

# **BO AND KENEMA PEACE FESTIVALS**



## **REPORT**

### **Supporting the Social Reintegration Process in Sierra Leone**

**Search for Common Ground  
Talking Drum Studio**

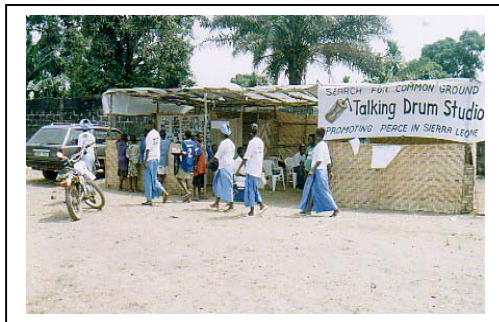
April 2003

## BACKGROUND

Youth were strongly involved in both sides of Sierra Leone's ten year war. Some youth were mobilized into a Civil Defense Force<sup>1</sup> (CDF) to protect their own communities. These youth took over the leadership of the communities, acting in the place of traditional rulers while securing the livelihoods of their own communities. Youth also formed the bulk of the combatants for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the rebel group that launched the war in March 1991. Consequently youth present one of the main challenges of the social reintegration process in the consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone. This is mirrored in the key concern of communities during the post war period: the maintenance of law and order. Currently, people, and especially youths, resolve conflicts using violence. The festivals explore these concerns and provide, through voices of the community, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

As part of SFCG's peace building activities, two peace festivals were held in two regional capitals targeting youth issues in collaboration with youths.

The objectives were to raise the level of awareness in the communities on these issues and impact on conflict resolution behaviour of youths.



Talking Drum Studio booth at Bo Peace Festival

Based on the success of past solidarity events organized with communities, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) organized two Peace Festivals this year in the Southern and Eastern capitals of Bo and Kenema. These are annual events organized with different stakeholders in the community in order for them to work together in making a contribution towards the peace consolidation process. The festivals are forums for raising awareness about issues threatening the peace and stability of communities. They revolve around specific themes identified in consultation with various stakeholders in the community. These themes change every year. 2003 marked Bo's third festival, and Kenema's first.

## INTRODUCTION

Bo and Kenema are provincial headquarters for the south and eastern provinces respectively in Sierra Leone. Both were centers for CDF activities. Most of the towns and villages around these cities were controlled by youths who were recruited into the CDF and were in authority as 'chiefs' of those areas for many years. The challenge of reintegration has been to disarm and demobilize the youth, and then facilitate their return as community members to participate in development rather than as 'chiefs'.

This year SFCG partnered with youth groups to organize the festivals. This arrangement enabled the groups to make their own contribution towards the peace process and explore the reintegration process. In Bo, 10 youth associations from different backgrounds worked together to make the event a success. In Kenema, 3 youth groups collaborated with SFCG. The themes locally generated for the festivals were "Change you way and lek Salone" meaning a call for attitudinal change and "No to violence and yes to law and order" respectively.

<sup>1</sup> local militias mobilized to resist rebel advance and protect communities during the war

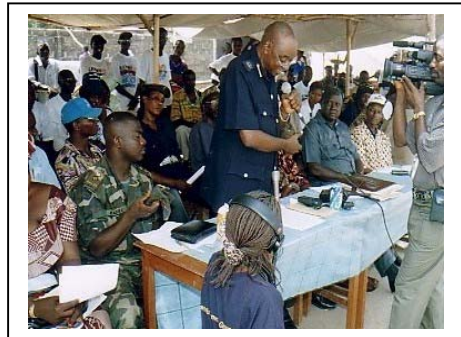
The youth worked with the Police, Army, UNAMSIL and Scouts on the security of the event. They also incorporated a few community elders to help them with safe keeping of the proceeds and ticket distribution.

## STRATEGY

Solidarity events, particularly the peace festivals, are designed to create a space for youth to work with other community stakeholders on issues of community interest in support of the social reintegration process. Part of the strategy is to bring together diverse interest groups to identify a common goal and action plan. This collaboration of elders and youths and different youth groupings is significant because establishing cooperative relationships is key to peaceful coexistence. The festivals in Bo and Kenema are a platform on which the various stakeholders, who are most times in competition or adversarial, have a unique opportunity to work successfully together, sometimes for the first time.

- 50 youths in Bo and 30 in Kenema formed the committees
- 60 youths helped the police, army and scouts with security
- Ticket stamping, distribution, counting of proceeds in the hands of 10 youths
- 20 youths sold tickets
- 13 youth groups collaborated with SFCG to make the events successful
- More than 20,000 youths witnessed the events

Youth groups in these cities compete for resources and rival for political power. Bringing these youths together to work for a common goal is part of the strategies employed by SFCG. Discussing ideas and developing the entire plan of the festivals, working in different committees with varying tasks and reporting to a larger group empowers the youths by creating opportunities for display of initiative, taking up responsibility and changing the dynamics of power by allowing a larger group access.



The Commissioner of Police for the Eastern Region opens the Kenema Peace Festival.

Subsequent to the war, the elders and the youth are in an even more adversarial and interdependent relationship. Historically, decision-making in communities has been primarily in the hands of the elders. However, the youth, having been the decision makers over the past ten years, are not prepared for the status quo prior to the war. It is particularly tense because this traditional decision-making structure is recognized as having contributed to creating the conditions for the war. The design of solidarity events

creates opportunities for youth and elders to work cooperatively and engage in a productive and constructive atmosphere.

Using culture, drama and music to highlight the importance of a just and fair social reintegration process are part of the strategy employed by SFCG to appropriately foster discussion.

While SFCG's outreach unit, the Community Peacebuilding Unit, coordinates the organization of the events, its media arm, Talking Drum Studio, provides coverage of the proceedings for a wide audience. The media work, a platform for voices of stakeholders sharing their opinions about issues integral to a successful social reintegration process, is a critical component of the strategy. In this way a localized event creates a much larger impact as community members not

participating on the ground are able to take part through the radio discussion. In that way, their issues and concerns are integrated in the outcomes of the event.

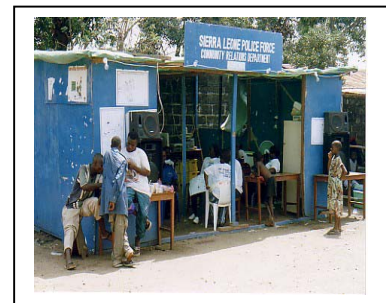
## METHODOLOGY

The planning of the event began with identifying interested stakeholders. The target group for collaboration was youths as they are central to a successful social reintegration process and consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone. A small group of representatives from youth groups were identified through an existing youth coordinating committee to discuss the idea with community leaders and other stakeholders. This group in consultation with the elders and stakeholders identified the themes and dates for the festival and wrote letters of invitation.

Representatives of this small group were asked to select four other members from their organizations in the case of Bo and six in the case of Kenema. These members were then divided into five committees (finance, grounds, publicity, security and organizing) who were charged with various responsibilities to push the process forward. Each youth organization had a representative on each of the committees who then shared the committee proceedings with his organization. Therefore 50 youths in total formed the entire working group in Bo and 30 in Kenema. Each committee met separately to decide on how to proceed and designed workplan of activities for the week. A general meeting was held every Sunday for various committees to report to the wider group.

- 5 committees formed for organising
- 50 planning meetings in total with committees
- 8 days of festivities
- 1,100 minutes of roundtable radio discussions surrounding themes of the events
- 35 hours of live broadcasting
- 28 drama groups, 24 cultural groups and 15 local artists
- 35 performances by local artists, 32 cultural performances and 36 drama performances

In its peace festivals, SFCG teams up with Steady Bongo, a popular youth musician with a platform of promoting positive youth profiles using socially responsible songs. In Bo and Kenema, Steady worked with the organizing committees to identify local musicians based in these locations so that they could perform with him to exhibit their talents. Selection criteria based on type of music, how the content of music tied in with the festivals' themes, and quality of stage performance were developed by the working group with Steady Bongo. Auditions with 13 local musicians in Bo and 15 in Kenema resulted in a final selection of 8 for Bo and 7 for Kenema.



A booth prepared by the Police for the public in Bo

The organizing committees selected drama and cultural groups to perform based on existing capacities and their geographical locations. The cultural groups reflected the diversity of the area. A drama mobilizer worked with the drama groups to help them focus on the thematic issues of the events.

Before the festival, TDS conducted radio discussion programs to prepare the minds of the community about the themes and what was expected from. The youth moderated the programs.

# IMPACT

SFCG facilitates solidarity events as a means to supporting a fair and just social reintegration process for the consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone. In this context the following outcomes were realized:

- Youth participation empowering self reliance and cooperation among this groups of people
  - *Revenue generated through the effort of youth for a community project in continuation of actualization of the theme*
  - *Youth taking up responsibility and showing initiative indicates their value in the community and is important for actualization of youth in decision making*
  
- Youth contributing to community development
  - *Youth helping in the supervision of the rehabilitation of the field*
  - *Action planning for continued project work*
  
- Building social networks
  - *Youth groups working cooperatively; identifying a common objective and action planning together -- in different committees irrespective of their groups or organizations*
  - *Police, Army and Scouts joining youths to maintain security for a community event*
  - *Identifying new and strengthening existing networks of youth*
  - *Building social relationships among groups who traditionally have adversarial interests and helping them to work towards promoting community interest was key especially for the security of the events.*
  - *Youth planning and designing the security network of the event with the Army, Police and UNAMSIL helped to minimize potential clashes between these groups.*

Revenue
▪ Le. 30,161,500 - total proceeds from the two events
▪ Le. 12,982,500 total proceeds realized in Bo
▪ 60% of proceeds dedicated to youth project in Bo
▪ 40% to collaborating youth groups in Bo including Police, Army and Scouts
▪ Le17,179,000 total proceeds realised in Kenema
▪ 64% dedicated to youth project in Kenema
▪ 36% to collaborating youth groups in Kenema

Building Networks/Event
▪ 15 start up meetings with individual stakeholders
▪ 10 youth leaders engaged in preliminary discussions with community leaders to facilitate event
▪ 5 committees to organize event with 10 youth groups represented with 50 members in total
▪ 20 meetings between committees and SFCG before event
▪ 40 committee meetings with SFCG before event
▪ 24 meetings with finance committee comprised of representatives of organising groups
▪ 3 meetings with finance and security committees during festival
▪ 3 meetings of organising committee after the event

- **Building trust**
  - *Youth handling finances to facilitate the smooth running of the event*
  - *Various committees working independently and held accountable to a larger committee about their activities*
  - *Youth succeeded in organizing a community event with the blessing of community elders and stakeholders that ended peacefully*
  
- **Supporting dedicated youth structures for social development**
  - *Rehabilitating both Kenema and Bo town fields*
  - *SFCG contributing to the development of community infrastructure dedicated to youth issues*
  - *In recognition of importance of youth issues to the larger community and reintegration process, local contractors, organizations and institutions in these locations make a contribution to a community effort by giving discount to charges*
  
- **Strengthening the peace process**
  - *NGO participating in a community event to move the social reintegration agenda forward*
  - *Cooperation of community leaders and government officials by supporting a community event organized by youths*
  - *Police, Army, youths make a collaborative contribution to their community*
  - *Massive turnout and cooperation from community people,*
  - *Successfully holding eight days of festivities with no violence*
  - *The support from the elders was overwhelming and building these networks between groups helped to build consultation into the decision making process between adversarial interest groups.*

**Finance and Accountability**

- 24 meetings with finance committee comprised of representatives of organising groups
- Ticket committee established as sub group of finance committee
- Record keeping of ticket and finance committee shared with larger group
- Consultative process for plan with revenue generated.
- Transparent and open process -- Organising process included tasks with financial implications delegated to committees and they were held responsible for the outcomes by the larger group
- Prompt announcement of proceeds to larger community after event supported by physical evidence

**Media work per event**

- Publicity committee with 10 members responsible for media work
- 300 minutes of radio discussion held with youth organisers before festival
- 480 minutes of round table discussion during festival with 36 community members
- 6 Partners in the social reintegration process engaged in live media discussion about their objectives
- 120 minutes of post event radio discussion
- Segments in other TDS programmes about impact and outcome of solidarity events on going

## FOLLOW-UP

- Confirmation with community stakeholders on suitability of post event projects in continuation of theme identified by youth organizers
- Media work around projects identified to have community input, remains to identify stumbling blocks, concerns and perceptions – and as a platform for exploring youth issues in reintegration process
- Identify implementers of project, and design and negotiate a comprehensive workplan of activities for implementation
- Conduct interviews and media work on phases of implementation to inform the public about progress made so far
- The issue of land acquisition for the intended projects has been settled (to be donated by the town to the youths for a dedicated youth structure)
- Hold consultations with Bo Town Council and Kenema District Football Association and youth committees about their vision with regards the development of their show fields
- Collaboratively preparing a long-term proposal integrating this vision for developing the town fields for funding and jointly identifying contractors for technical specifications for field developments.



Steady Bongo performing for the crowd.



Live drama by an amateur troupe in Kenema

## SUCCESS STORY

Tickets and their responsibility at these events is very sensitive. The ticket committee established a mechanism designed to promote transparency and accountability. The person who stamped and signed the tickets was posted at the gate to randomly verify tickets. Fake tickets, a normal practice at these events, is a big revenue-generating strategy for individuals. In this event the revenue to be generated was already dedicated to a larger, composite group of youth groups.

The attendance on the last day of these events is generally the highest and the tension at the gate provides an opportunity for fraudsters. In Kenema, the verifier picked up on a fraudulent ticket. The person identified where he bought the ticket and that individual was arrested. He in turn fingered the group that was involved. These boys were arrested by the police with fake tickets and money. Later the students identified the mastermind, who was their teacher and neighbor. He also turned out to be a member of one of the organizing youth groups from where he had access to the tickets.

A search was instituted by the youths for this man, but he escaped over the fence. They went to his house and around the town. In the morning he reported himself to the police for his own

protection. Statements were taken and the case was charged to court. Presently the case is in the hands of the youth community of Kenema, which established a task force to pursue the matter. Presently they are in court. This instance proved the impact of the message of peace and conflict resolution: the youth are using the law to solve their problem rather than violence. This represents a major change in their thinking.