

SSAAP Quarterly Newsletter

Special Edition XX, Sierra Leone

Winter 2017

“There is nothing small in Africa.”



.Welcome back to Sierra Leone.



This special edition is dedicated to Med Krack: my best friend in Salone; I Love you. You once told me that because of one man I loved an entire country. I think you might have been right.



Ebola Virus

The most pressing question on the lips of those interested to learn about Sierra Leone: *How is the nation, post-Ebola outbreak?*

Ebola began, according to most news sources, late January 2014, and ended in 2015. The State of Emergency in the nation was declared the last week of July 2014 via Emergency Announcement.

The Sierra Leoneans have much to say about Ebola – and will tell you all of their opinions, if you ask them!



Many hold true to their beliefs that Ebola was never really real – or that it was nothing more than a political ploy, used to bring money to the nation which would undoubtedly end up in the pockets of the president and his ministers.



While others lost family members, or the breadwinners of their families, or their babies, they are more reluctant to believe it was all a myth.

I have always had trouble extracting falsity from fairy tale, myth from mystic, truth from tyranny when it comes to news-related issues; the longer I live the more I have come to see there are not two sides to every story: there are an infinity of sides. The news and the media – specifically in Africa, are unreliable sources of ‘fact’, and for this reason I tend to believe more what the common man reports to me of his personal plight. I always take a person’s personal story as more accurate than books and news sources, and when I have the privilege of a one-to-one discussion with them, I realize this is the gift of oral communication. Regarding news sources, in the past I have even found inaccuracies in my most trusted news sources: BBC and Al Jazeera, when it comes to African news, primarily because their wo/man on the ground is sometimes African and thus carries a certain bias as s/he is too close to his/her nation to remain objective to it.



For this reason, I will indicate things that I firmly believe to be are fact, in relation to the Ebolavirus (EBOV):

1. There is no available vaccine for EBOV for the common man, such as for me and 99% of the people I interact with in Sierra Leone.
2. An Ebola vaccine is available; however, limited only for technical, trained healthcare professionals. They are controlled vaccines which were imported to Sierra Leone from France, U.S.A., and China.
3. Ebola was suddenly 'gone', even without a vaccine, from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. This is because the virus mutated and stopped killing human beings.
4. EBOV was the impetus for millions (even billions) of dollars to be donated to the nation, in the name of humanitarian aid dedicated to eradicating the deadly disease.
5. Very little of the funding went for its intended recipients: EBOV victims, survivors, and impacted family members. At one point, funding meant for Ebola survivors given by an international funding agency was not distributed to its beneficiaries. The Ebola survivors gathered in the center of Freetown, under our historical Cotton Tree, and protested the injustice. I do not know if, after this, the government gave the Ebola survivors the money that was earmarked for them. And I cannot find anything about this on the worldwide web. Again, it is local citizens' words to me; I have no internet or news source to back up this claim.



6. Ebola served as a weapon for many people in the rural areas. It was common during this time that someone with a personal vengeance against someone else could call the Ebola Team to the village, claiming his enemy was infected with Ebola (even if he had no known symptoms) and the local Ebola Team would remove the person from the premises, i.e. his home village.
7. Most citizens report to me that the short-lived Ebola term in Sierra Leone was worse, with a more concentrated magnitude of fear, than the 11-year civil war which was one of the worst genocides ever recorded in human history.



8. Many Sierra Leoneans (indigenous Africans, as well naturalized citizens) believe EBOV was a mythical disease created by their politicians in order to extract funds from Westernized nations.
9. The economy is at an all-time low. The currency conversion rate when I was last in Sierra Leone, during the Ebola outbreak in July 2014, was 3,300 Leones ~ \$1 USD. Today the rate is 7,400 Leones to one U.S. dollar. When I arrived in November 2016, it was 8,000 Le ~ \$1 USD. Serious inflation, and as with the economic crash in Zambia in 2016, the Sierra Leoneans are experiencing their own tragedy here. They cannot afford their own food or the cost of living. I would say suffering is at an all-time high.
10. Unemployment is also at an all-time high. I would estimate it to be above 80%.
11. Crime is heavier and more rampant than ever, specifically in Freetown, our capital city.
12. HIV rate increased from 10-15% (pre-Ebola Outbreak) to an alarming 25% (post-Ebola Outbreak). According to a friend who works with the HIV sect of Sierra Leone's Ministry of Health, this was due to people having too much time on their hands when the imposed curfew during the outbreak forced people off their fields and to stay at home with nothing to do for months on end.
13. Hunger is at an all-time high, due to shorter farming seasons (Global Warming), lack of seed/manpower due to the Ebola Outbreak, and lack of money to buy seeds/purchase food. There is a serious food shortage due to the farming seasons being shortened/nonexistent during the Ebola epidemic. Farmers were told not to go to their fields, and if they did so, their fellow community members would inform the police or local authorities. For this reason, as the harvest season is typically delayed following the sowing/harvest season, the lack of farming during the 2014/2015 Ebola outbreak is causing rampant starvation in the country for 2016 and 2017. There is a serious food scarcity now due to the outbreak.
14. And no, I do not regret coming back here ☺ I am incredibly happy to have returned. I have my work cut out for me more now than ever. But I have an undying loyalty to the country. I can thank my daughter, and all the incredible people I work with here for that.



The current state of affairs has taken a toll on the nation, emotionally and financially. A general feeling of hopelessness hangs in the air.

A Lebanese man told me he thought it was very strange that the internet exchange rate is approximately 5,400 Leones ~ \$1 USD, whereas within the country the exchange rate is 7,400 Le ~ \$1 USD. He pointed out to me that this doesn't make any sense, and that this is because there are many secrets kept by the government from the local people.

He is one of the owners of a cell phone company that was operating within the country pre-Ebola but did not leave the nation despite the outbreak. He sent his pregnant wife back to Lebanon and remained throughout the outbreak, insisting that almost 100% of investors left the country during the outbreak. He said that the cell phone companies (*Tigo, Africell, Airtel*) were the only companies left operating in the nation, and that this set the country back, easily, twenty years. It is anonymously agreed upon that the Ebola outbreak was a worse setback for this nation than was the eleven-year civil war.



Some scenes of our nation's capital, Freetown.



And while some blame the government, there are equally many who assert the civilians are to blame. They claim that the government represents them: government officials are hired to work for the people. Many say the civilians are equally to blame: *we contribute to what is happening here.*

Overall, eliminating blame from the equation, the people are devastated by the state of their nation; the foreigners, such as me, are universally heartbroken. Many of them have invested their money and their time/energy here; I have invested not only my energy but also my heart. I am committed to trying to uplift the spirit of one of the most incredible nations on the planet – and I will do it alone if I have to, as many people have stopped believing the country will ever be able to get out of its rut. But I am determined to do my personal best here – my commitment to SSAAP, to my daughter’s heritage, and to a nation that I solemnly believe has suffered more than anywhere else on the planet – or close to it.

In short, I don’t see a reason (other than a personal agenda, as many of the larger projects and government-funded agencies come to Africa with) to do anything else in Sierra Leone than work with the hunger/lack of water issues. This is the root cause of every single concern that plagues this country. The local people here are starving; they haven’t enough food to feed themselves and their families in a day. I think that this is what must be first addressed before any other sustainable program can be implemented (education-related, health-related, micro-business-related). Why work with anything else, when people don’t have food and water? Let’s begin with this as the base block before building anything else here. Anything sustainable must start after the people have been able to eat. Once people have food, they have elevated above poverty status. Otherwise, starvation and no water are the lowest denominator of human suffering on the planet. If we cannot help with this, even in a small capacity, then we – as a project and as a collective humanity – have failed.



Left: One of the most significant challenges Freetown faces is its waste disposal – or lack thereof. The layers of trash around the streets of the capital city look horrible, smell even worse, but the worst threat is far from its aesthetic. Rubbish polluting the streets is a contaminant and cause of widespread public health concern, airborne and waterborne disease. The government hired one company via private contract to clean up the city, and the Sierra Leoneans are irate. The contract should have been distributed among more than twenty companies, as the city is huge, and houses more than 469,000 people. Not to mention, the trash is an eyesore for the country.

Right: a late November rain washes the trash through an alley in the city. The trash, clogging the gutters throughout the city, cause frequent flooding when the heavy rains arrive (late April), and in some cases, children cannot attend school as the water is up to their thighs.



One of our favorite people in Freetown: Iris, age 80. She is half-Scottish, half-Sierra Leonean. All of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are in the U.K. and she says no matter what she tries to do, they refuse to come to Africa. But she can't stay away; she spends six months of the year in Britain and tells me the second week she is there she is already planning what she will eat when she comes back to Freetown. She is a scientist by profession. Once, Radiance and I stayed at her house in Freetown while she was in England with her children. Radiance called out to me: "Mama, is there a turtle under Iris's sink?" Indeed, there was a turtle under her sink, living in filthy water for the six months she was out of Africa. She has more than enough to say about the corruption in Sierra Leone, and says that now she is old she doesn't care if she dies as her life has been very complete, and that this cause of fighting for what she believes in is worthy of her death. She wants to protest on the street about the corruption in Sierra Leone, and that the money sent for Ebola went into the hands of the president and his ministers and that it ruined the nation, the challenge now being that people no longer have freedom of speech/opinion in the nation. People have been kept, by force, to be quiet. She says that the current state of her country is that it is finished, and in her life she has never seen Sierra Leone so devastated. She is crushed, as she (and I) believes the country deserves better than this.

Partners in the Project in Sierra Leone

All is not lost; all is never lost. Let me not entirely paint a bleak picture. In many ways, working in Sierra Leone is preferable to working in Zambia for me personally. The people are far more appreciative of the hand that is extended to meet theirs than in Zambia. Literacy and education are far more valued here than in Zambia, and the first university in West Africa was actually here in Freetown: Fourah Bay College, founded on 18 February 1827, is the oldest university in West Africa and the first western-style university built in West Africa. I find the Sierra Leoneans incredibly hard-working and tasks that take me five or six months to complete in Zambia take less than a month here. Whenever I come to Sierra Leone I am re-inspired for my project. New ideas seed themselves in my mind while I sleep. This country powerfully energizes me and reboots my electrical wiring, whereas Zambia keeps me restful, peaceful and healthy. I love both nations equally and differently, and am committed to serving them with my whole heart. I will work for them for the rest of my life, and that is my dream.



Mr. Musa T. Korpoi, Executive Director of Grace Children's Foundation (GCF), Moyamba District, Sierra Leone. Musa and I work hand-in-hand on all SSAAP/GCF projects, as mentioned in this newsletter. Besides being a very professional counterpart, Mr. Korpoi is also a dear friend and one of the most hard-working people I have ever met. He is a teacher by profession and well known throughout Moyamba and its surrounding districts. Thus, SSAAP and GCF work together on the Moyamba-sect of the SSAAP programs. Whenever Musa and I have meetings for SSAAP/GCF, other participants cannot keep up with us. Our minds are working a hundred miles a minute; he and I are always thinking on the same page as well. I have told him: "You and I better both live to be very, very old; because we are going to run out of time, again. I am leaving here in a few months, and we aren't going to get everything we want to get done finished. I think we should both just keep planning projects together for the rest of our lives because I'll serve this place until the day I die. I love this country." He laughed, and said with a smile: "Well, that is more than Love. So let's do it. Let's work!" One would be hard-pressed to find someone as intelligent and as clever as Musa, anywhere in the world. He is one in a billion.



Friend, professional ally, and partner in rural sustainable development, Mr. Musa has given SSAAP a home in Sierra Leone.

For me, what I am always impressed with in Sierra Leone is the lack of greed. People are gracious to begin a project for \$50. They will make a poultry farm from three initial birds, or start a fishing venture with an old boat and a few nets. The people bring a whole new meaning to the word ‘resourceful.’ Learning to be resourceful is one of the benefits of poverty. People here do so much with so little, which is another point of inspiration for me. SSAAP can make many projects with very little. The more people we can touch/serve, the more beneficial our time here has been.



In short, these people are warriors, strong survivors who have found a way to deal with intense hardship. They are very, very grateful for the humanitarian aid that SSAAP has brought to them.



Taylor Sorie Kamara, above right, with his oldest brother (age 58) in his family of nine children. Taylor is the GCF-Port Loko representative, with whom SSAAP works hand-in-hand. Mr. Taylor and I have parallel visions on how we believe rural development work should optimally serve the people and how our role, as the humanitarian aid organization, should operate to maximize resources, skills and success. A teacher as well as an agriculturalist by profession, Mr. Taylor is most concerned with animal-rearing projects and small-scale agricultural projects that SSAAP/GCF could do together for a few hundred dollars (\$100-\$200) to see people's enthusiasm and then watch the project grow over time. He believes that when people are hungry, the education in the country suffers, as does child-rearing, and healthcare. When people don't eat, they are easily angered and hot-tempered, especially in an environment as humid as Sierra Leone. For this reason, he says if you have food you have eliminated poverty. With an agricultural bent to every philosophy he has, he strongly believes food is the way out of this nation's obscene poverty.



GCF-Port Loko / SSAAP Team with our families.

SSAAP has incredible counterparts in both Moyamba and Sierra Leone (Mr. Musa and Mr. Taylor), thanks to the Founder of Grace Children's Foundation, Mr. Joseph Sawyer, pictured below with an orphan child he brought up from childhood, sponsored to school, and is now almost finished with her school.



Water

SSAAP's contract with Mr. Sam Amara & Co., signed in May 2014 to complete five wells, is now being satisfied by March 15, 2017. In Sierra Leone, the well-digging/well-drilling season takes place just before the first rains are expected after Independence Day: April 27th. The months of January, February and March are especially utilized for well-making. Mr. Sam and his crew began digging the wells two days after the new year. His crew consists of five men per well, and they begin the wells in three-cycles: once in January, and the men dig until they hit the water table. They leave the well, then return again mid-February, and dig further until they find water. Leaving the well once more, they return mid-March to complete the well and lay the cement at the base of the well, and at its opening at the top.

Each well is approximately 60 meters in depth, and each is hand-dug by Mr. Sam's crew.

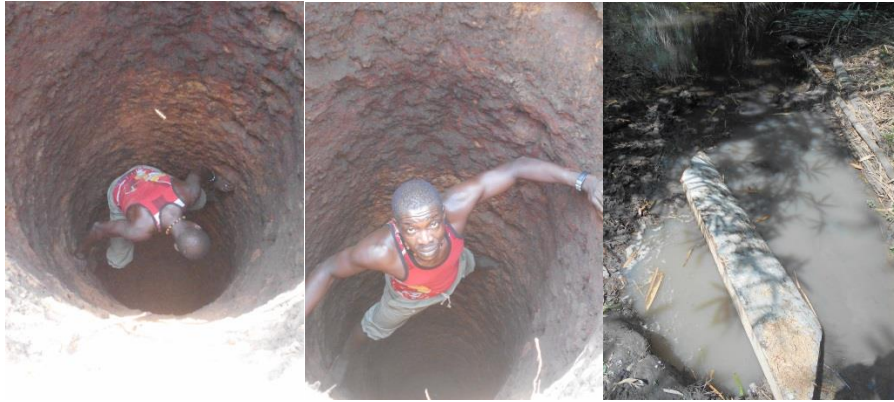
In 2017, we are drilling wells for the following communities within Agieboya Section, Fakunya Chiefdom, Moyamba District:

1. Gibina Village



Gibina Village well, drilling began on January 2, 2017. Well is currently 12 meters deep, and will be complete by March 15, 2017. Center: current water source, contaminated for human consumption as an ecosystem exists within it. The water stream will dry late February and will not collect water again until July. Right: Mr. Sam & Co. worker going down to dig the hole further.

2. Gbokuma Village



Gbokuma Village: left and center: Mr. Sam & Co. going into the well to demonstrate how the men climb into/out of the well. This particular area has a metamorphic rock layer at 7 meters down that the diggers attempted to penetrate with fire (placing burning logs inside the hole) in an effort to combust and separate the rock, but their efforts were in vain. Apparently, digging and finding a rock that cannot be exploded in this manner is quite rare, and happens only 5% of the time, so it was an unexpected discovery for Mr. Sam. A new hole was begun on 18 January 2017 in Gbokuma village, dug by Mr. Sam's Team.



These men bring a new idea to the concept of hard work! The sun alone is something to battle with here, not to mention the soil. I have undying respect for them. The Gbokuma well is expected to finish with the other four, by 15 March 2017. Below, right, the village presented us with gifts for assisting them: two variations of sweet potatoes and yams.





Left: the women of Gbokuma Village singing their thanks and praises to our team for giving them clean water. Right: Musa and Mr. Sam teach Heather about the local rocks and why it would be a bad idea (my idea) for them to dig a well too close to the water source.

3. Ile Village



Ile Village (above), well below (left), 12 ½ meters deep. Right: current water source. This water dries in February, and begins to flow again late June/early July.



Musa snapped this photo of Ile Chief Allhaji Omoro Bangali (left), Radiance (my daughter), our contractor Mr. Sam (right) and I, enjoying the day monitoring the wells and having more than fun seeing the progression of the wells and eating the local village food.



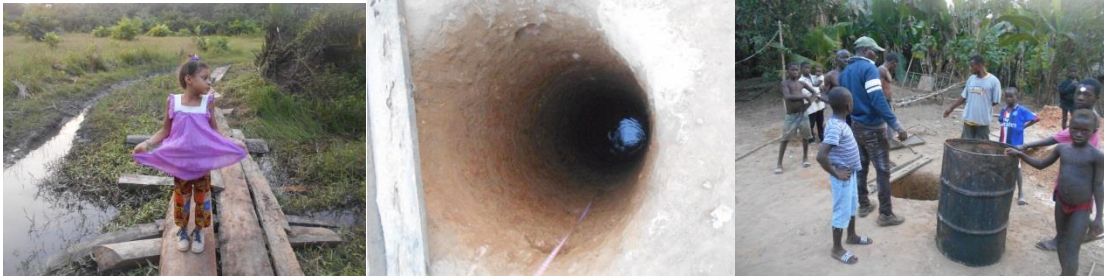
4. Mokoyoh Village



Local village women greet us in song as we arrive in the village. Water well is currently 12 ½ meters, and the water is plentiful (left). Current water source, which is dry from February to June/July. Sometimes it is dry for longer than that, and the people of Mokoyoh Village must walk 5+ km to fetch muddy water (for drinking, bathing, laundering, cooking).



5. Nyandehun-Nichol Village



The most successful of all five wells, the Nyandehun-Nichol Village well at only 8 meters yielded the entire drum of water shown in the photo (far right). (Far left), the community's current water source. It is muddy water at best, and at worst, a dried mud-hole.

Each well will be dedicated, on March 15, 2017, to the family in America who gifted the wells to Fakunya Chiefdom. A plaque, engraved with the family's name, will be put into the wet cement and will dry there, so that over time the dedication will be more pronounced upon the surface of the well.

SSAAP currently has funding for three wells to be drilled in the future in Sierra Leone. SSAAP expects to return to Sierra Leone in 2018 or 2019 (time-frame still unknown). We plan to drill one well within Moyamba District, for GCF (as they are currently drinking dirty water), and the other two wells we are planning for called Timdale Chiefdom in Bembellor Section. There are 6 villages there, all located within 1.5-3 miles from one another:

1. Upper Bembellor Village (Section Headquarter Village): approx. 200 inhabitants
2. Lower Bembellor Village: approx. 100 people
3. Sangla Village: approx. 60 people
4. Mosorie Village: approx. 50 people
5. Barbo Village: approx. 40 people
6. Mokovandi Village ('Fakai' Village, meaning 2-3 villages put together in one space, so a good area to drill a well): approx. 230-235 people

SSAAP and GCF are both extremely thankful to the donor family for the wells for Sierra Leone in 2017, and thank in advance the donor(s) who contribute to the wells for the future in Sierra Leone.

School Sponsorship Program

In Zambia, SSAAP sponsored 14 primary students to go to school in the August 2015 – May 2016 school season (Zambian school system runs on the same calendar as American school systems, and has three terms). SSAAP always requests photos of sponsored students wearing school uniforms, receipts from the school for both the uniforms and the school fees,

attendance reports and report cards (to verify that the student is taking the opportunity seriously), and a letter thanking the donor for the opportunity from the student – written in either ciTonga (Zambia), Krio (Sierra Leone), Mende (Sierra Leone), Temne (Sierra Leone), or English (International).

SSAAP sponsored 3 primary-aged students in Zambia for the August 2016 – May 2017 school year, and will sponsor 27 more primary students for the August 2017 – May 2018 school year when we return to Zambia in June 2017.

In Sierra Leone, the school year runs by the calendar: January – December. SSAAP is proud to announce its sponsorship of 50 students in the January 2017 – December 2017 school year! The sponsorships are as follows: 15 primary students in Manjendu Village, 15 primary students in Korgbortuma Village, ten primary students in Makobah and Minthomo Villages and 10 JSS or Junior Secondary School girls (grades 7 & 8) from Njagbahun Village. Many different individuals/families/groups contributed to the SSAAP-Sierra Leone sponsorships in 2017 and we thank you wholeheartedly.

A few of the sponsored students are shown below, from one of the five schools participating in the SSAAP Sponsorship Sierra Leone 2017 program.

Gbomuma Junior Secondary School (JSS):

Njagbahun Village, Fakunya Chiefdom, Kunyafoi Section, Moyamba District



Zainab H. Koroma

Kadiatu Lebbie

Nancy Makondor



Abu-BakarrThullah

Omoru T. Foruah

Julius K. Korgbow

As well, the participating village schools (Manjendu, Korgbortuma, Njagbahun, and Makoba) would like to make local gifts for the donors for the sponsorship program. I have no idea what to expect, as I told the schools nothing perishable and nothing too large or heavy, since I have to carry the gifts back to America. I am touched that they want to reach out to the Americans who have given their village these opportunities.

Sponsoring a student helps many more people than merely the student. Sponsorship helps the school, the school teacher (often times the teachers are unpaid), and the village at-large to develop when more of its citizens are educated.

What a gift! It's the gift of hope for the future. We cannot thank you enough!



A vast number of Sierra Leoneans never have the opportunity to become educated citizens. Unlike in America and the UK/Europe, where scholarships are available as are countless opportunities in higher educational institutes, very little to nothing like this exists here. Most people leave school due to lack of funding for school fees, or because of early pregnancies for girls. As well, many of them are forced into child marriages or child slavery – both during wartimes and even in times without war, as many of the children are servants to the people they are living with and their domestic chores are too many to attend school. For a variety of reasons, education in Sierra Leone is more than an opportunity – it is a future and light at the end of a tunnel for them. Above, this woman runs a small shop on the side of the main road in Moyamba Town. I am her customer and she has shared with me that she finished grade 6 and her husband, grade 8. Selling small candies and chips for the equivalent of 20 cents or 40 cents on the side of the road has afforded them food in which to feed their family (5 children, 3 dependents, and 4 orphaned children from extended family they are supporting).

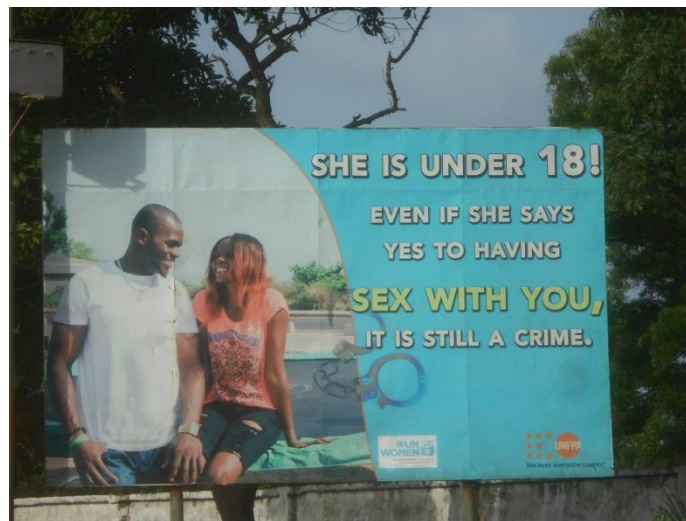
Programs Investing in the Strength, Talent, and Beauty of Women



Women's Rights:

- 1) Women's Rights are so much more than Western women teaching African women that they "are equal to men." This is over-simplified and cliché, as well a conclusion which is an obvious conclusion of both science and research.
- 2) The Women's Movement in Africa begins with the women themselves, and their desire to be independent. Many of the women are too afraid to be independent because they have depended upon men for so long they cannot imagine their society functioning any other way. Many are not open-minded to changing this dynamic within their society, even if it would benefit them in the long term.
- 3) Women must learn to respect themselves, and value and cherish their sacred bodies. This is a long road that may take centuries in Africa (and the world at-large!), but in Africa where direct prostitution and indirect prostitution (i.e. multiple 'boyfriends' who provide a woman's child with food in exchange for sex) is rampant. Additionally, 'commercial love,' i.e. marriage or using men for money or what they can provide is a deep root of African culture. Many of my male African friends have discussed with me that their wives left them for a man with more money. Money and Love are not one, and again this is a slow learning curve that Africa faces.
- 4) Development is in the mind before it can be part of the material realm. We develop by surrounding ourselves with people who are different than us, or who have differing opinions and learning to love them anyhow. The mentality of African women must change before their circumstances ever will.

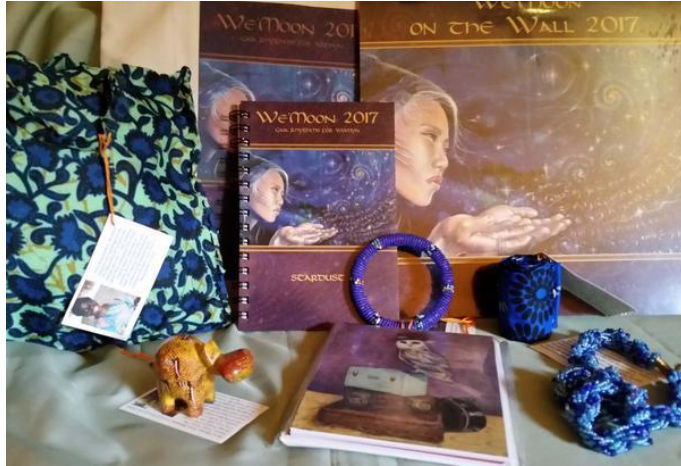
- 5) Love is a cultural experience and a specific bi-product of a world culture. In Africa, economics play a role in choosing a romantic partner. Women are usually completely financially dependent upon their men. Exceptions are rare. The relationships here (romantically) have little to do with love, and more to do with support/economic stability. I have come to see true unconditional romantic love as cultural, and a privilege of the developed world.
- 6) Most women in Africa cannot dream. They are too abused, and their lives are too painful. They are trying to survive. They see 'dreaming' as frivolity.
- 7) In Africa, historically, there is a system whereby women are dependent on their husbands, then at some point, their sons, even sons-in-law.
- 8) What came first: the chicken or the egg? Are the women dependent upon the men because the men have dis-abled them, or are they so used to men being the providers that the foundation of their culture would shake if the idea was introduced to them that they could survive without a man supporting them?
- 9) Even working women earning money in cities and towns are dependent upon their husbands: many times they use their salaries on hair extensions/hair weaves or designer shoes or clothing while the men are the ones supporting the children to go to school or are paying the rent for the house in town; there is a reliance on men to provide for the family, as opposed to the women, that needs to be confronted before the women can rise in their society and be valued the way they deserve to be. It has to come from their indigenous heart, not the concepts of the West, but they must rise from their own concept of what 'freedom' means to them – not what it means in the West.



The Western countries (specifically the U.S. and the U.K.) helped Sierra Leone re-write its constitution in 1991. The ideals are there in print, but not in practice. As well, many of the large humanitarian groups working in the nation, such as UNICEF, Save the Children, or even the UN, print signs such as this above. The signs and the laws that promote women's independence and freedom are there, but they are not practiced, as poverty plays a stronger role in the people's lives here than does justice and equality. Many young girls (aged 15 or 16) marry men in their 50's or 60's and the marriage is well-approved of by the girl's parents as the man will then help to support them through supporting their daughter.

We'Moon Partnership:

The We'Moon staff of Wolf Creek, Oregon worked with SSAAP in 2016 to give income-generation activities to underprivileged women in Simwatachela, Zambia. They ordered 100 pieces in total: 50 from Simwatachela Women's Association, 50 pieces from Shungu Women's Club of Mukuni Village. Please see the ad below for their Winter Solstice Packages.



Solstice Package Deals are here!

The tradition of gift giving at Winter Solstice arose to help keep our hearts' fires burning through the long, cold winter. We have created some very special Package Deals, some include a special surprise gift, and all ship for FREE in the U.S.

*

The packages sold out in less than two weeks! The We'Moon ordered another 150 pieces of local art for the 2017 calendar year, and this year, Sierra Leonean women will be involved (Gondama and Manjendu Villages, as well Maforki Chiefdom in rural Port Loko). Local soap (soda soap and African Black Soap [medicinal] made in Manjendu Village), as well as 50 crafts will come from the rural Moyamba and the rural Port Loko areas in Sierra Leone where SSAAP serves. As well, 100 pieces from Zambia (Simwatachela and Mukuni areas) will be ordered from local women. Thank you, We'Moon, for encouraging and inspiring women in rural Africa to be artists!



In addition to this income-generating venture, the women are also given a crafting project through We'Moon; old editions of We'Moon will be sent to Africa so that the women can hold meetings and cut apart the old journals to make collages of their dreams, inspirations, and feelings through looking at art in the journals. Everyone deserves dreams, and it seems unjust that the women in Africa – due to poverty – might be deprived of theirs. SSAAP's Secretary will be visiting Zambia from August-October 2017 and will be working with the Zambian women on this Envisioning Dreams project.

The We'Moon have not stopped at this! Besides being one of SSAAP's only partners to warrior into Sierra Leone, they are working with SSAAP on FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) issues.

Provided below is a brief historical background of the traditional process of women coming of age in Sierra Leone:



This is the Bondo Devil. The Bondo Society, begun by Madame Yoko (yes, a woman) in the early 1900's, I believe. Madame Yoko started the society to initiate young girls into womanhood, to teach them how to do domestic chores, how to please the men, and how to behave as good women in the society. The initiations, a century ago, lasted for 3-6 months in which the girls were taken to the bush (African wilderness void of civilization) and ate 'secret things' to stay alive, and were not seen by their families/communities for the duration of time spent in the "Bondo Bush" as they call it: a makeshift cabin in the middle of the bush where all the girls slept/ate/circumcisions and teachings took place.

Being an initiate of the Bondo Society is considered a huge honor in the society at-large and among the Bondo women especially. The girls/young women want to belong to the society, to be accepted, and to be fit for marriage. The idea of *not* participating is unthinkable to them.



All the initiates cover their faces with white powder, to show their participation in the society.



The girls dance in traditional raffia skirts to celebrate after they have been initiated. I was lucky enough to attend this ceremony in the village (and they let me take photos!!!), and I can attest to the joy that these young women had to be initiated into the society.



The initiation into the Bondo Society is very expensive for Sierra Leoneans. It costs 30,000 Leones, approximately \$4.29 using the current exchange rate. Just to give you an idea: a full year of school fees + school uniform for a primary school child is 45,000 Le, so sometimes this initiation takes the place of the child's school attendance for the year.

For poorer families, the girls are initiated at ages 6, 7, 8 (under 10). Why? Because initiation into the society costs the family 30,000 Leones + new clothing, a bag, and shoes for the girl. She wants to look nice after the initiation. So, for younger girls (age 6, 7, 8) they haven't that understanding of 'looking good in new clothes' and so they don't ask for the things that an older girl (age 16, 17 or 18) being initiated into the society would ask for. So, to save money, the family often times initiates very young girls because it is cheaper to do it when they are small than when they are older.



The ceremony I attended was in Manjendu Village, in the south of Sierra Leone, outside of Moyamba. This is Mendeland, meaning that the Mende tribe dominates this region of Sierra Leone. As Madame Yoko was from Moyamba and a Mende lady herself, the Mendes take this Society incredibly seriously and view it as a part of their culture they will never, ever forsake.

They see it that this is how their culture adheres together and unites. And because Mme. Yoko was a Mende woman, they see it as their obligation to continue her tradition of initiation.

I was informed the best hope of working with FGM I would have in Mendeland would be to work with the female school teacher in Manjendu Village who speaks English. I had a meeting with her on Sunday 15th January about the issue.



The English schoolteacher, Gbassay Savalie, thought that the Girls' Club would be wonderful: we decided to eat, talk about female reproductive issues and even about issues with sexuality, and make art collages. I suggested we also talk about keeping the body clean, hygiene, and not depending on men for survival and our life's happiness. She offered to cook the food for the Girls' Club and our first meeting will be held at the school on Saturday Feb. 11th. No males are allowed, is the only requirement. The club will be 15 girls, plus she and I and my daughter.

The most challenging part – ironically also the most rewarding aspect – of my work is blending the Western culture with Africa. I believe most of the foreign aid organizations, specifically in Africa, fail to do this. But you cannot simply cut-and-paste the West into Africa: it doesn't work that way. The people have to develop trust and Love is a huge factor in working together in harmony in Africa. Sometimes building trust can take a decade. Things are slow in Africa, but they are sure. America tends to be fast and not always effective in their haste; important details are at times overlooked. In Africa, things take a long time, but when they are here, they are here to stay. Things in Africa are sometimes infant-steps. So....if we can educate girls on reproductive health, and living for something higher/deeper/more sustainable than men, we have done milestones.

For the Port Loko aspect of the project, I am working with SSAAP's counterpart Grace Children's Foundation (GCF) – Port Loko, Taylor Sorie Kamara and Joseph Sawyer.

I am told that SSAAP's other location in Sierra Leone, Port Loko, in the north of Sierra Leone, home of the Temne tribe, is much more flexible when it comes to FGM than the Mende tribe and want to learn more about the dangers of the practice.

Together with Joseph Sawyer, GCF-Port Loko's Taylor Sorie Kamara has already conducted many FGM educational workshops in the villages surrounding the Port Loko District. They are encouraging SSAAP to work with them in Makoro Village, rural Port Loko, to host educational workshops. We will travel to the village by the first week of February, and will organize for an educational training with 10 village stakeholders of Mayepoh Village about female reproductive health (5 women and 5 men). We want to keep the meeting small, as people tend to be less shy in a smaller group than a larger one, and discuss basic sanitation and hygiene concerning women's reproductive health, as well as why we should value women in our society: they are creating our families. They are the keepers of our families and bear the pain of reproduction. If you don't have strong, healthy women, then you don't have healthy babies or babies at all. We must value and take care of women. They are the multi-taskers, the mothers, the emotional heart and the persistent wisdom of our societies. We must no longer take them for granted.



Left: Meeting with Mayepoh Village on February 3rd to discuss the Women's Reproductive Health/FGM meeting in March 2017. Right: This child was literally abandoned in Mayepoh Village; his mother is mentally ill and ran away while he was nursing. Please note his diaper made out of a black plastic bag.

Thus the Port Loko aspect of the SSAAP/We'Moon FGM initiative is quite different than the Moyamba aspect, based on the differences between the Mende and Temne tribes. The Temnes don't see the Bondo Society as an inherent part of their tradition as the Mendes do, probably because the Bondo Society began in Moyamba.

To summarize, we are working with both regions/tribes but working with them differently and tailoring the program to their individual needs.

We'Moon womyn, thank you for working with SSAAP on such a monumental venture – in all of our lives.



Apothecary Project:

SSAAP is working in 2017 (both in Zambia and Sierra Leone) to employ women to sew small purses ranging in size in two different styles to hold essential oils. The apothecary we are working with is a personal friend as well as someone who works with aromatherapy extensively. SSAAP is promoting rural village women to sew small purses as well as a few professional tailors in both Zambia and Sierra Leone, so as to provide different cultures with the art experience for these small purses. We will have the first set done by Mother's Day 2017 and the second set done by the Holidays 2017. Thanks, Kim, for this opportunity!



The women working with the Apothecary project in Port Loko, Sierra Leone representing its surrounding villages.

Traditional Herbs Program

SSAAP is also working with an herbalist in Oregon to link traditional African medicine and medicine men in our village area (Mende tribe, Sierra Leone) and indigenous cures for many illnesses as an ancient practice connected to healing common ailments such as:

- Cramping related to menstrual cycles
- Headache
- Backache
- Malaria
- Post-childbirth trauma
- Skin irritations/boils/rashes



The traditional African medicine man SSAAP is working with, Samuel Blango, is from Nyandehun Village. He is holding gbelui in his left hand, which is crushed and then used to make tea to treat malaria, and the vapors from the plant are also put under the nose of a malaria patient. In his right hand he holds kumulie, which is also used to make tea from its leaves and given to a woman whose menstrual cycle is late in an effort to help regulate her cycle. The herbal names are in Mende.

As well as more uncommon ailments such as:

- Mental delirium due to malaria over an extended period of time
- African Sleeping Sickness
- River Blindness
- Frequent nightmares
- Witchcraft



A lesson for SSAAP from Medicine Man Samuel Blango.

I would like to add that as every culture has its own adaptation of witchcraft, in Africa it is especially prevalent and used more often in rural areas than urban areas as a form of revenge or a fear tactic. In Zambia we have very specific laws forbidding witchcraft; I am unaware of whether any laws regarding witchcraft exist in Sierra Leone. *What you believe in is what holds power over you*, I was taught growing up. The Africans believe deeply in witchcraft and this has little or no link to education. Some of the most educated and well-traveled Africans I have met both in the States and in Africa believe deeply in witchcraft and/or have been victims of it, so it must be woven into the tapestry of the culture – and is an important piece of the culture. Witchcraft to an African could be compared to science to an American: something so heavily-embedded within the culture and a person’s belief system that one cannot separate oneself from it. America is a science-based nation, just as Africa is ancestry-based, and some of the superstition surrounding witchcraft is tied to deceased elders within the respective communities.

SSAAP looks forward to this venture with both its Mende counterparts as well as the healer we are working with in Oregon. Thank you for this educational and empowerment opportunity!



Art

The prolonged and immense hardship in Sierra Leone has yielded astonishing art, be it jewelry, paintings, wooden carvings, furniture, even art on metal sheets along the side of the road (above). For those of you who consider this to be art [I do] then Sierra Leone is a wonderland for an artist.

Music may be the most prevalent form of art in Sierra Leone. Day, mid-day, evening, midnight, 3 a.m. – there is always music blaring somewhere. In my observations, Sierra

Leoneans cannot live without music. It is their heartbeat, their lifeblood. Years ago, a friend of mine told me that music was a distraction from the pain of people's lives, and so that was why his people were addicted to music: *it helps them stay alive*, he said.

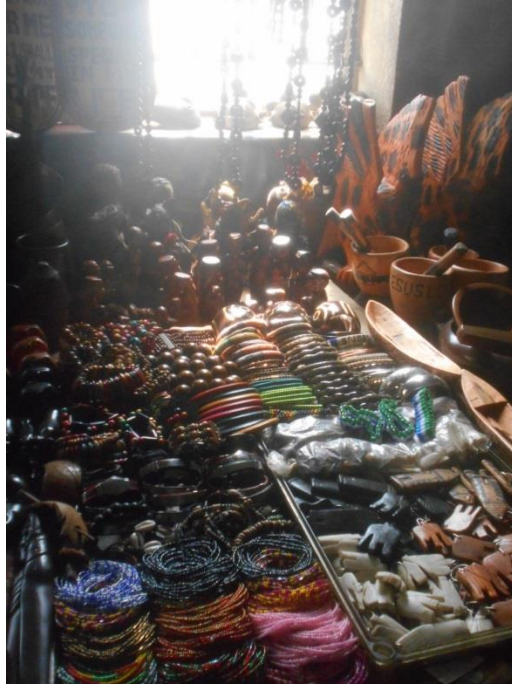


Traditional West African woodcarvings. Right: a Temne Moon Mask, because it is in the shape of a full moon.



SSAAP works with artisans both in Freetown, as well as in the Provinces and surrounding rural areas of Moyamba and Port Loko. At Bik Markit (*'Big Market'*) on Lightfoot Boston Street, downtown Freetown, is a gathering of artists who have come together to sell their art. Balu Kargbo (above, left) works with artists in Guinea to weave baskets (left, above); Umaru Abu Bakarr is a traditional mask carver and works with various artisans in different parts of Sierra Leone, representing diverse tribes, selling their art at his shop in Bik Markit.

SSAAP is additionally working with female artisans in Manjendu and Gondama Villages to make crafts for the We'Moon project, as well as local soap, and to sell the pouches for the Apothecary mentioned previously in the newsletter.



SSAAP sells its art during fundraisers in America in both Colorado and Ohio. Years when Heather is in the country, SSAAP has a booth at the World Gift Market in Littleton, Colorado, as well as a spring fundraiser at the International House on University of Denver's campus. Please stay posted for upcoming fundraising events hosted by SSAAP in America.



SSAAP meeting with Gondama Village Chief, Daniel S. Harding, over the village women's art initiative.

Solar Lights Program

Donated generously by Nokero in Denver, Colorado, twenty solar lights will be distributed to Manjendu Village, in rural Moyamba, as well as in Tasso Island, rural Port Loko.

The lights are distributed specifically to schools, clinics, health centers, or areas where the concentration of Junior Secondary School and Senior Secondary Students is greatest, so that they may have light in which to study once it becomes dark outside. One light was given to a shopkeeper to keep her shop, as well as the shops surrounding hers, light after the sun of the day sinks. SSAAP ensures that the lights will be used by more than one family (a community), and that each person who applies for a light via application form will have his/her case looked at individually or collectively as a school, clinic, or gathering place in which the light can be used.

The recipient community of each light will be required to write two or three reports for 2017, discussing how they used the light, how the light served the community, and how the light has improved conditions in the community. As well, each beneficiary of a solar light will be photographed with the light.

Many, many thanks to SSAAP's partners at Nokero. The lights are fantastic! They are exactly what we need in Africa: rather than battling with the penetrating sun, let's utilize it!



Left: The first of the solar lights was given to a community in Accra, Ghana when SSAAP traveled from Zambia to Sierra Leone. The beneficiary explained to me that the electricity doesn't always work and/or isn't necessarily bright enough to use late into the night. The Nokero light needs only to charge for a few hours and will provide light throughout the night. Right: Jemimah Sawyer Fofonah and her daughter Favour of Port Loko, Sierra Leone are overjoyed to receive the light, which will keep their small business on the street (as well as other businesses on the same strip) lit after the sun goes down at night.

Eyewear Program / Sunglasses for Ebola Survivors

The Ebola Survivors Relief Program in Sierra Leone is divided into two programs: eyewear (specifically sunglasses for Uveitis patients), and through the food relief program SSAAP offers. SSAAP has over fifteen pairs of eyewear to distribute to the rural areas of Moyamba:

- Manjendu Village
- Kentimawa Village
- Njagbahun Village

The recipients of eyewear are required, as with the solar light project, to write three reports for 2017, discussing how the eyewear improved the quality of their lives. As well, each beneficiary of a pair of eyewear will be photographed with the glasses.

Many thanks to those who have supported the eyewear program and donated eyewear to SSAAP. If you have glasses or sunglasses you are not using, and would like to donate them to SSAAP (in-kind donation receipt form available via SSAAP Secretary Gail), then please contact us. We appreciate any eyewear which no longer serves you.

Food Relief for Rural Ebola Survivors and Victims’ Families Program

The second branch of the Ebola Survivors Relief Program in Sierra Leone is through the food relief program SSAAP offers. SSAAP has approximately thirty packets of non-perishable rice, soya and vegetable dried food, feeding approximately a family of six, which will be shared with communities affected most adversely in the rural areas surrounding Manjendu Village, rural Moyamba.

SSAAP works hand-in-hand with the ABC Food program in Westerville, Ohio to supply relief food to Ebola-stricken areas and hopes to continue this program until the regions are self-sufficient and no longer relying on relief food.

Each recipient community has written a letter of thanks to the ABC food program in Ohio.

SSAAP wants to thank you for being our partner in Sierra Leone. *Thank you.* It’s better work when we do it together – and then it is fun as well 😊

'Tawopaneh' Animal Project

The animal project, funded in 2015 and specific to Sierra Leonean beneficiaries, will be implemented in February 2017 in the rural community of Maisambo Village in Port Loko. 'Tawopaneh' means 'let us move together' or 'teamwork' in Temne.

I apologize for the delay from when the gift was received in 2015 to the date when it will be utilized: February 2017. The gift to start an animal rearing project will be used to buy:

- Three female goats (200,000 Leones each)
- One male goat (150,000 Leones)

The community of Maisambo, approximately 455 population, will contribute the vaccines, vitamins, antibiotics and hiring a vet officer to check on the animals from time-to-time. As well, the community will provide the shelter, and the food and water for the animals.



Many people gathered for the goat project meeting at Maisambo Village (January 30, 2017).

Many thanks to the donor and her family who supported this project. Photos, reports, and receipts for the animals will be collected and provided to you. Thank you again.

Duck Project

The duck program in Banthron Village (population over 100 people) are beginning a duck program. The birds, as well as their eggs, will be reared, and some of them sold at the Bumoi-Luma Market, approximately 10 kilometers from the village. The market is a center of commerce and trade from nearby Conakry, Guinea (Port Loko District is near to Guinea), as

well as Banjul, the Gambia. The market is an international market for West Africa, and those selling their goods come from Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, even Burkina Faso.

We look forward to seeing Banthron Village’s work materialize on the duck project!

Banthron Village				
Number	ITEMS	QUANTITY	UNITY COST	TOTAL COST In Leones
1	Cements	3 (Three) Bags	Le 50,000	150,000
2	Sand	3 (Three) Bags	Community	Community
3	Sticks	3 (Three) Bages	Le 15,000	45,000
4	Grass for Roof	10 (Ten) Bundles	Le 10,000	100,000
5	Labour	Community	Community	Community
6	Food for feed	1 (one) Bag Bulgore	Le 150,000	150,000
7	Ducks	6 (six) ducks	Le 50,000	300,000
				745,000
Seven Hundred and Forty five Thousand Leones Total Amount 745,000				

“A Lot with a Little”: Banthron Village’s proposal for the Duck Project scarcely exceeds \$100 USD. SSAAP will fund \$80-\$85 of it and then allow the community’s resourcefulness to gather the rest.



Left: Banthron Village Duck Project meeting on January 30, 2017 with SSAAP/GCF-Port Loko. Right: SSAAP meeting with Banthron Village on 3 February 2017 to give the funding for the Duck Project. SSAAP funded 700,000 Leones (~\$100) of the 745,000 Le their proposal requested.

Fisher Folk Women’s Initiative

Due to high demand, SSAAP will begin a fish preservation and marketing project for fisher folk women in Timdale Chiefdom, rural Moyamba District.

Timdale Chiefdom is located near the sea. It was devastated from the Ebola Outbreak. Although it has the resource of the sea, it is impoverished due to Ebola, as well due to lack of capital for a startup project. Working together with local partner GCF, SSAAP will begin the

fisher folk project in late February/early March 2017. The village is approximately 35 miles from Moyamba town, and is called Tindale Chiefdom, in Bembellor Section. There are 6 villages there, all located within 1.5-3 miles from one another. For less than \$250 USD, SSAAP will work with the Fisher Folk Project to provide nets for fishing, hiring of a fishing boat (initially, before the Fisher Folk Project can afford its own fishing boat), lining rolls for the fishing nets. The community will contribute stone, granite, sand, bricks, block, and labor to construct an area to use to dry the fish, and in time, to keep fresh fish once the project can afford a generator (source of electricity) and a freezer.

More updates and photos to come on the Fisher Folk Project. The project will be run and organized primarily by woman, as Mr. Musa Korpoi points out: “We want this project to move quickly. If you want something done well, and done quickly, always involve women in it.” A few men will do the fishing, and the rest of the project (organizing and sorting fish, selling fish, book-keeping) will be done by the women, so this project acts as a women’s initiative project, as well as an income-generating activity for the community-at-large.

We also hope to initiate another Fisher Folk Project in Mambolo Chiefdom in the future (2018 or 2019).

Sanitation and Hygiene Workshops

When I arrived back in Moyamba, after not having been here for 2 ½ years, I visited Njagbahun School, where SSAAP sponsored teenaged mothers in 2014, and will sponsor JSS girls in 2017. The Headmaster of the school greeted me with a hug.

“I couldn’t believe it,” he said. “The Sanitation and Hygiene workshop you provided to the community in 2014, in May and June, directly helped us overcome the Ebola Outbreak.”

I was speechless. When I managed to ask him how something I did had helped an issue with the magnitude of Ebola, he smiled. “You taught us to wash our hands. With soap, without soap, with dirt, with ash from a fire. Most of the people you trained talked about your workshop for months after it was over. The workshop was perfectly aligned with the Ebola Outbreak, and teaching us to wash our hands was the center of what we needed to know in order to fight Ebola. How did you know?”

These are the moments I live for.

After this conversation with the Headmaster of Njagbahun Village, GCF will work with SSAAP on a series of Sanitation and Hygiene Workshops in the Njagbahun area for 2017 (at least 2-3 more workshops). Our first workshop is scheduled for February 10, 2017 in Njagbahun Village.

School Gardens

SSAAP visited the Port Loko region of its project January 27-30, 2017. The School Garden project, located in Makobah Village, Bureh Kasseh Maconteh (BKM) Chiefdom, Mabombo Section, assists the village's school in providing produce to the children, as well to pay in-kind salaries to the school teachers.

The project began in March/April 2014, with five hoes, five shovels, and five cutlasses SSAAP provided (approx. \$200) and 200,000 Leones (~\$29) spent on seed and roots of vegetables to reproduce.

The garden is now actively growing cassava (see photo), but they would like to grow other things such as maize, corn, millet and sorghum. They have asked SSAAP to fund more shovels, hoes, cutlasses, and watering cans for the project.



The Makoba School Gardens project. Left: the tools bought in 2014. The remaining tools are being repaired at the blacksmith's. Right: the signboard for the project while the stakeholders pose outside its fence.

Poultry Project

Also located in Makoba Village is the SSAAP/GCF-Port Loko Poultry Project. The Poultry Project began with 50 birds in 2014. Now, the number of chickens exceeds 300, and the community has made a shelter to house the birds as well. It is a success story, specifically because the project was functioning throughout the Ebola crisis of 2014/2015.



The project helps the local community of Makoba to eat, as a source of income when birds are sold, and as a way to bring up the community-at-large. There are currently 42 birds inside the shelter, 252 eggs nested, 70 mother hens sitting on their eggs, and 10 birds roaming about that are in the process of being caught and collected to put them back inside the house.



Thanks to Taylor Sorie, GCF-Port Loko for his hard work, as well as the Vet Officer in Port Loko, Mr. Francis Kabba. We could not do the project without your constant care and monitoring. Thank you again!



My enthusiasm for SSAAP strengthens due to projects such as these success stories. Taylor and I have a motto: “There is nothing small in Africa.” What we mean by this is that there is nothing too small to use as a resource in Africa. Five dollars can start a chicken project (we have done this in Zambia). People are so appreciative with so little, and are perhaps some of the most resourceful people on the planet. They can do wonders with pocket change, with an hour of sunlight, with a full stomach. My respect for them is infinite. The poultry project is in need of a new roof (the palm leaf roof is rotting from the last rainy season), chicken wire, cement floor, nails, and wire mesh. As I have been working on sustainability with these communities, and what it means not to depend on someone else for something – that independence is true Love – and that they deserve better than to rely on the West to fund their issues, I suggested to them that SSAAP could fund the cement floor and the chicken wire mesh if the community could fund the nails, the local materials (bricks, stones, sand, sticks) and over time, sell some of the chickens to pay for their own roof. With many of these communities, it is a matter of teaching/training them to understand that within their own resources, they have more resources – asking donors to fund them is not a sustainable solution to their problems.

Additionally, Mr. Abbas and Mr. Mohamed of Grace Children’s Foundation (GCF)-Port Loko are also stakeholders in the project, as is Mr. Kabba, Vet Officer. They are townspeople using the project as a way to farm, and are in turn supplying the project with materials from town to help rebuild the poultry structure. The community is donating a section of communal land to the project.

The poultry project in Makoba, in short, is:

- Helping a local vet officer practice his skills
- Providing the vet officer with poultry he can either eat or sell
- Assisting three men from town with poultry they can either eat or sell

- Teaching the community of Makoba sustainability. They are providing internal feed for the birds, and are building a local structure (three men from town will provide nails, SSAAP is providing chicken wire and cement for a floor, and in time the grass roof will be changed to iron sheets, when they sell enough birds to buy the iron sheets)
- Makoba community is providing land and labor for the project



Giving Mr. French Kamara (he speaks French fluently so was given this name) money for the poultry shelter cement and chicken wire. The remaining aspects of the budget (roofing, bricks, fencing) the community will contribute, and will sell chickens to afford the iron roof and the nails for construction of the shelter.

In short, a community of 353 inhabitants, four men from town (Taylor, Abbas, Mohamed, and Francis) are benefitting from this project directly. Indirect beneficiaries include all of their family members, extended families and dependents. SSAAP has funded approximately \$400 for this project. In short, as Taylor says, “There is nothing small in Africa.” Let the Makoba Poultry Project stand testament to that.

Culture



The experience of culture, and learning through experience in the field, is the currency I am paid in for my work.



Freetown has been growing more and more populated and thus more overcrowded post-Ebola.



I am convinced that World Peace is as simple as friendship between people living all over the world. Common bonds and threads of humanity link us together in potent ways, and cause wisdom. International friendships help to bridge barriers and to learn the multiple sides that exist to every story. The different races of the world add to the experience of beauty on the planet. Barriers, such as racism and contempt for others due to perceived economic status or prejudices based on tribalism/nationality, are usually barriers only within ourselves we have not yet dealt with. For example, racism: I have observed that racism usually is a bi-product of

self-hatred, and an inability to fully accept oneself. Racism also prevents us from seeing the beauty and sensuality of others from a different ethnic/cultural group.

So, in the end, racism – as with all prejudice – is an injustice to our True Selves more than to anyone else. We are injusticing ourselves when we participate.



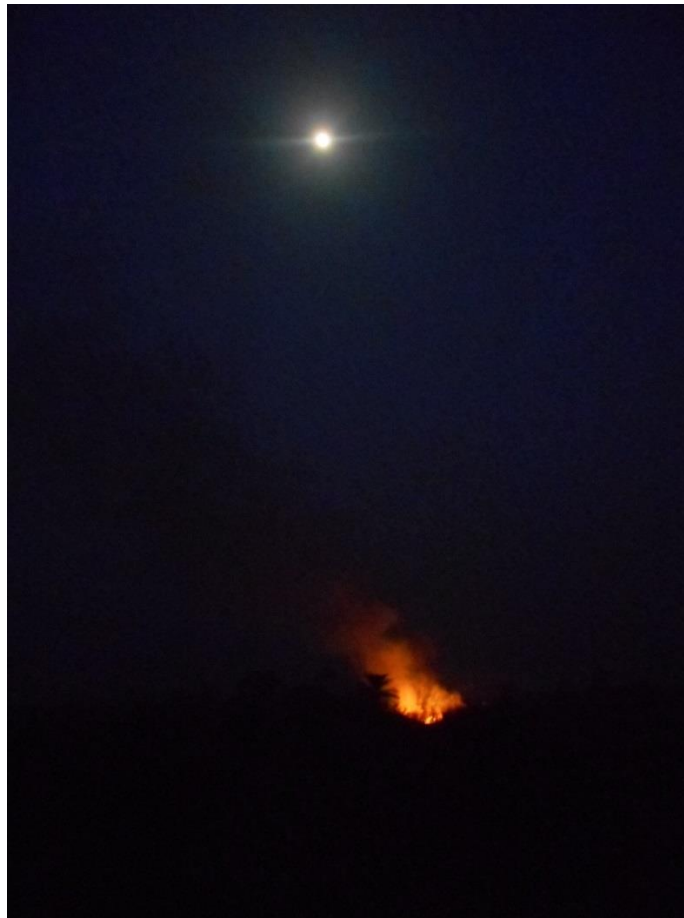
Left: SSAAP/GCF-Moyamba branch office and living quarters; Right: toilet and bathing shelter.



GCF-Port Loko organized for its local radio station, awarded the best radio station in Sierra Leone in 2013, Radio Bankasoka, to host SSAAP to discuss its work in rural Port Loko on Wednesday, 25 January 2017 on the 8 a.m. morning show.



Left: Monkey meat, considered a delicacy in this part of the world. Right: the man slices up the monkey's hand in preparation to boil, then fry the meat to eat with a stew and rice.

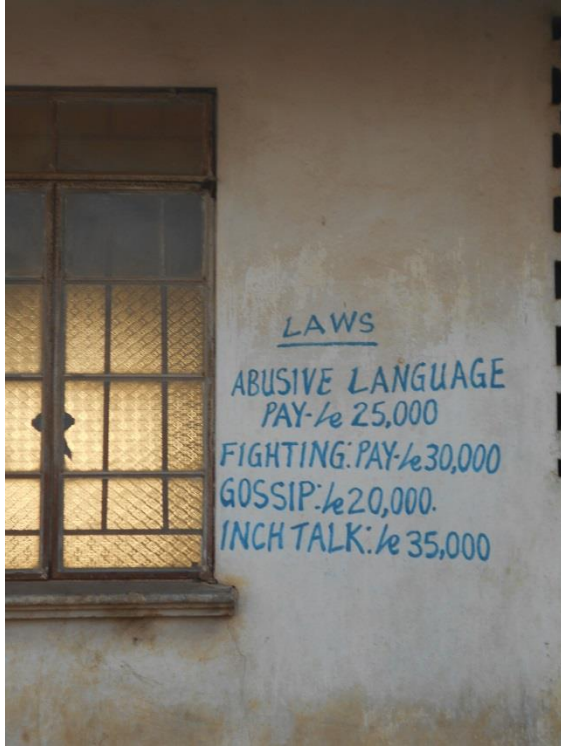


Africa is the Love of my life.

Below: Textiles / fashion and dress are forms of expression and art influences in this vibrant nation.



My 'office' setting where I have composed this newsletter to you, above left. Above right, this little boy, age 7 named Tiger, lives near the Wharf at Port Loko. I was told his mother was given a 'witchcraft charm' when she was pregnant for Tiger, so as to deform his face. He is an intelligent – and funny – little boy, but I fear he will have a very short lifespan.



Above, left: some very clever businessperson found a way to make easy money in Sierra Leone. Above, right: typical market, where fish, soap, and other food and household items are found. This market is in Port Loko, Sierra Leone. Below left, African shampoo made of local materials, including coconut. This shampoo supposedly makes the hair shiny and healthy. Below right: Sharing resources. This tree grows indigenously and prolifically in Northern Province, Sierra Leone. I am told it needs little rain for the seedlings to grow. I am taking as many seeds as I can afford back to Simwatachela, Zambia for our Tree Seedling Program there, in an effort to bring more trees to the dry, desert area so that we have more rain and a better harvest.





As part of my daughter's home-school, I took her to the old port where the slaves were led in Freetown (present-day Krio tribe; my daughter and her father are both Krios), at the end of Percival Street: *St. Jimmy's Market*. The Portuguese, then the British, pulled their boats into the harbor (pictured above, left) to off-load their goods and to on-load the African people (Krios) who would serve them as their slaves. Above, right: the cement slab upon which the man in the red shirt sits, as well as the cement block beyond it, are the last remaining pieces of the 'Slave Steps': the final steps the people took before boarding the slave ships.

In Senegal, Goree Island has a museum to teach tourists about slavery and the 'Slave Steps' are clearly marked in the museum. But in Sierra Leone, devoid of tourism, one has to search a bit harder to find historical points of interest. But they are there! And Sierra Leone is a country chocked-full of culture, art, and history. It is an ideal schoolyard for both of us.





Other points of historical significance, as well as cultural importance, lie in Port Loko. Port Loko, the original port of the Loko tribe, rests in the north of the country, quite near to Guinea. As the Africans who were enslaved from all over West Africa were brought to Freetown and its surrounding areas, many of them were brought to Port Loko. The small cement house pictured above housed people waiting to board the slave ships. Definitely the small cabin should hold the haunted stains of all who suffered and perished there; the whole of the area around it has this sort of a feeling when you pass by it now.



Monument in Port Loko for Bai Bureh, relentless warrior Chief, who protested the colonialist's 'Friendship Treaties' in the interior of the country, which was the British method for slowly overtaking the nation. *"Once a warrior, I now report to the white man,"* he said. He was imprisoned first in Freetown, then to Elmina Castle in the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) for seven years. His face appears on the 1,000 Leone note.



Sierra Leone is an intrinsically brilliant nation.

There is no shortage of beauty here. The rich culture and history of the country is unique to anywhere else in the world. I admire the Sierra Leoneans with the deepest part of my heart. There is a history of the sheer strength of the human spirit, and the will to survive against all odds. Some of the largest celebrations in Sierra Leone are funerals, honoring death. They celebrate the person's life and their love for the deceased through having a huge party: food, drink, merriment, tears of pain and tears of joy.

The savage civil/tribal/diamond war, the Ebola outbreak, the depressing HDI (Human Development Index) posted by the UN online, the unemployment statistics and short life expectancy rates are only half of the story. The other part of the story that no reports portray is the resilience of these mighty people, their intrinsic beauty and resourcefulness, kindness, adaptability, intelligence and tolerance for all kinds of people from all over the world.

There is much to praise here. There is much to believe in here. There is much to inspire here.



It is my belief, and even if shared by no one else in the world, that one must have to want to connect the dots of the world together. We all go together in a way that completes the story of human history on earth and the mistakes we have made and how the way forward relates to our ancient past and the bloodroot dreams of our ancestors; we must value the intrinsic and unique way of living extraordinary to every space and culture of this world; there is no ‘one way’, there are an infinity of ways.



Christmas Day in the village, 2016.

SSAAP is a 501(c)3 charity organization, created by the people and committed to serving the needs of the people. We work at the grassroots level of African societies, in traditional tribal settings, and assist with helping basic human needs: clean water, nutrition, basic education, and food sustainability.

We believe in the value of intention, of simplicity, and in the potency of details. The scale of how effective something is lies only within the hearts of those it has touched: theirs, mine, yours...

Thanks for being on-board with the local, grassroots nature of our rural Africa project.

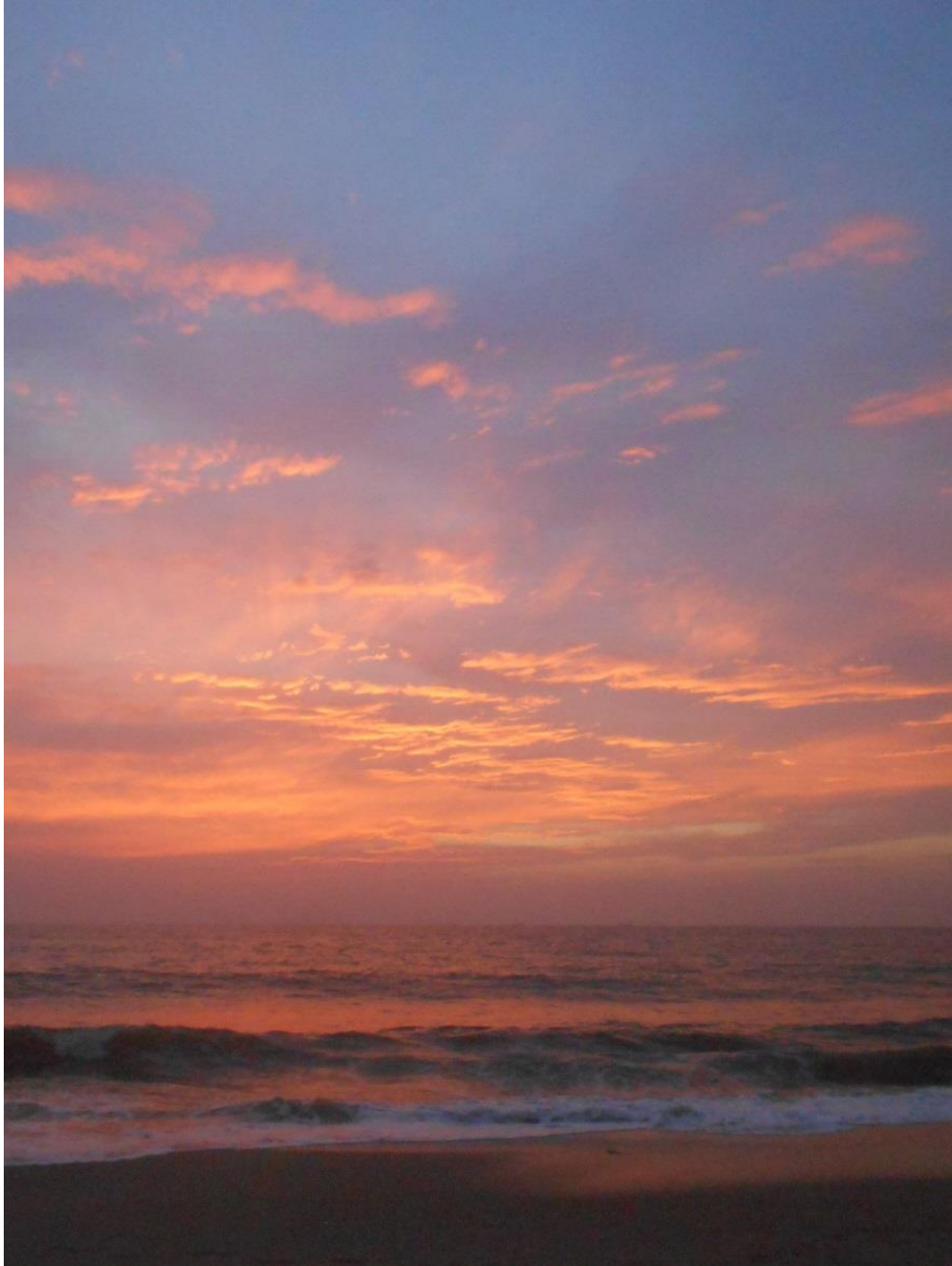


Left: Cotton trees, common in Sierra Leone, show their age from their roots. The thicker and sturdier the roots, the older they are . Right: Raging bush fire in Sierra Leone, when the ground is dry and fire starts easily. This fire was started accidentally and killed much lush vegetation, including the banana tree in the interior of this photograph.

If you are inspired by any of SSAAP's projects and/or would like to visit either of our sites in Sierra Leone or Zambia and volunteer your services or start your own initiative under SSAAP, please let Heather know. We are always open to suggestions on how to improve our programs, new ideas, and fresh inspiration!

With Love, Heather and Radiance





“I never knew of a morning in Africa when I woke up that I was not happy.”

~ Ernest Hemingway



Fun Facts about Sierra Leone

(Courtesy of <http://www.10-facts-about.com/Sierra-Leone/id/904>)

~ The country's name has been derived from the words "Serra Leao," which in Portuguese means - "Lion Mountain Range".

~ Sierra Leone is one of the smallest republics in Africa.

~ For a country as small as this, Sierra Leone is home to an astounding 16 groups belonging to different ethnicities. Each ethnic group has their own language. The Temne are the largest group followed by Mende group.

~The country made headlines on 14 February 1972, when the "Star of Sierra Leone," the third-largest gem-quality diamond in the world, was discovered in Koidu.

~ The Queen Elizabeth II Qua, the world's third largest natural harbor, is in Sierra Leone.

~ With coastal rainfall reaching 495 cm (195 inches) annually, it is one of Western Africa's wettest places.





Na wiyone.

~ Krio saying: "Now we own." This is the slogan for SierraTel government communication network. It means: "We own our project, we take leadership, we take pride in the work we are doing and ownership therefore of it."

Whether due to my daughter, or a memory of an antediluvian dream, Sierra Leone is the deepest silent space within me. It might even be the deepest part of SSAAP's mission here in Africa. A Sierra Leonean told me that in Sierra Leone, SSAAP is 'jungling' – going down footpaths barely passable by motorbike, visiting villages where people have never before seen a white man. Giving the people small funding for large opportunity to help with their hunger and their water.

This is the exact purpose of what I came here to do. The project in Sierra Leone is my dream come true. I hope to continue it for the entirety of my life.

Thank you for making this happen...

All verbiage and photos taken by and courtesy of H. C. Cumming.