



Laying the Foundation for Peace

Manowa-Sandaru Road Project
Update – September 7, 2010

Overcoming Obstacles and Making Progress



Springtime in Kailahun District, Sierra Leone brought the rainy season and its at times torrential downpours, still the weather did not wash out the optimism and resolve of the people of the Penguia and Peje Bongre Chiefdoms to continue to play their part in rehabilitating the 18-mile Manowa-to-Sandaru road.

When TPF Deputy Director Kevin Jackson arrived in April, he was inspired by the energy of local leaders in organizing the community to press on despite setbacks and delays caused by heavy machinery breakdowns and wet conditions. Kevin spent 6 weeks in the area monitoring the project and interacting with the community.



Young men spreading gravel on the road

Many TPF/community meetings were held to discuss progress on the road and to hear any grievances from workers and citizenry. Not a day passed without a member of the community expressing her/his

approval of the road work. One such person was a 36-year-old farmer named Betty who lives with her five children in a single room mud hut in Peje Bongre Chiefdom. She feeds her children on what she earns from her plot of land just north of Manowa, and according to Betty, “a good road” would make it easier to sell her produce in support of her family. She



Betty (in the foreground) and her children

notes that while construction on the road has been slow, she doesn't mind waiting since, "nothing tastes good when picked too early." She hopes to be able to sell her plantains and pineapples by next season.



Sengema Bridge then and now

Tragedy

On May 29 when a small group SLRA worker's were felling trees along the road near the village of Woroma, a tragic accident occurred. Sometime between 11:00 and 11:30 am just south of the Woroma Bridge, Muhammad Kamara was killed by a falling tree. As he was cutting into the tree, the blade of his power saw became stuck.

Kevin Jackson investigated the circumstances surrounding the accident and spoke to witnesses. "He was struggling to get it free, when the tree began to move," said one of Mr. Kamara's co-workers, "and that's when it came down on top of him."



As reported by Kevin, "At approximately 3pm, his body was carefully placed in the back of an SLRA vehicle, then driven across the country to his birth village, Kukuna in Kambia District, and placed in the ground on the same day of his death - a Susu and Muslim, Muhammed Kamara was a father of four."

In Mr. Kamara's memory, Taia Peace Foundation has committed to

providing one year's school fees for each of his children, and on July 10, at his 40th day memorial ceremony in Kukuna, TPF representative Manuel Rocha presented the offering to his family.



TPF representative Manuel Rocha and SLRA's Sahr Gbembo attend the 40th day memorial ceremony for Muhammed Kamara.

Progress

Taia Peace Co-founder and Chairman Jeffrey Wright made a brief visit to Sierra Leone in mid-June accompanied by his 8-year-old son Elijah. The purpose of the visit was to check in with the local community and witness the ramped-up heavy machinery-led roadwork following extensive discussions with SLRA management and Penguia Paramount Chief Jibila to identify and address the root causes of recent work slowdowns.

The work slowdowns were identified as largely resulting from logistics challenges in keeping the needed heavy equipment fully operational. The

spare parts required following breakdowns too often were not readily available on site. SLRA General Director Rogers paid a visit to the road in early June to assess the situation, and by the second week of June, SLRA supervisors and employees, who, despite setbacks, had maintained a consistent presence along the road, were again busy with grading and hard packing the road surface. Additionally, payment delays to some local workers were addressed. By mid-June, the Manowa-Sandaru road rehabilitation was back on track and the positive results of the previous six months were evident and measurable. While the roadwork fell behind schedule significantly, the general sentiment expressed by chieftom representatives was gratitude (tinged slightly with frustration at the delays) for the work done to date.



TPF Chairman Jeffrey Wright and TPF's TT De Abreu w/ PC Jibila, Women's Leader Fatimata Williams, and elders at Sengema



Elijah with new friends at Sengema (including a proud supporter of the President)





Progress

Francis Bokarie, who resides in Penguia Chiefdom and who recently established his own small village, Mongorla, noted that, on at least five occasions, an ambulance was able to access the chiefdom to transport a woman suffering labor complications. Francis expressed optimism over the increased access to market that the new road would provide. As founder of the Mongorla Agricultural Development Organization through which he cultivates a few acres of “yam, cassava, corn, potato, okra, pepper etc., etc.”, he expects to be among the beneficiaries of the improved infrastructure. Francis was among the first citizens of the area to reach out to Taia Peace Foundation founders when he would accompany the late Paramount Chief Sahr Kabbah-Sei to meetings in Freetown at which the conditions within the chiefdom were described. Francis Bokarie’s story is a good one for Penguia Chiefdom -- developer, farmer...former combatant.



TPF Chairman Jeffrey Wright with Francis Bokarie at Mongorla, Penguia Chiefdom

Next steps

As July approached the rains began seriously to hamper the work effort. The consensus among TPF, the SLRA and the chiefdom was to continue working until forced to stop, and as the heaviest rains approached, TPF, SLRA

management and Chiefdom leaders concluded that the roadwork be suspended until the beginning of the dry season (Oct-Nov) when the final amounts of laterite will be spread and hard-parked and the final culverts will be set into place. On July 15, SLRA Director of Maintenance Sahr Gbembo, in a note to TPF Executive Director Fred Leigh, offered the following assessment of the project: “Phase I (site clearing) is basically complete. Phase II (culverts and bridges) - bridges works are complete save the installation of six more culverts. Phase III (drainage) - works are required in some sections (the heavy rains revealed additional need for drainage in certain areas). Phase IV (paving) - pavement works is progressing but will eventually be minimized in July to October because of inclement weather. Works will definitely continue in October.” Mr. Gbembo continues, “The family of the deceased, Mr. Mohamed Kamara, were greatly honoured by the presence of your representative at the 40th day burial ceremony. The family has asked me to extend their sincere thanks to Taia Peace Foundation for what they intend to do for them. SLRA is



also immensely impressed by your concern for fellow human beings. The workers were motivated too. God bless your organization. We, in Sierra Leone, wish cordial relationship between your organization and the citizens of Sierra Leone. Extend our sincere greetings to your great donors. We wish them God's Blessings for they have blessed us with a road.”