

MORAL FOUNDATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY TRAINING HELD FROM 19TH – 23RD NOVEMBER 2007

SUMMARY

The Moral Foundations for Democracy (MFD) training and outreach programme is indeed creating a tremendous impact on maintaining sustainable peace and reconciliation in our country. This training is gradually changing the attitudes of individuals, as is clearly manifested during experience sharing sessions where participants give their experience in terms of change and reconciliation.

The thirteenth session (November 2007) of the MFD training and outreach programme has been completed at the Armed Forces Educational Centre (AFEC) at Wilberforce, Freetown. The outreach was held in Kono (300 miles East of Freetown), the rich diamond region of the country and one of the hardest hit by the war.

This training was unique as we had the newly appointed Minister of Defence and National Security as the Guest of Honour at the Opening Ceremony. This clearly showed the new government's recognition and accreditation of the MFD programme in the country. The programme was chaired by the Commandant of the Armed Forces Educational Centre, while the keynote address was given by Keith Neal from the International Faculty.

Thirty participants from the military, police and civil society, including teachers from secondary schools, attended the 5-day course.

INTRODUCTION

The opening ceremony began with Muslim and Christian prayers led by participants. An overview of the MFD training and introduction of local faculty was given by Abubakarr Kamara, the Acting Manager for MFD. Members of the High Table included Col. Dan Yanka, Commandant of AFEC; The Chairman, AIG Francis Munu, also representing the Inspector-General of Police; Guest of Honour, Maj. Palor Conteh (Rtd.), Minister of Defence and National Security; John Bangura, Founder, Hope- Sierra Leone; Keith Neal, Member of MFD International Faculty; and Genneh Moriba, Acting Country Director, Hope-Sierra Leone.

The Chairman, in his opening remarks, welcomed everyone and encouraged all participants to treat the five days' training very seriously as it was "the bed rock for the change Sierra Leoneans are yearning for". He urged them to make the MFD concept part of their daily lives and pass on their experiences to their colleagues who were not fortunate to be part of the training.

In his overview of Hope-Sierra Leone, John Bangura mentioned his experience in Tanzania and Switzerland which, as he put it, was a "calling from God to bring the message of reconciliation and change to his country." This led to the formation of H-SL. He elaborated on the role played by the organization in bringing lasting peace to our

beloved country through the support of the international partners, and pledged his continuous support in maintaining peace and sustainability.

The Minister of Defence and National Security, Mr Palor Conteh, congratulated H-SL for its relentless effort towards sustaining peace and stability, especially during the just concluded elections that were praised by the international community as being free and fair. He said that H-SL is way ahead in advocating the change of attitude that The President, H. E. Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, mentioned seventeen times during his inaugural speech. He emphasized the government's commitment to the growth and development of Sierra Leone. Mr. Conteh said that this training is unique and vital for the military which has responsibility for the security of the country. The Minister expressed his commitment and support for the MFD programme. In conclusion he said, "We Sierra Leoneans need to change our attitudes towards one another if Sierra Leone is to develop."

Keith Neal appreciated the effort made by the local faculty in carrying out the trainings and outreach programmes successfully. He made mention of how he first came into contact with John Bangura in 2000, and how the international faculty are doing their best to generate funds for the operations of the various departments of H-SL. He also announced the forthcoming MFD Training of Trainers (ToT) course that will be taking place in January 2008.

In the Chairman's closing remarks, he advised all participants to take the concept of MFD to their colleagues, families and neighbours.

The vote of thanks was given by Genneh Moriba.

TRAINING

The training was attended by thirty participants, including teachers from grade "A" secondary schools, and facilitated by six local faculty members. It is noteworthy that, for the first time, a female facilitator, Major Forde, fully participated in the programme. The classroom was spacious enough for participants and facilitators to move freely. The hall was decorated with natural flowers which made it attractive to participants. All the modules were well facilitated during the five days. Each day started with an extended time of quiet. This so-called **R&D (Research and Development – leading to Reflection & Decision)** was both interesting and very important to participants.

The session on **Change** and **Corruption** stimulated everyone to participate energetically. The word 'change' was of great importance to all participants, because of the call made by the president for a 'change of attitude'. It became very clear that if Sierra Leoneans do not change their attitude, the country will never develop, regardless of the numerous minerals resources with which the country is blessed. The police were targeted by many participants as one of the most corrupt institutions, and they were encouraged to continue to participate fully in the MFD course.

The session entitled '**My journey of life**' created a sad atmosphere as most participants shed tears as they reflected on their past life.

After this somber session, **Teamwork and trust building** acted as a stimulant. Many confessed that, because of selfishness, they were guilty of undermining people in authority. They agreed that the exercise opened their eyes to the need for coordination, unity and team work in every aspect of life.

Participants were divided into working groups during many of the sessions. In one, entitled '**Peace, justice, mercy & truth**', a short skit was organized by the participants to explore the meaning of these four words and to show how they are inter-related. Participants were divided into four groups. They produced a wonderful skit about the rebel war in Sierra Leone and the link with the four topics in maintaining lasting peace in the country.

Everyone was very happy with the programme and every break period was utilized for further discussions.

EXPERIENCE SHARING

Sierra Leone Police (SLP)

"I had a bitter experience during the rebel war in our country. The rebels attacked our town and I took my dad to a safe location. On our way, we met a check point mounted by the rebels and I saw a man by the name of Sorie who knew me as a policeman, but I was very brave to proceed with my dad. When we got to the check point, the man asked me to join them. I accepted because the only other option was death, and I told my dad to stay in the next village. I later escaped from the rebels and joined my dad in the next village and fled for another town. Two weeks later, the town was then attacked by the rebels and, unfortunately for me, the same Sorie guy I escaped from met me again in the town. He asked me whether the old man was my father and I said yes; and he shot him instantly, stating that he was the reason why I escaped. I was helpless and could not do anything to him because he had a weapon. I shed the most bitter tears ever in my life and my dad was thrown away without being buried which makes it more painful for me. I managed to escape again and I handed myself over to the peace keeping force. When the rebels finally surrendered and agreed for peace, I vowed to avenge the death of my dad. I started searching desperately for the man who killed him and deal with this man whenever I see him. Now this perception has suddenly changed as a result of the training and the experiences shared by my other colleagues whose stories are more tragic than mine. I have decided to forgive him, and even if he is dead I will pray for him to get eternal rest."

Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)

"I have gone through the advanced level training and today I am a sergeant. Why? Because I am a drunkard. Even though I have spent twenty years in the army, there is no progress in my life because I spend my salary on alcohol with my other colleagues. I have no respect for my bosses or my wife. I go home at around 2:00 am every day whether I am on duty or not. The lectures, especially the search for unchanging moral values, provoked a critical examination within my self. I now believe that change can start with the individual, and therefore I have decided to change and stop drinking hence forth. I have decided to apologize to my wife for all I have done to her while under the influence of alcohol, and also to my bosses and neighbours. I am really grateful for the programme."

Civil Society

“I had a friend with whom I shared many things, including clothes. But as the friendship continued, I realized that most of my clothes were missing and I began to see them on people in the neighborhood. When I asked my friend, he said he had no idea. One day, I saw my T-shirt on one of the neighbors and I asked him where he got it from. To my surprise he told me that my friend had sold it to him. I confronted my friend angrily and he later confessed that he was the one selling my clothes. He asked for forgiveness and I accepted. We were the best of friends again after reconciling. Unfortunately for me, he started again and stole nine pairs of my jeans and three pairs of shoes which my elder brother had sent me from the UK, and then he disappeared. As I am talking to you now, the police are searching for him and some one has revealed his hiding place to the police. But the values of this programme have touched me most in the area of change and peace and reconciliation, and I will not be happy if I do not withdraw the case from the police after completing my training. I am going to withdraw the case from court and bring my friend back home. My only appeal is that I would like him to go through the training too which I believe will help change his attitude.”

OUTREACH IN KONO

SUMMARY

The Moral Foundations for Democracy (MFD) outreach programme took place in Kono in the eastern part of Sierra Leone on 7th-8th December 2007. This was followed up by a further visit some days later. The outreach was initially planned to be held at Yileh, but due to the conflict in Kono amongst the political parties, (SLPP, APC & PMDC) it was necessary that MFD intervened. It was agreed by the local political leaders that the concept of MFD would be of great help in resolving the conflict.

The Programme started on 7th of December with a film show of “The Imam& the Pastor” and a radio discussion programme which was highly appreciated by the people of Kono. Most callers pleaded with the protagonists to unite and maintain the peace that they had been yearning for. They thanked Hope-Sierra Leone for being very proactive and for being the first civil society organization to visit the township to address the conflict.

Tensions were also high between two tribes in the township – the Madingoes and the Temnes. By the end of the intervention, the team was able to bring the major stake holders together, find the root causes of the conflict and reconcile the groups once again. The programme ended with the signing of peace communiqué in Koidu town (district headquarter town of Kono).

TRAINING

The training took place in one of the town halls in the township and was attended by sixty participants from the police, military and civil society which included some major stake holders of the three political parties.

The official opening ceremony included a brief overview of the MFD programme by Abubakarr Kamara, who also introduced facilitators, H-SL staff and John Bangura.

The training started with the introduction of participants and the story of the beautiful flower (see below for explanation). Participants were divided into four groups to elaborate on the garbage in the flower and its significance in relation to the conflict in the township. Many experiences were shared – in particular the attitude of certain elders in the township during the 2007 elections. A man from the third group stated: “The flower vase and its garbage are a true replica of us in Kono, just as the flower is beautiful – we have the best diamonds in the country, and for that reason this area is called the bread basket of the country – but we have the heart of a stone and a razor blade tongue to spoil one another. The flower has exposed us and this is the time for us to change our attitude towards one another”.

A bunch of beautiful flowers

This should be acted out. You need a bouquet of nice flowers (they can be artificial ones!). Hidden inside the bouquet are a stone, a dry leaf and a dirty rag.

Just imagine a person, man or woman, who is dressed really well. He/she wants to look nice and attract some attention. But what might lie inside this person?

- A stone: Is his/her heart like a stone?
- A dry leaf: Is he/she bored with life, without any fresh ideas, or life-giving hopes?
- A dirty rag: Is there dirt inside him/her, for nobody to see, but it's there all the same....?

R & D question: Are there any stones, dry leaves or dirty rags inside me?

Similar experiences were shared in other groups. The session on **Corruption** was very lively as participants identified the causes of corruption and people involved in corruption. The session on **Conflict transformation** was also of great help. Some participants used it to explain the root causes of the conflict between the political parties – brought about by the change in government. The session on **search for values** was also appreciated as participants struggled to highlight the four moral values and to see how they could be put into practice.

EXPERIENCE SHARING

The session on experience sharing was very lively as participants were impatient to share their experiences and to extend their appreciation of the programme.

Civil Society

1. “I am very disappointed with the RSLAF because they betrayed us – the civilians – during the war in our country. When information reached us that the rebels were planning to attack our town, the soldiers told us not to run away as they were in control of the situation and we had confidence in them. To our greatest surprise, the rebels attacked us at around 4:00 am and the soldiers were nowhere to protect us and we were left in the hands of the rebels with no defence. My Mum and Dad were killed and I was captured by

the rebels and taken from the southern province to the eastern province for seven years. Since then I have not been very comfortable and happy with any member of RSLAF because of what I went through, especially with the delay to my education. I see most of my school mates with convenient jobs and I am now in the class room with just my Higher Teachers' Certificate. I really get angry whenever I see combat and I always think of something harmful to do." Major T.M Brima (member of faculty) apologized to him on behalf of the soldiers that had betrayed them and the entire army. Fortunately, one soldier stood up and said he was part of the military group that had tactically withdrawn from the situation. He explained: "We were only fifty in number and thought that we could handle the situation, but to our greatest surprise the rebels outnumbered us ten times over. There was no way we could communicate with you, the civilians..... I am really sorry on behalf of my colleagues, even though some did not survive the war." They then hugged each other and shook hands.

2. "I am a strong supporter of the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) and I was very active during the elections. I was always on air to tell the people about the party. But each time I was on air the opposition party – that is the SLPP supporters – always humiliated me, to the extent that they went on air themselves and said that I was a drunkard and that I had tuberculosis. I went back on air to counteract the statement and told the people that the woman who said I was a drunkard drinks with me. She even buys the alcohol for me and that she is my girlfriend, so she must have given me the tuberculosis. After that statement, I became a target for the opposition but I always survived it by using the media. Now that the elections are over and we are all working for development, I have forgiven them. Fortunately, the woman who said those words on air is here with us. I just want to tell her that elections are over and we should be friends and not enemies." He stood and went to shake hands with the woman, with smiles from both of them.

SLP

"I had a bitter experience during the rebel war in the town I was posted to work. I was not treated fairly by the civilians because when the rebels attack any town, they look for soldiers or police men to kill and if you are extremely lucky they will ask you to join them. I trusted the people I was escaping with in my civilian attire and we went past several checkpoints without any problem. On our way to the last village, to a safer location, one of the rebels called us to return and we ran into the forest. We were chased by them and had to stop at a particular point. One of the rebels asked us whether there was a soldier amongst us and we said 'No'. He asked again if there was a policeman and I was the first to say 'No'. A woman said 'Arrest him, he is a policeman'. I was taken away while they allowed the others to go. I was seriously maltreated and suffered much pain in the hands of the rebels until we were attacked by forces loyal to the government. At that point the rebels ran off in all directions and that was how I escaped. Since then I have been praying that some day I will come across the woman who betrayed me, and that if she is dead, she will go to hell fire. But today I have forgiven her with all my heart because the Lord forgives."

COMMENTS

- The entire training and outreach was very successful. In Kono, significant progress was made in reconciling the people involved in the conflict.

- We are also grateful for the facilitators who have come on board: Vamba Konneh, Major Forde and Inspector Amadu Turay from SLP. They are very active.
- We are also grateful to our partners, especially to Brig. Kassim Kamara who provided a water bouncer for the participants so that they would have access to water, and for the facilities provided by RSLAF.
- We were able to take along just two facilitators to Kono due to the change of venue and vehicle problems, so we had to use a commercial vehicle for one facilitator and the support staff. The military and police vehicles were not available as most require maintenance.
- The issue of vehicles has to be addressed, especially for the MFD outreach programmes. The H-SL van cannot go every where in the provinces and when programmes clash, another vehicle has to be found.

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