

The Jeneba Project Report



September 2012

The Year In Brief

This summer, The Jeneba Project led another set of successful initiatives in Sierra Leone. The construction of a secondary school in Sierra Leone has come to a head-start with the purchase of one-acre of land in a town close to Lungi called Robis, in northern Sierra Leone. After years of aiming to acquire a piece of land to serve as a site for our future schools, we now have enough property to consolidate most of our current activities in one area.



Purchasing a piece of property is not easy anywhere, but the process is even more complex in Sierra Leone, where the same piece of property may have multiple title holders with suspicious documentation. Moreover, we were new to the process of buying land, so we had to learn everything on the job. However, with the help of the Chiefdom, we successfully negotiated a fair deal and obtained all documentation for the acquisition. Thanks to our two exceptional volunteers this summer, Alicia Wells and Alyssa Lapane, most of the land has been brushed and cleared. It was not easy fulfilling all these transactions during the rainy season in Sierra Leone. But, despite the rain that at times lasted for days on end, and often compelled us to halt work, we achieved most of our objectives.

The next stage of the process is to start work on the construction of a senior secondary school. Since it was impossible to mold bricks during the rainy season, we postponed the process to the end of the year when the dry season returns. Even though the dry season comes with its own impediment of water shortage in Sierra Leone, it is a better season to mold bricks. We intend to commence construction as soon as the bricks are available in December.

In addition to purchasing land in Sierra Leone, we also made The Jeneba Project an official local Nongovernmental Organization (NGO). We had anticipated the process to be as simple as incorporation in the State of New York, but unfortunately the process took more time and more resources than expected. However, we are glad to report that The Jeneba Project is now officially registered under the Ministry of Finance, Sierra Leone. We hope that this status will remove future hurdles in terms of hosting foreign volunteers and importing donated materials to the country. Registration also grants The Jeneba Project tax-exempt status in Sierra Leone.

We had preliminary informal conversations with the Peace Corp in Sierra Leone for future collaboration. Once The Jeneba Project has a school and housing for volunteers, we hope the Peace Corp will be able to contribute some volunteers. The Peace Corp provides volunteer teachers primarily in the areas of English, Health, and General Science, which are some of the main areas in which Sierra Leonean schools need assistance.


Alicia Wells and Alyssa Lapane, both of whom are US school teachers and served as summer volunteers, worked diligently to design a health/first aid curriculum for the future school. We believe that in a country where so many continue to die from preventable diseases, The Jeneba Project can provide the youths with instructions on how to prevent diseases such as malaria and diarrhea. As we write this report, Sierra Leone is plagued by a cholera outbreak. Cholera is a communicable disease that is caused by poor sanitation, especially of drinking water. Diseases such as this can be prevented with just a little instruction in common hygiene and basic sanitation.

Additionally, the senior secondary school The Jeneba Project constructed in 2009, administered by the St Joseph's Secondary School, has just graduated its first group of students. Four hundred students attend the school annually and around half of that number took the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSSCE), a college entrance exam. However, the next group of students will only graduate two years from now due to changes in the educational structures within Sierra Leone. Rather than the three years formerly required, high school students will now spend four years in senior secondary school.

Another important achievement this summer was the successful launch of the Sierra Leone Memory Project (SLMP). The project collects testimonies from Sierra Leoneans who experienced the civil war between 1991-2002. We hope the testimonies collected will provide a meaningful framework to publicly explore the traumatic memories of political violence; debate difficult questions about human behavior and choices in difficult circumstances; highlight the problematic nature of rigid 'victim' and 'perpetrator' labels; and ultimately provide future generations and leaders with powerful lessons about the importance of human rights and democratic values in preventing intolerance and violent expressions.

The Memory Project is sponsored by The Jeneba Project and Humanity in Action—an international educational organization dedicated to inspiring and connecting a global network of students, young professionals and established leaders committed to promoting





human rights, diversity and active citizenship in their own communities and around the world. We are currently looking for additional sponsors in order to continue to collect this historic information for the benefit of future generations both in Sierra Leone and around the world. Most of the materials collected from the initial project will be available on The Jeneba Project's [Memory Project](#) page. It may also be available on CD/DVD by request.

We have also initiated several partnership opportunities both in Sierra Leone and the US. The hope is that as we make progress both with the school and the Memory Project, there will be many more opportunities for collaboration and alliances.

Funding for The Jeneba Project remains one of our major priorities as the extent of our services and what we choose to offer will continue to be heavily determined by the amount of money in our coffer. Our volunteers have been quite helpful in reducing the cost of our activities. We hope to attract a larger and stronger donor community in the near future in order to provide more services in the areas we work.

On behalf of The Jeneba Project, we thank all of our donors and sponsors. Our appreciation goes to all those who continue to support us financially or otherwise. Without your support we cannot provide the critical services we continue to offer to those in need across the world. As we enter the next phase of our fundraising, we will ask that you continue your unwavering support and confidence. Please visit our website for more pictures and videos of our work and activities in Sierra Leone.

Sincerely,

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Life After Salone

Alicia Wells


Between the sea and the mountains Freetown could be a picturesque city.

I don't know what I expected when I decided to go to Sierra Leone. But regardless of what I thought it would be like, the experience wasn't something I could have anticipated. You don't get clear sense of a country from simply reading books or looking at pictures, or even hearing second hand stories about the country.



Sierra Leone is a very pretty country. Between the sea and the mountains Freetown could be a picturesque city. But because the country lacks the infrastructure necessary to enforce basic laws, the city streets are lined with trash and chaos characterizes the traffic on the streets for both pedestrians and automobiles. During my stay in Salone, I became less aware of these facts as they slowly became part of life. Dropping a plastic bag that used to hold frozen yogurt on the side of the road was no longer something that caused me to second-guess my morals. Squeezing four, or possibly five people into the backseat of a taxi while three more people squished into the front seat seemed just 'normal.' Sitting in an overloaded mini-van while we did a K-turn in the middle of a crowded intersection was no longer horrifying. In the United States I am repulsed by these behaviors, but in Salone there wasn't an alternative.

When I got off the plane in New York and exited the airport I was struck by the feeling that I had never left. But then, I immediately noticed how clean the streets are. I noticed everything as I continued north to Boston. The water coming out of a faucet, the sidewalks, the ease of a gas stove, street lights, options in the grocery store, the houses, the lack of pot holes in the streets, and yes, the number of white people or *poto*, as the say in Salone, milling around. Ultimately, I noticed how easy life is. This is not to say that my life in Salone was particularly difficult. I was well taken care of, hardly ever made my own food, and only did my own laundry twice. But life in the States is ridiculously easy, comparatively.



I remember having a conversation about life in the states. Questions about technology and the availability of items were raised. While there is the obvious obstacle of money everywhere, once you have the money to buy the items and pay the electric bills, most things in the US are guaranteed to work. The yellow pages make fixing things or hiring someone to do the work simple. Whereas in Salone, needing someone to do the work required going out and searching for someone qualified. Online resources and certifications in the United States allow you to hire someone qualified for the job; but in Salone, you sometimes just have to trust that your contractor can in fact do the job.

I now appreciate the regulations in the United States. Standing at the DMV to transfer my Connecticut driver's license to Massachusetts wasn't as awful as I remembered it being. Everything was organized: fill out the paperwork, have your picture taken, take a brief eye exam and sign on the electronic pen pad, easy. I can only imagine the hassle that would come with in Salone. I checked on the Internet that the transfer would cost \$100. You could anticipate this in Salone as well, but what about the unofficial fees that are expected. In the United States that isn't even heard of, but in Salone it is common practice and expected by many. The task, while time consuming and slightly annoying in the States, is straight forward and easy. One building; one, maybe two, forms at most, and waiting until your number is called to turn in the paperwork. No running around the city trying to accomplish a simple task. Then, just as the man at the DMV said, my license arrived in less than a week, through the mail too.

I've spent some time traveling in my life but for the first time I feel like where I have been has altered my perception of the world as a whole. I appreciate things that I took for granted before and find myself more patient with factors such as time, and just plain waiting. I'm settling back into life in the States, but my perception of the world will forever be changed by the experiences I had in Sierra Leone.

Anything is possible but nothing is certain.

Alyssa Lapane

"Anything is possible but nothing is certain."

After spending a month in Salone, coming back to the States was a relief. As much as I enjoyed my time over there, it was not easy. I am overwhelmed by the amount of information I gathered both about myself and the conditions in which other people live. I

came back to the States feeling extremely grateful for everything that I was afforded growing up and the lifestyle I continue to lead.



Things that used to bother me, no longer do. It seems foolish to worry about petty drama when other people are struggling to survive. As cliché as that sounds, it is true. Reading about extreme poverty or about the damage caused by a senseless civil war is one thing; visiting the country and experiencing some of the aftermaths can be earth-shattering.

The main aspect of my trip that remains with me is the life of the people who suffered amputations during the war. I was fortunate enough to meet a few of them through my work with the Memory Project. The resilience and bravery that they exhibit EVERY DAY should be lauded. I cannot understand how people can treat them with disrespect, especially because many of them have accepted their fate and just want to live a 'normal' life. To be that light-hearted and genuine even after all they have been through is amazing. They are an inspiration! To hear the personal stories of how they were treated during and after the civil war is atrocious. Chopping off limbs in general are despicable crimes, but to have them be politically

motivated and executed on individuals who had no idea there was a president is even more sickening.

Another thing that took a relatively long time to adjust to was the general conditions of the country from garbage management to time. Yes, people had to be certain places at certain times, but being late or not showing up seemed to be common. Time seemed to be the least of worry, and the only way to get things done was if you had the money to expedite the process.

It is difficult to understand how a country with so much potential can be so stagnant in many ways, but Joseph explained it best: In Salone, anything is possible but nothing is certain. It is this possibility of life that keeps people going daily, even though what they thrive to achieve may not be a given. I hope that their resilience and strength will be rewarded!



The Jeneba Project

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