ECHOES OF YOUTH VOICES AND CONCERNS FROM THE MANO RIVER BORDER ZONES

THEME: Border Economic Challenges

LIBERIAN DOLLAR PENETRATES DEEP INTO SIERRA LEONE

LE DOLLAR LIBÉRIEN PÉNÈTRE PROFONDEMENT EN SIERRA LEONE

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This is the second of four editions of the BORDERLINES magazine published as part of the REGIONAL YOUTH INITIATIVE OF THE WORLD BANK CIVIL SOCIETY FUND (CSF). It is implemented by Pampana Communications with the support of the World Bank, the UNDP and the Mano River Union Secretariat.

The Magazine is among other activities of the REGIONAL YOUTH INITIATIVE intended to draw the attention of policy makers to the salient voices, views and concerns of vulnerable youth residing along the volatile post-conflict Mano River border communities which had served as intensive conflict zones and flashpoints during the war and peace keeping periods in the three Mano River Union countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The theme for this edition ‘BORDER ECONOMIC CHALLENGES’ has been chosen based on the strong consideration that youths in the three countries in general and those along the borders in particular, have been the largest single group who have been most associated with conflict and peace in the Mano River Union sub-region and that their economic have been at the bottom of the conflict.

During the 14-year conflict period in the sub-region, the youth constituted over 90% of the fighting forces and were mostly recycled in cross-border battles across the three countries. Even before the war, the youth were faced with wide ranging problems that hindered their individual and collective participation in governance and development. With the end of the war, there have been minimal efforts to approach the youth crisis in the three countries from a regional vantage point. Most youth support activities in the sub-region have been confined to the individual countries.

In this regard, the BORDERLINES magazine is among the rare efforts in the Mano River sub-region aimed at addressing youth concerns and welfare by looking beyond national frontiers to act within the broader framework of the Mano River Union.

ÉDITORIAL

Ceci est la seconde de quatre éditions du magasin FRONTIERES publié en tant qu’élément de l’INITIATIVE RÉGIONALE de la JEUNESSE DES FONDS de SOCIÉTÉ CIVILS de la BANQUE MONDIALE. Il est mis en application par Pampana Communications avec l’appui de la banque mondiale, du PNUD et du secrétariat de l’union du fleuve Mano.

Le magasin est entre d’autres activités de l’INITIATIVE RÉGIONALE de la JEUNESSE prévue pour dessiner l’attention des gouvernements aux voix saillantes, les vues et les soucis de la jeunesse vulnérable résidant le long des volatiles communautés d’après-guerre dans la frontière du fleuve Mano. Ces communautés avaient servi comme de zones et de points d’inflammabilité intensifs pendant la guerre et après la paix dans les trois pays qui constituent l’union du fleuve Mano : la Guinée, la Sierra Leone et le Libéria.

Le thème pour cette édition est des DÉFIS ÉCONOMIQUES de FRONTIÈRE ”, qui parle des grands défis économiques devant la jeunesse qui résident le long du volatile communautés d’après-guerre de l’union du fleuve Mano qui avaient servi de zones et de points d’inflammabilité intensifs de conflit pendant les périodes de guerre et de maintien de la paix dans les trois pays qui constituent l’union du fleuve Mano : la Guinée, la Sierra Leone et le Libéria.

Pendant la période de conflit de 14 ans dans la sous région, la jeunesse constituée plus de 90% des forces de combat et ont été la plupart du temps réutilisé dans les batailles frontalières à travers les trois pays. Même avant la guerre, la jeunesse a été confrontée aux problèmes étendus qui ont gêné leur participation individuelle et collective au gouvernement et au développement. Souvent manquant de l’information et des opportunités, les jeunesse sont devenues les cibles faciles pour le recrutement dans la guerre. À la fin de la guerre, il y a eu des efforts minimaux d’approcher la crise de la jeunesse dans les trois pays d’une position avantageuse régionale. La plupart des activités qui soutiennent la jeunesse dans la sous région ont été confinées aux pays individus.

À cet égard, le magasin FRONTIERES est parmi les efforts rares dans la sous région du fleuve Mano visée à adresser des soucis et le bien-être de la jeunesse en regardant au delà des frontières nationales pour agir dans le cadre plus large de l’union du fleuve Mano.
Liberian Dollar Penetrates Deep into Sierra Leone

THERE ARE SALIENT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CAUSES OF THE GROWING LIBERIAN CURRENCY STRENGTH ACROSS THE BORDER INTO SIERRA LEONE. SIDIE SHERIFF REPORTS.

There are several notable international border crossing points in the Mano River Basin. You have the tri-border zone where Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone share a common boundary around the important trading towns of Koidu, Foya and Nongowa. You have the famous Voinjama-Nzerekore axis between Liberia and Guinea. You have the Gbalamuya-Pamlap road linking Conakry and Freetown via Forecariah in Guinea and Kambia in Sierra Leone, among many others.

Outstandingly, there is the renowned Babangida Highway linking Monrovia to Sierra Leone’s eastern and southern capitals of Kenema and Bo respectively through the famous Mano River Border Bridge. This has been largely attributed to the superior road advantage of Liberia over Sierra Leone which makes the proximity of Monrovia to the Sierra Leonean Chiefdoms of Makpele and Sorogbeima more apparent than the ‘whole-day’ journey it takes the people of these chiefdoms to travel to Bo or Kenema in their country.

“When people from our country’s capital, Freetown, come to visit us, they are surprised to hear ‘Due to the good motor road, we can easily reach Monrovia to sell our goods and return with highly needed items. So our demand for the Liberian dollar is so high and frequent that we have come to adopt it as our currency’, says Jebbeh Gray who trades in foodstuffs and toiletries between Zimmi and Monrovia, “When people from our country’s capital, Freetown, come to visit us, they are surprised to hear

people rightly measure “proximity” in terms of travel time, not distance. Even though they seem to be ‘distance-closer’ to their provincial headquarters, they consider it much easier and faster to transact business with Monrovia than with Kenema or Bo or Freetown in their own country.

BORDER YOUTHS TRADING IN LIBERIAN DOLLARS

The village of Bo is on the Liberia side of the Bridge and Jendema on the Sierra Leone side. It is from here that the Liberian dollar has been observed to have penetrated deep into Sierra Leone, almost replacing the Sierra Leone legal tender, “Leone”, as medium of exchange in economic transactions.

Hannafi and his
our banana, mango and orange sellers, for example, quote prices in Liberian currency”, Gray continues.

“So it has turned out to be. Our learned people in the world of economics say: let the market forces dictate the status quo”, laments Hannafi, “and no force of arms can change this. The only magic that can change this is for the government in Freetown to reactivate the pre-war Bandajuma Road Project”.

Before war started in the two countries in early 1990s, the governments of former President Samuel Doe of Liberia and President Joseph Momoh of Sierra Leone started the implementation of what was to be known “the Mano River Union Highway”. The two governments meant to construct a first class highway between the Liberian capital, Monrovia, and Sierra Leone’s second city and southern capital, Bo. Liberia was to do its stretch from Monrovia to the Mano River Border Bridge; and Sierra Leone from its southern city of Bo to the same Bridge.

Liberia speedily and efficiently completed its own part of the project which became known as the ‘Babangida Highway’ before war started in that country towards the end of 1989. Sierra Leone went less than halfway through the project and the result was the ‘Bo-Bandajuma Highway’. The remainder road from Bandajuma to the border Bridge was never done up to the start of the war in March 1991.

“The former government of Sierra Leone was said to have had ample time to accomplish its own part of the job before the war but was neither seen to have done much to forge ahead with the project nor did it communicate well the reasons for its delay. Hence there was widespread disaffection and feeling of disappointment in south-eastern Sierra Leone” says Sheikh Kuyateh, an indigene of Zimmi now based in Bo.

But this is just partly the reason for the economic and social transformation now emerging and evident in communities extending from the Border Bridge into Sierra Leone. The wave of Liberianization in Makpele and Sorogbeima chieftdoms in Sierra Leone is not due to currency conquest alone.

Sorogbeima and Makpele also have a very strong ethnic and religious affinity to the Vai and Gola speaking people in Liberia. In fact, Sorogbeima is originally Vai and Makpele is originally Gola. There is also a deep culture of marabout Islam permeating Vai-Gola lands ranging from Bomi Hills and Robertsport in Liberia to Pujehun and Kailahun in Sierra Leone.

These explain why the people of Makpele and Sorogbeima often surprise non-Mende speaking visitors from Freetown by not only quoting prices in Liberian dollars, but also conversing with them teasingly in Liberian English instead of Krio. Outwardly, their languages - Gola and Vai – have been replaced by Mende, the largest indigenous provincial ethnic group in Sierra Leone. But inwardly they have never forgotten their linguistic roots and identities.

There are important ramifications of this development for the governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia. For Liberia it can be a matter of cultural reunion and an opportunity for strengthened ties with Sierra Leone, explaining why President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, being herself connected to the Gola ethnic group, had to recently grant Liberian citizenship to thousands of Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia, mostly hailing from Sorogbeima and Makpele.

For Sierra Leone, it is different, noting that even before the war, the people of Sorogbeima and Makpele largely regarded themselves as a marginalized people by the government in Freetown and downtrodden by the political event surrounding the cold-blooded murder in

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Zimmi in 1981 of their son-of-the-soil, Kemokai, which led to the *Dorkpowosu Rebellion* followed by what was considered as the “repressive response by the then Siaka Stevens regime”.

Up to the onset of the war in Sierra Leone, a sense of political apathy and tendencies of nonchalant attitudes and latent revolt were rife in Sorogbeima and Makpele.

Former Member of Parliament, representing the two chiefdoms, Mannah Kpaka, was said to have been the only opposition politician during the Stevens regime who refused to join the All Peoples Congress (APC) one-party system and who continued to enjoy the confidence of his constituency throughout his political career.

Interestingly, former President Siaka Stevens himself made strong maternal lineage claims to the historic coastal town of Sulima in Sorogbeima chiefdom and was said to have often referred to Mannah Kpaka as his maternal uncle. But the claims by Stevens were never translated into action by rewarding his maternal homeland with good roads as his then counterpart, Samuel Doe, did to Grand Gedeh County in Liberia.

In spite of their common ancestral links as claimed, Siaka Stevens and Mannah Kpaka were always odd political bedfellows throughout their careers.

Now history has come to pass. Regimes have changed in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. The political stage has played host and said goodbye to many players of war and politics.

The international environment under which impunity and dictatorships had reigned through the 70s and 80s is no longer the same. No sensible regime can impose itself and expect subservience anymore. It is high time that emerging governments now thought of legitimizing themselves by eliciting popular support from the grassroots rather than showing power and prowess to subdue people.

All recent sub-regional peace initiatives in West Africa have pointed to the need for newly elected governments in conflict prone countries to pursue national legitimation, not ethnic, regional and partisan appeasement. The country report on Sierra Leone released by the Seventh African Governance Forum held in Ouagadougou from 24\(^{th}\) through 26\(^{th}\) October 2007, for example, emphasizes that trust and state legitimacy in Sierra Leone can be achieved by “creating public and national ownership of government. If the Sierra Leone State has to play an effective role in poverty reduction and development, it must enjoy full legitimacy and trust at whatever level and in whatever sector”. The report claims that the tendency to view public trust in terms of the way private or civil society agencies trust government or public sector agencies in general is not sufficient.

“...This is half the story. In the Sierra Leone context state officials hardly trust civil society. A lot of studies point at mutual suspicion between citizens (especially youth) and the state”. The report further reveals that “the recent general presidential and parliamentary elections reveal a sharp ethnoregional divide along south-east and north-western lines. This divide which has serious implications for national cohesion and development is now seen as the new challenge for the new government”.

In this regard, the government in Freetown is to revisit its priorities and consider strongly the reactivation, acceleration and the completion of the Mano River Union highway, in addition to continuing with the Kenema-Koindu road construction project initiated by the previous government which now seems to be underway.

These would not only substantially restore trust for government in Pujehun and Kailahun Districts where the first guns were fired and last combatants disarmed, but would also go a long way in ameliorating the intensive disaffection now developing in these two districts for what their people widely perceive as “bearing the biggest brunt of an undue disenfranchisement action” in the aftermath of the September 2007 presidential run-off elections. **END.**
LEARNING CENTER

FACTS ABOUT CURRENCY AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE

Foreign exchange is the process of trading the currency of one country for the currency of another. This process is necessary for international trade to take place in a world of different currencies. The value of one currency versus another is determined by the international exchange rate and, in most cases, is subject to fluctuations based on open trading of currency in foreign exchange markets.

For as long as trade between countries with different currencies has taken place, foreign exchange has been in existence. According to Julian Walmsley, author of The Foreign Exchange and Money Markets Guide, although foreign exchange has existed since before biblical times, a formal global market for foreign exchange did not develop until the 1800s with cable transfers taking place between London and New York.

Historically, governments attempted to set exchange rates themselves to improve a country’s trade position. If a country set its exchange rate low relative to others, it could improve the country’s trade position by making its exports more affordable and imports from other countries less affordable. Such policies led to trade wars as countries struggled to improve their trade positions. Since the early 1970s, however, most major currencies have been allowed to "float," which means allowing exchange rates to be determined by supply and demand on the currency markets. Most countries still fine tune exchange rates by keeping a reserve of gold or foreign currencies, known as foreign exchange reserves, which they buy and sell to stabilize their own currency when necessary.

The foreign exchange markets are decentralized and consist of thousands of businesses and governments throughout the world that buy and sell currency. Governments have a special interest in foreign exchange because an unstable or rapidly falling price for their currency can create economic disruption. Therefore, governments, or their central banks, intervene in foreign exchange through open market activities, namely, buying or selling of currencies to influence the exchange rate for their own. Other common players in foreign exchange markets include portfolio managers, foreign currency brokers, and commercial banks. Some of these organizations deal in currencies as an investment. Others sell the currency to their own customers, such as multinational corporations, importers, and exporters, who need to convert currency to conduct their businesses.

The largest users of the foreign exchange market are commercial banks, which serve as intermediaries between currency buyers and sellers. Corporations and financial institutions also trade currencies, primarily to safeguard their foreign currency-denominated assets and liabilities against adverse rate movement. Banks and fund managers trade currencies to profit from rate movements. Individuals also are subject to fluctuating exchange rates, most commonly when a traveler exchanges his/her native currency for a foreign one before embarking on a business trip or vacation.

The foreign exchange market determines exchange rates. When demand for the currency of one country goes up in relation to that of another, the first currency is said to be more valuable (or stronger) in terms of the second currency. Some of the factors that increase demand for a country’s currency are an increase in exports (more currency is needed to pay for these exports), an increase in interest rates (the currency now earns more for the holder), and anything that improves political stability (the risk of holding that currency has decreased). Currency markets can also be influenced by indirect indicators of economic strength or even by rumors or anecdotal information.
Bad Roads threaten Border Farmers and Traders

**BESIDES ITS ADVERSE IMPACT ON CURRENCY STRENGTH, BAD ROADS CAN ALSO SUBTRACT VALUE FROM FARMING AND AGRO-TRADING PROSPECTS. THIS IS A FACT OF LIFE IN THE TRIBORDER AXIS OF THE MANY FRONTIERS IN MANO RIVER UNION. SHEIKH BAWOH REPORTS.**

Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia are no exceptions to the under development suffered in rural communities in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) as a result of hindrance to transportation of people and goods posed by poor road network and infrastructure. The “current rural travel and transport”, according to the World Bank, “are dominated by head loading and walking, largely by women, to satisfy the daily travel and goods movement needs of rural populations in Sub Sahara Africa” (Source: Intermediate Means of Transport in SSA, World Bank Technical Paper No 161).

This grim picture can best be illustrated by reference to the appalling condition of roads in the tri-border communities linking Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. This area’s terrible motor road network and infrastructure take a severe economic toll on local residents who are predominantly cross border petty traders and rural farmers.

On the Guinean side of the border, the Nzerekore-Massanta Road is reportedly in a far better shape - with almost no potholes - than the Nongowa-Nzerekore road which is in a worse state similar to the roads across the border in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Sarah Mansaray, a Guinean based in Nongowa who sells fruits and vegetables in the border communities says: “Those of us who trade in perishable goods like banana, oranges, cucumber, watermelons, guavas, lettuce, onions, among others, are mostly affected. Sometimes the condition of the roads prevents us from reaching the market on time and making the profits we envisage”.

Like Sarah, Sallieu Jalloh, a garden farmer in Nongowa, says he is frustrated not by the lack of market, but by the appalling stretch of road he has to cover each day to reach the market. Most border residents in Guinea are farmers like their Sierra Leonean and Liberian counterparts. But the Guinean farmers would stand to reap more benefits if the road conditions along the border were to improve since Guinea deals more in perishable crops than their counterparts in the other two countries.

“We face lots of difficulties in transporting

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our agricultural produce to Nzerekore and Massanta,” laments Sallieu. “And the distance we cover to reach the market is not encouraging because the roads are bad and terrible especially during the rainy season”. These are Guinea’s biggest towns near its boundaries with Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Sallieu says in spite of the difficulties they face on these roads, he and many other traders like himself are forced to take the risk of traveling to Nzerekore any way in order to make a living. “We have no choice because if we don’t go, it means we won’t sell our produce or sell it at a highly reduced price, even at a loss, in Nongowa or other outlying villages.”

While Nongowa residents are mostly garden or subsistence rice and tuber farmers, inhabitants of Foya Kamah in Liberia and those of Koindu in Sierra Leone are mostly cash crop farmers, although they do not entirely depend on cash crops for a living.

Before the war, Loffa County on the Liberian side of the border was an expanding agricultural community with very enterprising inhabitants. Loffa hosted several European agricultural projects as well as other programs. Its pre-war communities of over 400,000 people were respected throughout Liberia as master farmers. But after the war, one of the serious challenges faced by Loffa farmers is poor road infrastructure. One major challenge highlighted in the Liberia Government’s Food Security Strategy is affordability by consumers and access to the market, pointing out the need for an improved road condition.

In an IRIN interview, Ex-President Kabbah in his handing over speech recommended that particular attention be paid to the Kenema-Koindu road for which funding had been secured from four Arab countries and that of OPEC. Kabbah reiterated that the road deserves special mention because of “its strategic and security importance”.

Although a recent World Food Programme document on Liberia indicates that the underlying causes of food insecurity are low agricultural production and low purchasing power, a recent market review by IRIN News shows that “outside Monrovia, the market system functions poorly, largely due to bad roads, limited transportation and lack of functioning institutions”.

A trader in Foya Kamah, Morie Collie, also argues that bad road hampers trade. “From here to Voinjama, traveling on the roads is cumbersome for traders and farmers who have to transport their goods and produce to better priced market centers”.

Like Liberia’s Loffa County, Kailahun district in Sierra Leone is famous for cash crops and notorious for bad roads. Since colonial times to the start of the war in 1991, the bulk of Sierra Leone’s agricultural foreign exchange earnings used to come from Kailahun’s cash crop commodities, mainly Coffee, Cocoa and Palm Kernel. Pendembu town in the Kailahun District was the last destination point for produce cargo transport by railway during colonial days.

“Produce sales through the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board (SLPMB) used to greatly enhance Sierra Leone’s export earnings”, says Karmoh Fodei Koroma. But today the road to Kailahun district from Kenema is as bad as the roads from Kailahun town to Koindu.

There is a strong feeling among farmers and traders in Kailahun District that unless the main access road linking Koindu to Kenema via Kailahun, Daru and Segbwema are

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transformed into a “Class A Road”, farmers in that part of the country will continue to get far less value for money on their produce returns. According to the Critical Road Infrastructure Study undertaken by the Sierra Leone Government, roads requiring reconstruction and rehabilitation in the category of “Class A” should cover at most 800km. Of the 800km roads, the Kenema- Pendembu road which is 84km and Pendembu- Koindu road which 86 Km, if rehabilitated will provide access to the agricultural remote areas of Kailahun District.

Other documents like the country’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) have recognized the importance of the road sector as an important element to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. “The Government’s priority in the infrastructure sector is to improve land, coastal and river transport in order to increase access to the rural farming population and urban poor to the market centre as well as social and economic services”.

Also, the Transport Sector Strategy of March 2007 outlines three major objectives as follows: (1) Ensuring physical access to services, markets and revenue generating opportunities, (2) Lowering Transport cost to ensure affordability of transport; and (3) Increasing efficiency in the delivery of transport system.

Although the various studies have emphasized the importance of good roads in the economic development of the country only a portion of roads are accessible in the real sense. The negative effects of bad roads on Kailahun farmers are enormous. Due to the poor road condition, Kailahun cocoa farmers are forced to under-sell their produce to mostly agents of Lebanese produce buyers who have the capital to ply trucks and other heavy duty vehicles on the rugged Kailahun- Kenema route. This development has raised questions as to whether farmers in that region are actually getting the true worth of their produce in money terms.

“I don’t think with this situation we are benefiting because we sell our produce for far less than the normal price. Many of us want to avoid the trouble of transporting our produce to Kenema with rocketing transport fare”, Samuel Langama a farmer from Yenga laments.

The poor road condition is also affecting traders in the district. The once famous Koindu international market, though it still sits, attracts far less traders now than before the war. This is partly to the fear posed by dispute between Sierra Leone and Guinea over the nearby town of Yenga, but also partly to the bad road condition.

The Kailahun road issue has some political undertone. The last government of Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) made a commitment to transform the road to Kailahun to a first class highway as part of its nationwide development plan. A survey on the road was done with the promise that work will commence after the elections. Now that elections are over, residents of Kailahun are still waiting to hear from the new government whether it will continue from where the last government stopped. Chief Edward Kundu Foryoh, the Chiefdom speaker of Kissy Teng, expressed the hope that the new government will pick up from where the last governments stopped. “Politics is over and I hope the new President will not abandon plans to reconstruct the road.”

In Freetown recently, President Ernest Bai Koroma promised members of the Makona River Union that work on the road will go on as planned as more than fifty percent of the fund for the road has been received.

Ex-President Kabbah

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in his handing over speech recommended that particular attention be paid to the Kenema-Koindu road for which funding has been secured from four Arab countries and OPEC. Kabbah reiterated that the road deserves special mention because of “its strategic and security importance”. If the new President heeds the advice of his predecessor and delivers on his promise of upgrading the Kenema-Koindu road, the first line of beneficiaries will be farmers and traders in Kailahun. Beyond them, the country will also benefit immensely in the form of economic growth. This is probably why the most salient single recommendation contained in the country’s recent Diagnostic Trade Integration Study (DTIS) for Sierra Leone is “Get the Cocoa Sector Working Again”.

In view of the appalling road condition in the three Mano River Union countries, it makes a lot of sense when the World Bank, in another study, recommends to the governments of Sub Sahara Africa – including the three Mano River Union countries - that “Significant time savings and productivity gains can be achieved by using Intermediate Means of Transport (IMTs) ranging from wheel barrows to motor cycles and motor cars and trucks with significant impact on women. That returns on investments in IMTs and low cost rural infrastructure will be so high that private people will respond with government role being largely promotional” (Source: Intermediate Means of Transport in SSA, World Bank Technical Paper No 161).

“IMTs would save large amounts of time and energy and reduce drudgery, particularly for women. When IMTs have been introduced in the past and used in the transport system, private individuals have usually reaped the benefits. The better understanding that is required of the nature of Rural Travel and Transport and its impact on rural development is being addressed in current studies under the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Program by the World Bank and ECA with the support of bilateral donors.”

The World Bank further asserts that “gaps exist in rural transport services as evidenced by the considerable movements of people and goods that occur off-road”. Therefore, “improving rural access and personal mobility of rural people, particularly women, will help to increase productivity, and hence, agricultural production. Intermediate means of transport has the potential for achieving this.” END.
HOW TRANSPORT HELPS AN ECONOMY


Transport helps an economy in two basic ways. First, it gives consumers access to places where they can engage in income-generating activities, consume other goods and services (including education and health care), or engage in leisure and social activities. Second, transport enters the economy as an intermediate input into production, either directly or as a complement to other factors (for instance, securing inputs or getting output to market).

In the case of rural agricultural production, improving transport may lower input prices and hence production costs, improve access to credit, facilitate technological diffusion, increase the area of land under cultivation, or increase the availability of "incentive" goods. One study on Nigeria (Balwinder Singh, "An Analysis of Market Infrastructural Problems in the Green Revolution Period in Nigeria," Economic Affairs, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1986) reported the substantial costs to farmers due to inadequate transportation facilities connecting rural areas to market towns.

On a national level, improved transport may increase trade and competition from imports, which in turn may lead to improved production efficiency, putting downward pressure on consumer prices and reducing seasonal fluctuations in price. In urban areas, the price and quality of transportation and other types of infrastructure significantly affect firms’ decisions about where to locate and ultimately affect firms’ output.

In Kinshasa, for example, which has expanded fourfold physically since independence, a deteriorating infrastructure forces people living in districts developed after 1960 to walk long distances to reach a bus or their workplace? This affects the productivity of workers and the wages they are likely to demand.

Transportation costs are a significant part of total costs, affecting the survival of small firms and the entry of new firms into an industry or market. National output can increase if inputs shift to more productive uses. By attracting inputs from other regions, transport can shift a region’s production outward.

WHAT IS RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE


Rural infrastructure can be seen as a complex of physical structures or networks within which social and economic activities are carried out. These structures are not ends in themselves, but are means to achieving the broader goals of poverty reduction and economic growth. Rural infrastructure contributes to these goals by providing essential services such as water and sanitation; energy for cooking, heat and light and employment generating commercial activities; transportation of goods and people; and the transmission and communication of knowledge and information.

The updating of the global rural development strategy From Vision to Action provided an opportunity to take stock of experiences, consolidate lessons learned and synthesize emerging strategies for achieving sustainable RI service delivery in rural Sub-Saharan Africa.

To this end, a participatory process was undertaken among RI practitioners at the World Bank to develop a “building block” paper, which focused on four RI sectors:

- Rural Transport;
- Rural Water Supply and Sanitation;
- Rural Energy; and
- Rural Information and Telecommunication

Characteristics of Rural Infrastructure

The four rural infrastructure sectors have been characterized in terms of three broad attributes: (i) physical characteristics; (ii) ownership and decision-making; and (iii) finance. Within this framework, a major distinguishing characteristic involves the levels at which decisions are made to invest in RI services.

For example, in the case of energy and telecommunications, the decision to invest generally resides with the private sector, while governments seek to attract investment and provide incentives for equitable provision. On the other hand, the decision to improve the rural road network is made by public entities at various levels, while water supply and sanitation decisions are generally made at the local community or individual level. In all sectors, RI service delivery models are in a period of transition, away from centrally-controlled public sector provision, to more private sector, demand-driven and decentralized models. END.
ROSE NADIA: THE ROAMING BANKER

IN THE BORDER TRADING TOWN OF FOYA WHERE THE DEMAND FOR SAVINGS BANKING SERVICE IS GROWING, FORMER REFUGEE, ROSE NADIA, HAS BEEN SMART ENOUGH TO RESPOND. SHEIKH BAWOH REPORTS.

I had barely exchanged greetings with Jaclyn Andrew, a hairdresser whom I was interviewing at the poorly constructed beauty saloon in the center of Foya town when a fair complexioned lady showed up.

Our attention was drawn to the pretty visitor who was there to collect Jaclyn’s daily savings. I must hasten to say that the visitor’s purpose attracted me more than her appearance.

Foya Kama in Lofa County, the biggest town in Liberia closest to the border with Guinea and Sierra Leone, plays host to some of the 14,000 strong UN peace keepers deployed across Liberia.

Despite Foya’s burgeoning population and vibrant economy, the town has no formal banking institution. Nevertheless, traders, mostly youths, have improvised a system of banking by which they repose collective trust in Rose Nadia as their banker. In her care young traders save returns realized from their daily trade earnings.

She’s widely hailed “the Roaming Banker”. Rose, my new interviewee after Jaclyn, told me she started this kind of banking a year ago and has since attracted hundreds of clients, mostly young traders in Foya. The clients, according to Rose, deposit a daily minimum amount of 10 Liberian dollars over 31 days. For every deposit, Rose scratches out a mark in the square of her clients’ bank daily savings card. At the end of 31 days, 30 days deposit is returned to the client and a day’s deposit withheld as bank charges.

Asked why she chose to provide such service, she replied: “It’s business and I’m out to make profit otherwise there is no logic doing this type of business”.

Rose argued that without her scheme most young traders who now serve as her clients would have been tempted to consume their daily earnings and gone out of business. “Imagine what would have happened to the seed monies and profits of these young people. Many would have said good bye to business a long time ago because they would have been tempted to use the money unwisely, while others would have lost their savings to rogues. So you see in the absence of a bank in this community I am their savior”.

In the middle of our conversation, her cell phone rang. It was a call from another client. Young Chernor Musa had completed his thirty-one day savings cycle with Rose and was calling to locate his banker to withdraw money. Rose directed him

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to where she was and within minutes, Chernor materialized and received three hundred Liberian dollars in front of my eyes. It would appear as if Rose always had ready cash on her for such eventualities. Afterwards, I was surprised to see Rose tearing Chernor’s savings card. When I requested an explanation, Rose said: “A new one will be issued to him, this one (the torn card) is now useless. He is going to start afresh”.

Chernor who would now begin his fourth monthly savings with the scheme beamed a broad smile when he was handed the money. He counted, nodded, and said bye to his trusted banker. Chernor’s next move: to buy more goods and develop his business to a higher level.

Apparently delighted at accomplishing another business mission, Rose turned to me, smiling broadly and said: “This is what I do everyday”.

Asked what would happen should a client fail to save the agreed thirty-one-day amount but opts to make a withdrawal, Rose clarified: “If for instance someone saves for ten days and wants his or her money back, I only give out nine days’ savings. That is what we had agreed on. They all know this is how I operate”.

Though elated by the confidence reposed in her by her clients, Rose, a thirty-two year old housewife with two children, does not abandon her domestic work. “I strike a balance between my business and my house work. I make sure I attend to my family, especially my children in ensuring that they go to school on time”.

“What if you are busy with domestic work and a client intrudes to request your service, what would you do?” I asked.

Again she smiled and answered, “Normally our transactions do not last long. But it all depends on what specifically I’m doing. I either attend to my customer first or ask to be spared sometime to complete the work at hand”.

Rose was among thousands of Liberians who sought refuge in Sierra Leone during the devastating rebel war. Previously resident of the Liberian capital, Monrovia, Rose left for a refugee camp in Sierra Leone when the rebels closed in on Monrovia.

She returned to Monrovia few years ago when the United Nations Peace Keepers were deployed in Liberia. Realizing afterwards that the life she had lived in pre-war Monrovia was no longer the same, she convinced her husband to move their family to her native town of Foya in Loffa County. It was here that Rose launched her banking scheme, a business venture she had discovered in Monrovia. END.
DAUDA’S DIAMOND DREAM

MAKING FORTUNE IN DIAMOND DIGGING IS RARE. AMONG OTHERS, IT DEPENDS ON REALIZING RETURNS FROM ‘WASHING’ AN EXTRACTED GRAVEL-CONCENTRATE. IN DAUDA’S CASE, THE ‘WASHING’ USUALLY OCCURS TWICE A YEAR BUT HARDLY BRINGS HIM ANY REWARD TO WRITE HOME ABOUT. SIDIE SHERIFF REPORTS.

Looking 10 years older than his age at 24, Dauda Kiawu now subsists as a diamond digger in Dari-Salaamu on the Sierra Leone side of the Mano River. Dauda is daily relieved of nostalgia when he wakes up every morning and gazes across this river in Liberia at the scene of human movements in his birthplace, Congo, once a famous iron ore mining town.

Congo is in fact the town known in Vai as Mano River. If you ask a typical Vai speaking Liberian in Grand Cape Mount County to translate the statement “Mbetaana Congo”, meaning “I’m going to Congo”, he or she will substitute the word “Congo” with “Mano River” when translating the statement into English. Thus the actual translation would be “I’m going to Mano River”. Apart from this semantic significance of Dauda’s town, Congo also used to contribute significantly to operations in Congo as a result of the war, Dauda’s simplest option was to cross the river into Sierra Leone.

In Dari-Salaamu, Dauda has spent most of his time either before the war were silent and survivors had returned home. In spite of this challenge, Dauda says he is not bothered for a single moment whenever he remembers that his childhood peers who had before the war migrated to Roberts Port and Monrovia and had preferred schooling and technical training are now said to be in better positions of fending for themselves.

Throughout his work life, Dauda can hardly go to bed with anything other than the food-for-work, few sticks of cigarette and antibiotic pills distributed weekly to his labour gang by their sponsor in the big town of Zimmi.

Once in a blue after the guns

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moon, if there is any shadow of luck, Dauda would pocket a commission of not more than 100 US dollars. The last one was in 2003 when, from his own diamond washing sieve, he reported a piece that brought fortune to his boss in Zimmi and his boss’s sponsor in Kenema.

But fortune in diamond business comes seldom. It depends on the number of times winnings are realized, if ever realized, from washing an extracted gravel-concentrate in a diamond washing sieve. In Dauda’s case, this usually occurs twice a year. Speaking in Mende with a strong Vai accent Dauda says: “that piece looked like a pebble that fills a sling meant to scare birds away in a rice farm during harvests. It was as beautiful as the twinkling star in the sky.” Beyond this description, Dauda says nothing about the volume, weight, shape, colour, dent and luster which make a diamond’s value and price.

As the going gets tough daily with Dauda, his resolve to make it up one day deepens.

Living with memories of the gem stones he has seen in the past, Dauda says he has mustered enough courage to stay in business as usual, a business his peers in academia refer to as “wasted life in diamond captivity”.

Dauda has never relented in thinking that he will one day attain and overtake the economic heights of his child hood peers who are now in “white colour jobs” in the cities.

In Dauda’s mind, this is achievable with the best of God’s time.

To many equally destitute youths in big towns and cities in Liberia and Sierra Leone, one out of a hundred of Dauda’s type achieves such dreams. END.
THE ECONOMIC SURVIVAL OF BORDER YOUTH
MAKING ENDS MEET FOR YOUTHS IN COMMUNITIES AROUND THE MAKONA RIVER WHICH BOUNDS THE THREE MANO RIVER UNION COUNTRIES OF SIERRA LEONE, GUINEA AND LIBERIA HAS BEEN FRAUGHT WITH DIFFICULTIES. SHEIKH BAWOH REPORTS.

Even before the war the economic survival of youths in the said border communities was not easy.

On the Sierra Leone side of the border, the eleven-year war had a devastating effect on the lives of young people in Koindu, the largest cross-border commodity market center in the Mano River Union before the war.

Koindu youths were caught right in the thick of the war as they were targeted by the rebel forces for conscription. Koindu, like the rest of the three countries’ border areas, was renowned for agricultural production. Upland and swamp farming, cocoa and coffee cultivation and animal husbandry were common as far back as the 60s when most African countries were becoming independent of colonial rule. According to the World Bank Youth and Employment Study on Sierra Leone, “emerging occupations since Sierra Leone’s war ended in 2002 are bike and taxi riding, petty trading and hairdressing dominated by female youths”.

Although there is evidence of farming, most youths in Koindu have resorted to petty trading for survival. Unlike other towns in the Kailahun district where youths are heavily involved in farming, Koindu youths are mostly inclined to buying and selling. There are reasons for this. Koindu before the war was a flourishing international trading center, attracting business from other countries even beyond the Mano River Union and providing employment for youths. Secondly, during the war, some of the youths who sought refuge in neighboring countries or escaped to urban areas had acquired petty trading skills which they now continue to employ as a means of livelihood.

“Although the Koindu Market still sits, it is now a shadow of its former self”, says Ibrahim Jalloh, Chairman of the Traders Union in Koindu. The cause has been attributed mostly to the Yenga dispute which has scared away potential traders from venturing in to the area.

“As long as the Guineans continue to occupy Yenga, trade will be hampered because in Koindu the guns are only two miles away”. Mr. Jalloh’s position was re-echoed by the Sisters Unite, an all female traders social club. Mariama Jabbie expressed anger over the continued occupation of Yenga by the Guinean forces and claimed they were being denied the right to live a better life. “Before the war, you could start from nowhere.

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and survive in Koindu because of business opportunities then, but that is no more”, she lamented.

Even though business is not booming as before, Sia Tamba, a mother of two, like her Sister’s Unite colleague, Mariama, had to resort to selling foodstuffs instead of wearings which used to be her line of business. “Initially, I sold clothing; not any more. Business is not booming as before”, she explained.

But the problem of unemployment and survival of the youths is not peculiar to Koindu. The Sierra Leone poverty profile puts young adults between 15 and 24 years among the poorest of the poor.

Most of the deprived youths are school drop-outs found in rural and urban areas and in slums in the cities around the country eking out their living from mainly petty trading.

For the female youths in Koindu, it is lack of capital not skills that is challenging their survival. Like their male counterparts, a good number of them acquired some skills while seeking refuge in Guinea and other countries. Many learnt soap-making and gara tying and dying.

“Even if you are a genius in gara tie-dying, you cannot make much out of it if you don’t have the capital to purchase quality materials. Our talents are being wasted”, Isata Kamara, who like Mariama Jabbie, now trades in foodstuff lamented.

Youths in other trades like carpentry, masonry, tailoring among others, are also struggling to survive as business is slow. Many of those who were fortunate to have gone through some form of skill-training in these trades either as refugees or as ex-combatants have left either for Liberia where national reconstruction is in high gear or for other parts of the country.

Osman Amara acquired skills in carpentry in Guinea while he was a refugee. On his return to Koindu, he set up a carpentry shop but was forced to close it because of lack of business. Osman who now operates a relatively profitable video centre, the only one in Koindu, pointed out a number of reasons for which carpentry is no longer profitable in the township.

“The population of Koindu itself has drastically reduced since the war. Besides, the kind of reconstruction in this area requires special skills like ours.”

While it is true that most reconstruction of private premises are being done by the locals themselves and require very little skilled input, the area nonetheless have witnessed reconstruction of some social institutions, like clinics and schools undertaken by government or NGOs. But what is the contribution of skilled workers in this reconstruction process?

Amara answered: “Unfortunately most contractors come with their work team from as far as Kenema or other areas. The only input from youths in this area is labour. They have little or no place for those of us who have learnt something”.

With their poor economic status many youths in the area expressed the hope that something concrete would be done to support their effort to survive and live peaceful and decent lives like their counterparts in other parts of the country.

Sex trade is not known in Koindu, but there are evidences that young girls stream across the border to Foya Kamah in Liberia which plays host to UN peacekeepers and NGO workers.

In Liberia, a youth policy document has been finalized and presented to the President. While the youth await the full implementation of the youth policy, their condition, like their Sierra Leonean and Guinean counterparts, remain precarious.

The youth in Foya Kamah in the Loffa County like those in Koindu suffered the brunt of the fourteen year long civil conflict. Some were conscripted into the armed rebellion while hundreds of others were displaced and became refugees in neighboring countries.

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Young girls were used as sex slaves during the war.

With the United Nations Peace Keepers’ deployment throughout the country and the successful disarmament program, new social and economic issues have emerged including the incorporation of stigmatized youths into the mainstream of society.

During the youth conference which was held in 2006 in Freetown attended by representatives of youth leaders in the three Mano River Union countries plus Ivory Coast, George Wisner of the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) referred to the youth of Liberia as a ‘high-risk group in the entire sub-region’.

He pointed out “HIV/AIDS, unemployment, lack of education and training, drug and substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, involvement in war and highest number of ex-combatants in the sub-region” as challenges which the Liberia youth have to contend with.

While some youth in Foya are engaged in some form of economic activities that would enhance their livelihoods, many more find life difficult to live. Even for those engaged in business or trade, life they would say is not easy.

Kumba Tamba established a hairdressing saloon three years ago but has still not found it worthy. “The only time I made some profit was last year when an NGO called International Rescue Committee (IRC) sponsored ten girls to undertake training in my saloon”, Kumba says.

Nonetheless, Kumba is still doing hairdressing because she thinks it is better to work without profit than to sit down with her hands between her legs doing nothing.

Kumba could not take up farming as a means of survival, she lacks the energy to do farming and she is not even familiar with farm work.

Another youth, John Fayia, operate a carpentry shop and trains eight other youth. John’s team of carpenters makes furniture such as bed, chairs, and tables for sale. “I cannot say it is a profitable business, but it is manageable”, he says. As a carpenter, John had hoped that he would have been hired to do the roofing work on the many public structures that are being put up – such as schools, health centers, etc. But he says contracts have not been coming his way. Carpenters in Foya, like those in Koidu, are being ignored for others from urban centers. “We are hardly contracted by NGOs. They bring in their work team”, he lamented. When asked why with the seeming non-profitable outlook of carpentry in the area, he still trains young men, John said: “We have to prepare them for tomorrow. We hope things will change for the better and catch up with the opportunities that lie ahead.

With mobile communication having its foothold on a rural area like Lofa, Ishmael James is making the most out of it. His shop in the heart of Foya is a hot spot for cell phone users. He recharges cell phone batteries, sells top-up cards and trades in currency. Starting almost two years ago, Ishmael expressed delight at the progress he is making. Not less than thirty phones are being charged at any given time. He says: “my generator is making money for me in the absence of electricity”.

Ishmail is highly respected because of his business acumen and his position as Secretary General of the Foya Traders Union. Even though he is doing relatively well in business, Ishmail however deplore the general condition of living in Foya. “Things are hard”, he says.

Compounding the problem of Foya is the presence of a fourteen-thousand strong UN Peace Keeping force along with a number of NGOs providing a potentially fertile ground for sex trade. There is evidence of commercial sex trade going on in the township. And HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy which plague Liberia are undoubtedly part of the socio-economic survival problem facing this region. END.
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH YOUTH CHAIRMAN, FALLA GBORIE

SHEIKH BAWOH INTERVIEWS A BORDER YOUTH LEADER, FALLA GBORIE, ON A RANGE OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES THAT POLICY ATTENDERS SHOULD KNOW.

Bawoh: I understand you are the youth chairman of this section – Toli Section.

Gborie: That’s right.

Bawoh: What can you say about the youth of this local governance area?

Gborie: Our welfare is actually not improving. It is discouraging due to lack of jobs, poor infrastructure and social amenities. Some of the youth are business people but there are virtually no funds to improve on the businesses they do. Also a good number of us are farmers but we lack basic farming implements.

Bawoh: You mean, on the whole, you lack capacity, funds or sponsorship?

Gborie: Very correct Mr. Bawoh.

Bawoh: What specific economic activities are the youth engaged in?

Gborie: A good number of youths are business people including myself, the youth chairman. Some are produce buyers; others are goods sellers. They sell things like Kerosene, and other domestic goods. Some youths even transport goods such as banana cassava, cocoa and potato to Kenema and other places. But we lack financial capacity and sponsorship.

Bawoh: Can you elaborate on the issue of sponsorship and lack of capacity?

Gborie: Yes, we lack capital and sponsorship. It was only sometime in 2004 that donors came to assist 5-6 communities but the farmers were too many. Only 2-3 villages benefited per section and there were a lot of grumbles among those who did not benefit.

Bawoh: What about capacity?

Gborie: We don’t have enough. We have been writing projects and asking for help but to no avail. Take the cleaning of the town for example. We received a wheel barrow, 2 pick axes and 4 machetes which are grossly inadequate to clean the town. One way we’ve tried to address the problem is any time a youth commits a crime, we ask him/her to clean or brush a portion of land within the township. But we need more tools to facilitate the cleaning.

Bawoh: I also understand that transportation is a major problem due to bad roads.

Gborie: Perhaps the most immediate support we need from the central government for now is the proper maintenance of our bad roads, especially those leading to Kailahun, Buedu and Kenema. It is only when these roads are properly repaired that we can easily transport our produce from these areas. Other services such as water, health and electricity are secondary. The present felt need of the Kailahun District communities is good roads.

Bawoh: Mr. Gborie let us also talk on the security situation for the traders and farmers of this region.

Gborie: There is no problem regarding security in this region. We have community policing and we always keep meetings with our colleagues in the neighboring countries and discuss issues that will always keep us united. I have been a victim of border conflict during the Yenga crisis and now as chairman of the youth, I shall continue to preach peace to the youth and other members of the various communities.

Bawoh: Mr. Gborie, there used to be an international market at Koindu and yet it has not returned to its normal functioning. How does this affect the livelihood of the people of this community?

Gborie: The lack of international market at present in Koindu is really a major problem affecting youths and other members of this community. Before this time, a good number of youths and other community people were all business people but at present, there are few, if any, who can boast of a million Leones to invest in business.

Bawoh: I also understand that government has identified and, demarcated new land for the international market and has also started putting up structures on the site. So what do you want any organization to do for this community?

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Gborie: All that I want is the work to be done speedily. The market should also be big enough to host an international lorry park, a hotel or guest houses etc. Once such a project is completed, it will attract investors from all over the world.

Bawoh: Mr. Gborie, other youths of this area also depend on farming. You mentioned some people engaged in farming. What kinds of farming do they undertake?

Gborie: Such farming is referred to as self-help. We do it by group. We are normally engaged in cocoa brushing and groundnut planting. We divide ourselves into groups and mostly do it 3 times per week except when the work is tedious such as clearing. We do it together and provide our food for work through individual contributions.

Bawoh: What about social activities that will bring in income generation?

Gborie: There is a community centre here and one of the present Parliamentarians that came from the constituency bought us a musical set which we can rent at a minimal cost to carry out our social activities.

Bawoh: What about the money people pay for the set, is it for the youth association?

Gborie: Yes.

Bawoh: Then what about the cross-border trade, are there any problems?

Gborie: There are problems regarding cross-border trade especially with Guineans. They always demand for a lot of identification cards and other documents. But at present, most of our businesses are done in Kenema as well as Freetown.

Bawoh: What about Liberia, are there problems?

Gborie: No problems at all

Bawoh: You mentioned World Vision in our discussion as the NGO that gave out Micro-credit to people but you said only Liberians benefited from that project in 2002-03

Gborie: Yes, during that time this area was occupied by mostly Liberian ex-combatants. There were not many community people after the end of the war.

Bawoh: You mean those that benefited from that project were not indigenes of Foya Kama?

Gborie: Not all of them. Some came from very far areas in Liberia.

Bawoh: And there is no vocational centre within these communities?

Gborie: Not at all

Bawoh: Let us talk about this micro-credit or ‘Osusu’. How is it working? Is there any NGO that is helping these communities?

Gborie: Yes, last year, an NGO, Plan International came with such program and a good number of people benefited. Eight groups within this community benefited and at present, they are training 5 groups of people from this community who will also be charged with the responsibility of training other groups as to how they should manage their businesses?

Bawoh: How is it called, I mean the micro-credit program?

Gborie: It is commonly called in our local Krio as “Compin Yone”. But there are also different names in Kissy. It simply means togetherness

Bawoh: Now Mr. Gborie tell me a bit about yourself.

Gborie: Well, I am the youth chairman, born in Bumpoh, a small village within Koindu Community. I attended school here and at present, I am married with four (4) children. Life has actually not been easy for me. During the war I had to move to Guinea for safety. After the war, I came back home and it is through business activities that I have been able to manage and take care of my family. I am the only indigene of this land that went during the war but later returned after the war in order to help develop our community. That is the reason why I am presently the youth chairman. I also contributed greatly during the N.C.D.D.R program by talking to combatant youths to disarm. At present, we are all working towards the development or our community.

Bawoh: Quickly, what can you say about the future of youths of this border region?

Gborie: The most important thing is for the government to try very hard to move the Guineans from Yenga. Because with Guineans still occupying Yenga, the future of our youths is still not secure. There is continuous harassment of youths living within and around Yenga by Guineans. That particular border region is not free and safe for our youths and even other Sierra Leoneans living in that part of the country.

Bawoh: You mean Yenga also affects the living condition of people within that area?

Gborie: Yes, 90% of youths are affected by the Yenga issue. Our youths mostly, business people are continuously harassed by Guineans living in Yenga. There is yet no solution to the Yenga problem.

Bawoh: Thank you so much for this interview.

Gborie: Thank you too Mr. Bawoh.
Il y a plusieurs passages internationaux à la frontière par l’intermédiaire de route de mateur dans le bassin du fleuve Mano. Vous avez le zone tri frontière où la Guinée, le Libéria et la Sierra Leone partagent une frontière commune autour des villes marchandes importantes de Koidu, de Foya et de Nongowa. Vous avez l’aex célébre de Voinjama-Nzerekore entre le Libéria et la Guinée. Vous avez la route de Gbalamuya-Pamlap lier Conakry et Freetown par Forecariah en Guinée et Kambia en Sierra Leone, entre d’autres.

Remarquablement il y a aussi la route célébre de Babangida qui lie Monrovia à Bo et Kenema en Sierra Leone par le pont dans la frontière du fleuve Mano. Le village de Bo est sur le côté du pont de Libéria et Jendema du côté de la Sierra Leone. C’est d’ici qu’on observe le dollar libérien pour avoir pénétré profondément en Sierra Leone, remplaçant presque l’offre légale de la Sierra Leone, « Leone », comme agent monétaire dans des transactions économiques.

La supériorité d’autoroute libérienne par rapport à la Sierra Leone a fait la proximité de Monrovia aux Chefferies Sierra Léonais de Makpele et de Sorogbeima plus évidents et plus faciles et les habitants dans ces régions préfèrent d’utiliser cette route facile au lieu de passer une journée entière en route pour voyager à Bo ou à Kenema en Sierra Leone.

*« Une voiture de Peugeot 504 prendra presque 2 heures au voyage par une distance de 84 milles le long de la route bien pavée et large de Babangida de Monrovia au pont de la frontière du fleuve Mano. Il faudrait à la même voiture de Peugeot par moyenne de 5 heures pour couvrir un voyage de 80 milles de la ville de la Sierra Leone de Kenema au même pont », indique Hannafi Massaquoi, un maître fermier de manioc et homme d’affaires résidant à Fairo, la ville de siège social de chefferie de Sorogbeima en Sierra Leone. Hannafi et ses camarades mesurent correctement la « proximité » en termes de temps de voyage, pas distance. Quoiqu’ils semblent être ‘distance étroit’ à leurs sièges sociaux provinciaux, ils le considèrent beaucoup plus facile et plus rapide traiter des affaires avec Monrovia qu’avec Kenema ou Bo ou Freetown dans leur propre pays.

« En raison de la bonne route de mateur, nous pouvons facilement et rapidement atteindre Monrovia pour vendre nos marchandises et rentrent chez nous avec les articles fortement nécessaires que nous achetons de là. Ainsi notre demande du dollar libérien est si haute et fréquente que nous sommes irrésistiblement venus pour l’adopter en tant que notre devise », a dit Jebbeh Gray qui a démarré dans ce pays vers la fin de 1989, le Libéria a rapidement et efficacement accompli sa propre partie du projet qui est devenu la route de Babangida.« Ainsi est la situation. Nos personnes instruites dans le monde des sciences économiques disent : laissez les forces du marché dicter le statu quo », Hannafi a déploré, « et aucune force des bras ne peut changer ceci. La seule magie qui peut changer ceci est pour que le gouvernement à Freetown réactive le projet d’avant-guerre de route Bandajuma ».

Avant le commencement de conflit civil dans les deux pays dans les années ’90, les gouvernements de l’ancien Président Samuel Doe du Libéria et le Président Joseph Momoh de la Sierra Leone ont commencé l’exécution de ce qui devait être connu « la route de l’union du fleuve Mano ». Les deux gouvernements ont l’intention de construire une route de première classe entre le capital libérienne, Monrovia, et la deuxième capitale de la Sierra Leone, Bo. Le Libéria était de faire son bout droit de Monrovia jusqu’au pont à la frontière du fleuve Mano; et la Sierra Leone de Bo jusqu’au même pont.

Avant la guerre a démarré dans ce pays vers la fin de 1989, le Libéria a rapidement et efficacement accompli sa propre partie du projet qui est devenu la route de Babangida.

La Sierra Leone est allée moins qu’a mi-chemin par le projet et le résultat était la route de Bo-Bandajuma. L’autre portion de la route, de Bandajuma jusqu’au pont de la frontière, n’a été jamais faite jusqu’au début de la guerre en mars 1991. « On a dit qu’alors le gouvernement de la Sierra Leone a le temps suffisant pour...
accomplir sa propre partie du travail avant la guerre mais elle n’a pas été vue pour avoir fait beaucoup pour aller de l’avant avec le projet ni il a bien communiqué les raisons du son retard. Par conséquent il y avait de désaffection répandue et le sentiment de la déception au sud-est de la Sierra Leone » indique Amjad Tunis, un indigène de Zimmi.

C’est discutablement en partie la raison de la transformation économique et sociale qui est maintenant évidente parmi les communautés dans le pont de la frontière de Sierra Leone. Mais la vague de libérarianisation dans des chefferies de Sorogbeima et de Makpele en Sierra Leone n’est pas limitée à la conquête de devise.

Sorogbeima et Makpele ont également une affinité ethnique et religieuse très forte aux personnes parlantes de Vai et de Gola au Libéria. En fait, Sorogbeima est à l’origine Vai et Makpele est à l’origine Gola. Il y a également une culture profonde de l’Islam imprégnant des terres de Vai-Gola s’étendant des collines de Bomu et de Robertsport au Libéria et à Pujehun et à Kailahun en Sierra Leone.

Tout ceux-ci expliquent pourquoi les indigènes de Makpele et de Sorogbeima étonnent souvent les visiteurs de Freetown qui ne parlent pas Mende en indiquant non seulement des prix en dollars libériens, mais également en conversant avec eux en anglais libérian au lieu de Krio. Extérieurement, leurs langues indigènes - Gola et Vai - ont été remplacées par Mende, la plus grande langue parlée indigène en Sierra Leone. Mais au fond de leur cœurs ils n’ont jamais oublié leurs racines et identités linguistiques.

Il y a des ramifications importantes de ce développement pour les gouvernements de la Sierra Leone et du Libéria. Pour le Libéria c’est une question de réunion culturelle et une occasion pour renforcer les liens avec la Sierra Leone. Cela explique pourquoi le Président Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, elle-même étant relié au groupe ethnique de Gola, a dû récemment accorder la citoyenneté libérienne aux milliers de réfugiés Sierra Léonais au Libéria, beaucoup de qui viennent de Sorogbeima et de Makpele.

Pour la Sierra Leone, c’est le contraire. Même avant la guerre les habitants de Sorogbeima et de Makpele se sont considérée en grande partie d’être marginalisé par le gouvernement à Freetown et piétiné par l’événement politique du meurtre froid de leur fils de le sol à Zimmi, le professeur Kemokai en 1981. Cet événement a mené à la rébellion de Dorkpowosu a suivi de ce qui a été considéré comme une réponse répressive par le régime de Siaka Stevens.

Jusqu’au début de la guerre en Sierra Leone, un sens d’apathie politique et les tendances de la nonchalance et de la révolte latente étaient nombreux à Sorogbeima et Makpele. L’ancien représentant parlementaire et le héros politique des deux chefferies, Mannah Kpaka, selon rumeurs était le seul policier d’opposition pendant le régime de Stevens qui a refusé de joindre le All People’s Congress (APC) et qui a continué à apprécier la confiance de son collège électorale dans toute sa carrière politique.

Ironiquement, on a dit que la lignée maternelle forte faite par l’ancien Président Siaka Stevens lui-même réclame à la ville historique de port maritime de Sulima dans les chefferies de Sorogbeima. L’ancien Président Siaka Stevens a désigné souvent considère Mannah Kpaka comme son oncle matériel. Néanmoins Mannah Kpaka et Siaka Stevens étaient les amis politiques impairs tout au long des temps de la vie des deux hommes d’État.

Maintenant l’histoire est devenue réelle. Les régimes ont changé au Libéria et en Sierra Leone. L’étape politique a joué le centre serveur et a indiqué au revoir à beaucoup de joueurs de guerre et de politique. L’environnement international sous lequel l’impunité et les dictatures avaient régéné par les années 70 et le 80s n’est plus identique. Aucun régime sensible ne peut s’imposer aux citoyens. Il est grand temps pour des gouvernements de penser en termes de se légitimer en offrant la confiance de son collège électoral dans toute sa carrière politique.

« Ainsi est la situation. Nos personnes instruites dans le monde des sciences économiques disent : laissez les forces du marché dicter le statu quo », Hannafi a déploré, « et aucune force des bras ne peut changer ceci. La seule magie qui peut changer ceci est pour que le gouvernement à Freetown réactive le projet d'avant-guerre de route Bandajuma ». 
My name is Hanafii Sadabu Massaquoi, born of Fairo, Sorogbeima Chiefdom in Sierra Leone. I had lived the bulk of my 57 year life as a businessman in Liberia and the US. I lost all my assets and savings to the war in Liberia in the 90s where I served in many public service capacities in the 60s, 70s and part of the 80s after returning from the US.

Approaching 60, I thought that the best I could do with the rest of my life was to go back home to till the vast array of fertile and virgin lands left behind by my forefathers.

I returned to Fairo in 2002 and met my people all involved in subsistence farming. “Oh No!”, I said to myself, “I’m not going to do farming to merely make ends meet. I am going in for profit. I wanna be rich”.

Without a single cent, I mobilized the enormous idle youth labour in and around my village to cultivate the largest cassava farm in Pujehun District, albeit in Sierra Leone in 2003.

We successfully harvested the cassava tubers and processed out of it a number of food items such as garrie, fofoo and too which we sold to customers in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Still doing cassava and sweet potatoes in large quantities, I have now decided to also venture into the cultivation of a very strange and unknown crop in Sierra Leone: Castor Beans. With the assistance of my cousins in Monrovia and Freetown who have regular access to the internet, I have come to learn about the increasing global demand for castor beans due to the upsurge of global search for an alternative source of non-oil energy in highly industrialized countries.

As a career businessman who loves taking risks, my instincts are telling me that cultivating Castor Beans is going to be my best bet to realizing my dream.

Right now, to provide us with the seedlings, I have planted about 75 trees in my backyard as part of over 5000 seedlings planted elsewhere. I have also convinced up to 3000 farmers in Sorogbeima, Makpele, Barrie and Kpanga Kobondeh chiefdoms in Pujehun District to follow my steps. I must at this point give thanks to the assistance of former MP and wife of late uncle, Mary Masallay of Bo, who offered me the first young tree I have now multiplied in thousands. I intend to cultivate 50 acres this year plus an average of 4 acres per farmer, among those contacted, which will hopefully all sum up to 80,000 acres.

On behalf of myself and the Pujehun District Castor Beans Grouping, I am requesting the central and local governments, particularly the Pujehun District Council, as well as potential investors, including grant and loan giving institutions, to partner with me.
The BORDERLINES initiative is seed sponsored by the World Bank and implemented by Pampana Communications with manpower support from the Mano River Union Secretariat and UNDP in Sierra Leone.

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