



## Activists spread message that “education is better than silver and gold”

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

iEARN Kono Report .....Page 1  
(see below)

iEARN Bo Report.....Page 3

### July 2004 - iEARN KONO REPORT

by Andrew Benson Greene, National Coordinator, iEARN Sierra Leone

The expansion of iEARN Sierra Leone in the provincial districts in Sierra Leone is designed to give voice, through access to Information Communication Technology, to the scores of youths who have faced a multiplicity of hardship from wars.

On the 24th of July, Andrew Benson Greene and his team of outreach facilitators set off for the Kono district, located in the far Eastern part of Sierra Leone, to meet with child miners and war-affected youths and to open up doors of opportunity. **More than 1500 children under the age of 18 have worked as child miners in the diamond-rich town of Kono;** some of these youths were specially singled out for recruitment by the armed forces that perpetuated war in Sierra Leone. Languishing in the diamond mines and unable to improve their lot, these youths are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

iEARN Sierra Leone believe that the youth of Kono District should have the opportunity to gain skills via Information Communication Technology in order to recover fully from a violent past and overcome the problems of economic exploitation through their constant recruitment as child miners. Instead of the bleak and treacherous future of mining in the diamond fields, these young people can gain training in computers and information communication technology, at the same time letting their voices be heard through the powerful interconnectedness that the internet offers.

The meeting in Kono was well-attended by many

youths who have experienced first-hand the grave repercussions of economic exploitation and years of war.

Just after formalities and prayers, The Chairman expressed thanks to Mr. Andrew Benson Greene, Franklin Koroma and Fatmata Victoria Kamara, for taking the time to visit the iEARN Kono branch. Simeon Komba, iEARN Youth Representative in Kono, noted that the offer of computers to the iEARN Kono centre will change the perception of the community, allowing them to see that 'education is better than silver and gold.' Simeon, who hails from Kono district, and who has found valuable resources through experienced gained in iEARN web-based forums and 'No War Zone' on-line collaboration at the iEARN Sierra Leone centre in Freetown, believes that the power of the internet has great things in store for his colleagues.

Mohamed Lamin Soh, who holds a Bachelor of Science Degrees Honours, is the Director of Programs iEARN Kono. He articulated that **the program will provide a safe and secure learning environment for the good of the youths in the Kono community, who have never considered the possibility of a future other than mining.** He said that iEARN is his baby, and that the iEARN Kono branch will be the first to be initiated in the provinces as a unique opportunity for engaging youths in computer-related skills training.

Mr. Sesay, a reporter from Kono FM 98.2 Radio, remarked that he is very excited to see young people of Kono coming on board in the electronic media. He stressed that with education one can be aware of and address many long-standing issues. Andrew Benson Greene the National Coordinator of iEARN Sierra Leone expressed thanks to Computer Aid International UK for donating additional computers to help expand the use of ICT in communities around the country; this helps to engage youth affected by war in fruitful tele-collaboration. Francis Quee, a prospective beneficiary, says that 'iEARN is not a new thing' and appreciates the coalition and the opportunity to be part of the tele-net community. He noted that Dr. Denis Bright Minister of Youth and Sports was made aware of the development of iEARN in Kono during a recent visit.

Franklin Koroma, a youth from Albert Academy



“education is better than silver and gold”

KONO REPORT continues from page 1

Secondary School's iEARN Club in Freetown, gave a personal testimony of ICT's enormous rewards. He spoke of how using this technology has helped him heal from the trauma of war, to make friends around the world, and make his academic work progressive through online resources. Daniel Kelly, a Youth Facilitator, thanked iEARN Sierra Leone for the foresight to expand to the youth of Kono, who have limited opportunities to access computers or even see them. He cited several efforts by several people within the Kono Community to keep up the spirit whilst they awaited this generous support from iEARN Sierra Leone. One notable person was Mr. Fambuleh who works with the United Nations Armed Military Contingent in Sierra Leone.

Ms. Fatmata Victoria Kamara of the iEARN Sierra Leone Positive Music Project thrilled the gathering of youth with a scintillating display of her musical talents. She articulated her experiences of being part of the music project which she noted had been a very powerful tool for trauma healing. She stated that the current efforts of the PMP at recording will help in campaigns and sensitization on vitals issues of HIV/AIDS, Peace building and environmental con-

cerns.

Several radio discussions were made to sensitize the Kono community to the iEARN program that will help to benefit the youths. Andrew Benson Greene expressed his appreciation to the youths of Kono to embrace the program, noting that through skills training in computers and Information Technology, and also the participation of youth in such venues as the iEARN forums and No War Zone www.nowarzone.org, they will be productive citizens in the community.

Mohamed Lamin Soh, further noted that as a way for helping the youths there will be possibilities for them to be involved in recreational programs, computer games, video and filming production, music, panel discussion, and experience sharing through educational camps and sensitization campaigns.

\*\*\*\*\*



### 2004, July - iEARN Bo Report

iEARN Sierra Leone is traversing the length and breath of the country, raising awareness within schools and community on the use of ICT for post-war recovery. Their aim is to improve post-war peace and reconciliation, help design curricula, and develop teaching materials supporting education for human rights, communication and conflict resolution, and multicultural and peace education. This prompted a cross section of iEARN Sierra Leone staff to move to the Southern Head District of Bo with hopes of expanding the ICT initiative to youths whose voices have not been heard.

Andrew Benson Greene, (National Coordinator), Alimamy Sekou Bangura (Teacher Facilitator), Emile Toby (Financial Secretary), Franklyn Koroma (Youth Peace Advocate and student of the iEARN club at Albert Academy Secondary), were there on this feasibility tour to the second city of Sierra Leone.

Amongst many schools and initiatives visited was the Bo Government Secondary School, which has a positive contribution to the economic, educational, social and cultural development of the country. The Principal of the Bo Government Secondary School, Mr. Bob Katta, vowed cooperation between his school and other iEARN Communities to assert the importance of tele-education in Sierra Leone. The Principal said that **iEARN's effort, particularly the innovative manner in which the pupils will have access to online resources (via the use of a computer lab and internet on a daily basis), will significantly influence the future course of e-learning possibilities and online interactions.**

Mr. Alimamy Sekou Bangura, in a meeting with teachers from Bo School, recounted first-hand the important role that collaborative education through teacher supported online training has played in the improvement of student learning in Freetown, and he hoped to translate his experiences to the teachers of Bo School and the Bo communities.

Franklin Koroma of the iEARN Sierra Leone Club at Albert Academy Secondary School regaled his colleagues with his first-hand experiences gained in the use of ICT. He recounted how, at

first, he thought computers were nothing more than new television screens, and he never knew that **he could use computers to find friends and exchange ideas with people throughout the world.**

Speaking at the morning school devotions, Andrew Benson Greene noted that the future of iEARN at this school will not merely be determined by the number of gadgets available through iEARN, but to what use they are put. The strength of online dialogue, collaborative educational projects, opportunities for school twinning, and peer-to-peer tele-collaborations are what is necessary to reap the benefits. Being a former pupil of the school, Andrew Benson Greene took a pleasure tour around the boarding school where he studied for 7 years. He spoke with nostalgia to the pupils he met at his dormitory, especially of how during his school days, the use of information communication technology was unheard of, and that **what lay before them was a great opportunity that would enrich their scholastic experience and change their lives.**

However, the key challenge that iEARN Sierra Leone observed was how to extend the initiative of using ICT in schools whose curriculum has not yet embraced tele-education. iEARN Sierra Leone observed in this visit that Bo School's educational system is a major agent of social change and has a huge responsibility in this endeavour to improve tele-education and computer structured education in the schools. However, it is the responsibility of iEARN Sierra Leone as a vibrant and more experienced K-12 initiative in Sierra Leone to further empower school communities. To this end, community ICT access centres will be set up within communities in Bo to help solve the problems of youth disaffection through the benefits of ICT.

\*\*\*\*\*