as a way of staking a claim in Liberian politics during the turmoil of that country's civil war, or as retaliation for the Liberian government's alleged support for rebels in Cote d'Ivoire. Nimely, was named as Liberia's foreign minister in the transitional government that was appointed on October 14, 2003, following the resignation and exile of Taylor. MODEL was accused of violating UN sanctions by exporting timber from the regions of southern Liberia that it controlled. The group later promised to disarm as part of the country's 2003 peace agreement.

In recent days, amid tension between the Ivorian incumbent Laurent Gbagbo and the declared winner of the run-off elections in Cote d'Ivoire, new reports have suggested that Gbagbo was regrouping former warlords from Liberia, to make a last stand against the West pressing for him to accept the results and step aside. Then late Monday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement attributed to Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf warning former warlords to stay out of the Ivorian crisis in the wake of reports that certain individuals and former warlords have been contacted "unofficially" to intervene.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: Let's begin with the statements attributed to the Liberian President and issued by the Foreign Ministry late Monday night in which she warned ex-warlords to stay out of the crisis in the Ivory Coast next door. What do you make of the President's statement?

THOMAS YAHYAH NIMELY: I find that statement to be a politically-naïve statement. I think what we should be concerned about right now is a sister country is in conflict. If the crisis materializes where it becomes a reality and there's war in Cote d'Ivoire. Cote d'Ivoire has fifteen to seventeen million people. We have five counties in Liberia that share a common border with Cote d'Ivoire. If we have a million refugees coming into Liberia, we have crisis on our hands as well. So I think what we should be thinking now is to sit down and find a solution to the Cote d'Ivoire situation. I think the President needs to be talking with ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States); talking with AU (African Union) to have a voice about this situation that is happening in La Cote d'Ivoire because at the final day, it is going to affect her as a president. Now, warning me or warning former warlords, how would that help her? It's been five years after the fight today, it is not even five years, we're talking about since 2003, that the war has ended.

Is she saying that she is not happy with the work we did that brought her to into power? If she is not happy with the work that we did then she does not have to be president. Madam President, you don't have to warn me. Talk to the youths; find them programs to keep them

busy. This is something that you should have done since 2005. Keep the young people busy and let's see how they can get occupy possibly and contribute to nation building. But if they are doing nothing, if they are selling waiter market and the police are taking their waiter market and throwing it away and there is no school. There was supposed to be free education and education is not free and there is no job then what do you expect these kids to do. There is nothing that they would be able to do. So, don't blame Thomas Yah-Yah Nimely. From 2003, we have disarmed. If anybody crosses and leaves to go into Cote d'Ivoire Madam President, Thomas Yah-Yah Nimely is not responsible for that person and I hope you don't keep that in the back of your mind and in the mind of any of your government officials, that Thomas Yah-Yah will be responsible for crossing or former MODEL ex-combatants going into Cote d'Ivoire to go and fight. That warning you give to me I think is a threat to my life and I will inform the people of Grand Gedeh County about this statement that you have made because we have experience this before during the Charles Julu situation, during the Col. Dorbor situation. Charles Julu is dead today and Col. Dorbor has a permanent disease, he is impotent for life because of the treatment he received at NSA. Now, this will not happen to Thomas Yah-Yah Nimely.

If you have a serious problem with the youths in Liberia, crossing into Cote d'Ivoire, let's sit and talk about it and I think you government is capable of talking about it, let's go to the five counties that share common borders with Cote d'Ivoire and let's talk with the elders there and let's see how we can discourage the young people and let the government start brainstorming now to find programs that will keep these young men and women busy so that they can't cross into Cote d'Ivoire.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: Have you been in touch with Mr. Gbagbo at all? Or Mr. Outtarra since this conflict started?

YAH-YAH NIMELY: No, No, No! I haven't talked to anybody. I have no reason to talk to anybody. Listen, Cote d'Ivoire has fifteen million people, we have three million, and now why should we be responsible to fight Cote d'Ivoire's war? Now if anybody wants to fight we leave it up to them. But we have no business going to fight Cote d'Ivoire's war, a country of fifteen, sixteen million people and we have never fought war for Cote d'Ivoire.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: But there have been some perceptions and speculations that you



"When you have energy in your body go ahead and start preparing for your own retirement. So I am preparing for my own retirement. I am not preparing for war, I don't have time for politics but of course I am running for Senator in 2011."

and your rebel group fought along with Gbagbo during the first conflict in the Cote d'Ivoire. Any truth to those reports?

YAH-YAH NIMLEY: Help him to do what? Help fight in a country that has fifteen million people and probably have two to three million military personnel, army and gendarmerie? So even if I did, don't I have a life? Why did I disarm, why did I sign the peace agreement, we signed the peace agreement to ensure that there is lasting peace in Liberia and in the region, so we disarmed and we disarmed honorably. So does that mean now that anything that happen now you will be calling on Thomas Yah-Yah Nimley – even if he's working on his farm?

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: So what have you been doing since you left the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)?

YAH-YAH NIMLEY: I'm on the farm, I'm planting rubber, I'm planting cocoa, this is where I am and I just left from there. I have been in town for two months now and I am planning to go back on the farm.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: What is your position on the friction or feud if you call it between Mr. Gbagbo and Mr. Outtara?

YAH-YAH NIMLEY: My brother, you know what, I have left politics. I left politics. I want to deal with realities and deal with my own retirement. Whatever happens within that country is within that country. I have no details of what is happening there. In order for me to do an assessment I need to know what is happening in the country for me to know, I can't just guess and say what is happening there. I really do not know what is going on over there. But what I do know is that there is a trouble brewing that will affect Liberia, it will affect Nimba County, it will affect Grand Gedeh County, River Gee County, Maryland County. It will affect those counties.

One million refugees crossing over we got crisis on our hands, that's something we should be thinking about instead of someone getting up in the morning and warning Thomas Yah-Yah Nimley, if anyone crosses into Liberia or Cote d'Ivoire. I am not responsible for anyone crossing into Liberia, I mean into Cote d'Ivoire and I want the President to know that.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: Do you have any control of your boys? Where are they now?

YAH-YAH NIMLEY: The people were disarmed since 2003. They were disarmed since 2003, they are independent. Since it is a free country, they are free to roam around.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: But are you in touch with any of them?

YAH-YAH NIMLEY: Why would I be in touch with any of them. I see them all the time in the street. I see them all the time in the street, they're on the motorcycle, some of them are on the farm, everywhere you go they're into motorcycle business, people are into small businesses. I see them, sometime they see me and say, "Oh Chief, how are you". When I get something, I give it to them but that does not mean I have control over them.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: How do you see this thing ending?

YAH-YAH NIMLEY: You know what, that's what I say it requires an international intervention. I mean from a political standpoint, I think it requires an international intervention. From two points because at no time in my life, I would have seen a country having two presidents and being installed simultaneously. This is something that ECOWAS should be involved in 24-7, to ensure that there is not problem.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: Any final words for the President in the wake of her statements cautioning former warlords?

YAH-YAH NIMLEY: The final word, my advice is that the President should think again. Before warning Thomas Yah-Yah Nimley, she should think again. The problem with the youths, Thomas Yah-Yah Nimley has no control over the youths in Liberia. As of 2003 from the time MODEL was disarmed by Jacques Klein and others, Thomas Yah-Yah Nimley has no control, if the youth crawls into Cote d'Ivoire, if they crawls into Guinea, I am not responsible for them and I see no reason why she should threaten me or give me



Security forces trying to extinguish a fire on a street in Abidjan

any warning. That warning does not belong to me. I think she should sit down with her security forces; she should sit down with the diplomatic community and see how we can find a solution, go to the counties involved and let all of us sit down. If she goes to Grand Gedeh County and says Mr. Nimley, we are talking with some leaders in the country about our youths crossing and going into Cote d'Ivoire, I will take part in that discussion.

We are looking for solutions; we are no looking for warning. Nobody bullies me. Do not bully me because the issue is not about bullying, the issue is about solutions so that our country and the region can survive.

FRONTPAGEAFRICA: So you have no intentions of going to war again?

YAH-YAH NIMLEY: Why should I go to war? Before you go to war, there should be a reason. When I came here to Liberia, I don't know if you want to call it war but I came here to create peace and I did create the peace and after I did, I washed my hands and I'm on the farm and I don't know whether if this is something bad that I did. Because today, we all are seeing the benefits.

The Bottlecaps-Effect

CPS Worker Jutta Boysen about her work with the Liberian Ecumenical Women Organization



Members of the Ecumenical Women's Organization in a meeting and at work

What effect can bottle caps and remnants have on women in Liberia?

When you ask someone in the streets of Monrovia how he or she is faring, the answer very often is "I try small!" Without really thinking about it, this has become a slogan for my work here as a Gender & Justice Advisor at the Liberian Council of Churches. One day I bought a handmade greeting card showing a local scene depicted with colorful remnants from a tailor shop. This and a hot pat made by women in Mozambique using bottle caps started off a handicrafts group every Tuesday from 12 noon to 3 pm at the Council's house.

What seemed to be just a way of passing the time became important and meaningful to the women: They say:

1. It is nice to learn something new!
2. It is good to make use of waste material.

3. It is relaxing my mental tensions!

Clara B. goes further in saying: It is an added value that I will be able to train others, e.g. teenagers in my community and this can make them more pro-

ductive in society. Laverne I. hopes to take orders for special designs to match people's wishes and Salome B. is happy to make her own Christmas cards.

Initially we wanted to sell our

products only to raise funds for the Ecumenical Women Organization – but now we have 100 US dollar in the purse. And it might become more as we have started to make banners using remnants. Thus we saved 80 US Dollars on the two banners for our workshop last week. For reasons beyond our control the order for a banner for the National Election Commission was withdrawn.

So what started small has become economically attractive and now we discuss how to split the money between the organization and the producers. This – of course – will be made public in our next EWO monthly meeting and might attract more women to join the group.

When asked about the advantage of this form of income generating in comparison with selling cakes in the street, all four women jointly said: "When selling on the road you are exposed to violence!"

But is all this really peace work?



A participant from a EWO workshop on Gender Based Violence



International Day of Peace 2010

Making Peace Work in the Mano River Region

For the second time since 2009, the Civil Peace Service Liberia, commemorated the International Day of Peace on September 21st of 2010. Similar to the year before, the day was declared a working holiday in the country by the president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

The president called on all citizens, all government ministries, businesses, schools, churches and mosques, market places and homes to cease movement and observe a moment of silence for one minute at 12 o'clock, noon, in observance of the International Day of Peace.

Due to the cooperation of the partners from the German Church Development Service EED and the German Association for Development Cooperation AGEH it was possible to celebrate this year's Peace Day in five of the fifteen counties in Liberia: next to the counties that already have participated in 2009, Montserrado, Lofa and Nimba, further activities in honor of the day took place in Bong and Maryland.

After the February unrests in Lofa County, the celebration in Lofa played a special role in this year's celebrations.

In February 2010 violence

erupted in the towns of Voinjama and Kornia in Lofa County, resulting in several deaths and the destruction of property including two mosques, one church and a school, after a 14-year old girl was found near a mosque in Kornia. Lofa County is one of the areas in Liberia that is deeply affected by the civil war and poverty. Ethnic and religious divisions overlap to produce a potentially tense condition. Especially the two ethnic groups of the Lorma and the Madingo have developed atrocities during the past.

To overcome those atrocities, to have a look on how much of the hostilities are based on prejudices, the Lofa County Network, a network of local partners of the New African Research and Development Agency, used the celebration of the Peace Day to bring people of the Lorma and the Madingo together: in a storytelling workshop, senior members of different communities recalled the time when the situation between the ethnicities was calm and peaceful. They discussed the situation with younger community members and together they had a look on how the situation got worse and

on possible solutions for the tensions. In a subsequent soccer-tournament the invitees found a fun - and peaceful - way to address challenges.

In Monrovia the day began with a Parade towards the Paynesville City Hall. Despite the heavy rain hundreds of participants made it through the parade and into the Paynesville Cityhall, where an indoor program was held.

The celebration was attended by a huge number of schools from all over Monrovia, by government institutions, and by many Civil Society Organizations, including the National Muslim Council of Liberia.

In her welcoming statement, the Civil Peace Service worker, Mrs. Judith Baessler summarized the efforts of the German government in containing violence and strengthening civil society presence through the development of the civil peace service program in Africa and other parts of the world.

She asserted that through this initiative in Liberia, Sierra Leone in the Mano River Region and other countries, organizations have been proactive to ensure that a peaceful co-existence

is strengthened.

Presenting the Keynote address, Dr. Anthony Lombeh Hena, Deputy Director, Policy Dialogues and Special Projects, KAICT, reemphasized the International Day of Peace as a day dedicated to peace and observed by citizens in the Political arena, military groups, civil society organizations, traditional council and religious groups all over the world. He echoed that the celebration of the Peace Day is dedicated to building a safer and a more just world for all.

Dr. Hena, gave a brief summary of the history of the Mano River Region, outlining Security and Peace Education as two key areas which must be addressed in making peace work in the Mano River Region. Dr. Hena stressed that security must be comprehensive of the various apparatus to guarantee stability and peaceful co-existence.

The celebrations were accompanied by dramas, songs, paintings and an exhibition of African Noble Price for Peace and Right Livelihood Award laureates. The exhibition will find a permanent home in the Stella Maris College for Health Science, Monrovia, in the beginning of 2011.

EED visit to the Mano River Region

Christine Klusmann visits partners in Liberia and Sierra Leone



Christine Klusmann with participants at the Gender Mainstreaming Workshop in Monrovia.

Partners of the Church Development Services EED (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst) of Bonn, Germany, facilitated a fourteen-day mission of Christine Klusmann, officer-in-charge of Financial Support and Monitoring, Africa 1 Department. The mission covered partners' activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

While in Liberia, Mrs. Klusmann made a courtesy visit to the German embassy and performed the official opening of a five-day regional Gender Mainstreaming Training Course facilitated by eed's partners local support service - Management Enterprise Limited (MEL) of Accra, Ghana and Mrs. Ariane Gruszczynski from the EED consultancy desk in Bonn Germany. The training brought together 9 partner organizations from Liberia and Sierra Leone and emphasized understanding the concept of gender and working with a variety of tools for mainstreaming gender in partners organizations and their programmes.

Mrs. Klusmann held bilateral meetings with Liberian Partners including the New African Research and Development Agency (NARDA), Liberia Opportunities Industrialization Centers (LOIC), Lutheran Development Service (LDS), the Liberian Council of Churches,

(LCC) and the Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL) over the course of her stay in Liberia.

The Liberian mission was completed with field visits to Lofa, Bong, and Bassa counties to review on-going projects of the partner organizations.

Crossing the border from Liberia to Sierra Leone, the EED officer held discussions and visited several project sites in Bo and Mile 91 of eed partners operating in Southern Sierra Leone including the Sierra Leone Adult Education Association (SLADEA), the Sierra Leone Opportunity Industrialization Centers (SLOIC), the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) and CAUSE, Sierra Leone. Mrs. Klusmann also held bilateral discussions with the Christian Community Development Project (CCDP), a potential eed partner.

In Makeni, Ms. Klusmann was joined by Ms. Katharina Demel of Bread for the World. Both were apprised of Mankind Activities Development Accreditation Movement (MADAM) and SLADEA's training and education projects in the area. The mission was rounded up in Freetown with bilateral consultations between the eed Africa Desk 1 officer and the Sierra Leone Council of Churches (CCSL), the YWCA, the SLOIC and SLADEA.



Mrs. Klusmann at a meeting with partners in Sierra Leone.



On the road to the Liberian capitol building

The Liberian Threshold Bill

On the road to elections in Liberia

In 2008, about two years ago, the Liberian National Elections Commission submitted a Threshold bill to the National legislature based on the results of the 2008 National Population Census as a means of ensuring the balance of political power and representation in Liberia.

Two years later, in 2010, the Threshold Bill that was submitted was set-aside by the Liberian legislature and in its stead a joint resolution was signed by members of both houses of the Liberian Parliament and endorsed by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

As a direct reaction to this, group of Liberian Civil Society Organizations and Individuals decided to stand up and challenge the legitimacy of the actions of the executive and legislature, hence a petition was made to the Supreme Court by Cllr. Marcus Jones and over fif-

teen organizations on behalf of the wider Civil Society.

At its meeting in August 2010 at the secretariat of the New African Research and Development Agency (NARDA), the Civil Society Advisory Committee, an umbrella bringing together a wide range of Civil Society actors, discussed the recent developments of the Threshold Bill and the joint threshold resolution and determined that a common position and a united course of action as a Civil Society body was in order.

At a mass meeting of Civil Society organization held on Thursday, August 26, 2010 with over forty Monrovia based organizations attending, it was decided that instead of launching a parallel initiative alongside other Civil Society Organizations, the umbrella of the National Civil Society Advisory Committee

will support and join ongoing non-violent and legal efforts.

At the very same meeting, Civil Society decided to strengthen this peaceful course of action by garnering public understanding and support for this issue.

It was decided that during the course the following months massive civic awareness should be carried out as a means of helping the citizens to understand and appreciate the issue of the threshold especially in the light of the upcoming Liberian elections in 2011.

“We will continuously pursue those courses of action that are in the interest of the public, including educating the public and our officials of Government about their role and responsibility as we move forward towards

elections in 2011. Furthermore, we remain resolute in upholding the principles of democracy and constitutional rule, recognizing the constitution and its provisions as organic foundations for the conduct of public affairs and for promoting the principles of rule of law”, Lancedell Mathews, Executive Director of NARDA and currently chair of the Civil Society Advisory Committee said about the campaign.

Although the chances for the success of the campaign are not the best, taking into account that the resolution already has passed (see background information on p. 17), but the continuation of awareness raising among the Liberian society remains key to effectively inform about the developments in the Liberian electoral process.

Awareness raising is key

Timeline: The Liberian Threshold Resolution

The following document represents a timeline covering the events around the Liberian Threshold Bill and the so called Liberian Threshold Resolution. The timeline was reconstructed alongside key dates and based on a wide range of Liberian newspaper articles about the events.

Background

The current 64-member House of Representatives is based on the on-the-spot registration of voters and existing legislative representation quota in 2005. It was the best solution to give displaced Liberians and returning exiles, who could not return to their original places of abode, the opportunity to take part in the 2005 legislative and presidential elections.

As the result of that solution, Montserrado and neighboring counties, which were relatively safe for electoral activities, received lion's share of the house representatives, with nearly half of the representatives coming from Montserrado County alone.

The representation anomaly, plus the conduct of a population census in 2008 in keeping with Article 39, necessitated the review of the population-per-constituency ratio, thus prompting the introduction of the "Threshold Bill" by the Executive Branch of Government nearly two years ago.

The Threshold Bill is considered a key element to the holding the country's general and presidential elections in 2011. The process of passing the law goes on since 2008. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had vetoed and halted previous versions of the Threshold Bill. In 2010 the passing of the bill again triggered widespread discussion among Civil Society and the Liberian Government.

21.01.2010

Fear of losing legislative seats in the forthcoming general elections apparently gripped some senators from depopulated counties Wednesday when the much-delayed Threshold Bill was introduced on the floor for debate.

At long last, the Upper House of the National Legislature yesterday passed the bill once vetoed by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on grounds of its being unconstitutional.

The bill was reviewed by the House of Representatives and subsequently sent to the Senate for concurrence.

Some lawmakers, prior to the passage of the bill yesterday, apparently feared that their counties would lose seats against their parties' political and other interests.

28.01.2010

Discussion broke loose after the presidential office received the Threshold Bill and was "disappointed" (The Analyst) by the document. The discussion spread and resulted in both a massive delay and several attempts to stop the law from getting passed.

Since the representation only affected the House of Representatives, members of the Lower House vehemently resisted the bill from NEC and instead fought to cast the setting of a new threshold into oblivion. However, when that body could not see its way along that path, they at last settled for another option to accommodate the less populated counties.

As the days numbered, the Upper House (Senate) was drawn into the fray because the political tide was affecting them. As such, the Senate threw in its own dice making the threshold a coat of many colors. Every attempt by the lawmakers to hurry down the road was thwarted by the Executive with the President demanding a figure that will retain the original 64 seats. Thus she vetoed their threshold bill on account of 'no money to accommodate new representatives.'

07.05.2010

Following months of delay over the passage of the controversial Threshold Bill, the Supreme Court of Liberia on Wednesday, May 5, 2010, issued a 10-day ultimatum to the National Legislature to resolve its internal and external differences relating to the Bill.

23.07.2010

On July 23rd 2010 the "Liberian Forum" (www.liberianforum.com) concluded that with the Threshold Bill the Liberian officials were seeking to increase the number of Representatives from 64 to 86, with a combine total of 116 legislators in the post 2011 elected government of Liberia.

The Liberian National Elections Commission in keeping with its constitutional obligation submitted the electoral bill after preliminary results of the March 2008 National Housing and population census in Liberia, proposing a threshold of 45,000 per constituency, but the House reduced the number by 5,000 thereby creating rooms for more representation in the legislature.

In 2009, the 52nd National Legislature set the population threshold at 40,000. With the threshold set at 40,000, it means that

every 40,000 Liberians will be represented by one legislator in the 53rd legislature.

This indicates that a population of approximately 3,476,608 divided by 40,000 will result into producing 86 lawmakers in the House of Representatives and 30 senators (two each representing senior and junior) would come from the 15 political subdivisions of Liberia, which could lead to a combine total of 116 legislators in the post 2011 elected government of Liberia.

The Least populated counties including River Gee, Grand Kru and Bomi will lose seats while Montserrado (that carries nearly half of the country's population), Nimba, Bong and Lofa counties will get more representations.

Montserrado County would have been expected to get additional 14 seats in the House of Representatives meaning that the county then might have 28 Representatives in total beginning 2011.

On the same day the Plenary of the Liberian Senate has formally adopted a joint resolution to suspend provisions of the 2008 National Housing and Population Census that relate to the apportioning of a constituency threshold.

The senate voted 22 in favor to adopt the joint resolution, which is meant to amongst other things, trash out the contentions regarding the apportioning population threshold.

According to the compromise in the resolution, additional nine seats will be divided among the largest populated countries in the House of Representative to the existing 64 seats in the House of Representatives.

02.08.2010

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf signed into law this compromise Joint Resolution of the National Legislature reinforcing certain electoral districts and allowing for the creation of new ones, leaving the question of what happened to the larger Threshold Bill.

With the passage of the compromise resolution into law, according to Presidential Press Secretary Cyrus Badio, the National Elections Commission (NEC) would now proceed to design plans for the holding of the general and presidential elections due October 2011.

On the 2nd of August 2010 the President issued a statement that went out four days after she signed the Joint Resolution. It states: "It (the Threshold Bill) may not be the best document but certainly an instrument that can guide us toward an important exercise to sustain our democracy. The National Elections Commission can now begin the process leading to the holding of successful elections next year." (www.emansion.gov.lr)

The President called on all citizens, especially those who may share different opinions on this compromise to look at the greater picture and lend their support for a smooth and transparent process.

Among other measures, the Joint Resolution states that the sixty-four (64) Electoral Districts set up and used by the National Elections Commission (NEC) for the conduct of the 2005 Presidential and Legislative elections shall remain constant.

But for the purpose of the 2011 Presidential and Legislative Elections, each county shall retain the existing number of seats it has in the House of Representatives, except the countries of Grand Bassa, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado, Bong, and Nimba.

Accordingly, nine (9) additional electoral constituencies are hereby prescribed and established. The National Elections Commission (NEC) shall reapportion such additional constituencies herein prescribed to the counties specifically named in this Joint Resolution, based on a fraction of the percentage contribution of the current seats each of the counties herein named above to their total number of seats in the House of Representatives.

03.08.2010

As a direct reaction to the formal signing of the bill by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf a former President of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), Mr. Abraham G. Massaley, has announced that Liberians at home and in the United States have teamed up to challenge in the Supreme Court the constitutionality of the controversial Threshold Resolution.

He has also announced that they will file a petition for a Writ of Prohibition against the National Elections Commission (NEC) to bar the commission from re-apportioning constituencies under the so-called resolution, if the commission attempts to do so.

Mr. Massaley said the resolution is unconstitutional because it contravenes Article 80 d and e, and it seeks to deprive thousands of Liberians of approximately equal representation in the National Legislature as required by the constitution. Article 80 d of the Constitution states that "each constituency shall have an approximately equal population of 20,000, or such number of citizens as the legislature shall prescribe in keeping with population growth and movements as revealed by a national census; provided that the total number of electoral constituencies in the Republic shall not exceed one hundred."

Mr. Massaley said a key point in their argument is that the legislature failed to prescribe population threshold for each constituency consistent with the 2008 census result, as required under Article 80 d and e, but rather chose to arbitrarily dish out nine legislative seats without any constitutional basis.

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