

CPS: Contributing to Lasting Peace in Sierra Leone

By Pa Santigie Sesay

Eight months after its peace building intervention, long-lasting peace had returned to the Manewa community, Northern Sierra Leone. This community which serves as the headquarters for the section has over two thousand residents. Basic social facilities like health center, school meant to serve the immediate surrounding communities could only be sought in Manewa.

It is no gainsaying that during the 2018 Multi-tier elections, lots of divisions and conflicts erupted across the country due to variance in political beliefs and orientation. At the height of the elections, some people were chased out of the community or from a particular region and properties were destroyed. Even after the said elections, malice, hatred and animosity still exist in some regions and healing these wounds could only be done gradually.

Manewa is one of such communities that was badly affected with political tension and split in political beliefs. During the campaign periods, members of the then opposition party-Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) mounted robust campaigns to the Manewa section and during that course, many people were won over. One of such prominent persons that was brought over is the present MCH Aid in-charge of the Manewa Community Health Centre; Madam Doris F. Macdonald. Madam Macdonald is the head of the only community health center serving approximately eight thousand community people in the entire section.

During the campaigns, the community people became angry that Madam Macdonald had taken a lead in campaigning against the

then Ruling All People's Congress Party (APC); a party they described as theirs. The entire section declared Madam Macdonald as their political enemy especially so when she is a southerner. In Sierra Leone, people's political allegiance are tagged to the regions they hail from and that is why Madam Macdonald was described as a sympathizer of the SLPP. This prompted the entire community and the surroundings to distance themselves from her including the community health facility. As the relationship got worse, Madam Macdonald nurtured some fear for her safety and requested for her immediate transfer from the community health center to another.

Manewa is one the traditional communities of the Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food (SiLNoRF); a strategic partner of the CPS Network. In one of its community outreach meetings, field staff of SiLNoRF learnt about the acrimony existing between MCH Aid MacDonal and the community people.

Being that CPS is a promoter of peace and tranquility in the society, it took up the matter very seriously with the aim of making sure that a lasting peace returns to the communities. During the last International Day of Peace Celebration which spanned from 10th to the 19th September, 2018, this community was targeted with a peace mediation meeting and sensitization through

drama. The meeting took place at Manewa and participants were drawn from the surrounding communities since they too stopped using the health facility. During the meeting, equal opportunities were given to each aggrieved party to vent out their angers and later, an amicable settlement was reached. The entire communities were reconciled, crowned by symbolic hand shakes and dancing.

Almost 8 months after this intervention by CPS, this writer who was amongst the team that did the mediation, paid a one day follow up visit on the 17th April 2019 to know how that intervention had contributed to brining lasting peace and reuniting the people. When this writer arrived, his first port of call was the community health center where he was heartily welcomed by the embattled MCH Aid; Macdonald.

Testifying how our intervention restored peace; Macdonald thanked the CPS team for organizing such a meeting at the most needed time. She emphasize that since they were reunited during that international peace day celebration, sanity had returned to the community and till date, there had been no cause for concern.



MCH Aid: Doris Macdonald in front listening to peace messages from CPS team during the meeting

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According to MCH Aid Macdonald, had it not been for the timely intervention of CPS, she should have fled from the community or something unimaginable would have happened to her. She praised CPS for the grassroots approach they used to settle the impasse noting that since then, normalcy had returned to the communities.

Initially, MCH Aid Macdonald

outreach visits with approval of her boss to the neighboring communities to encourage aggrieved and runaway community people to come back and make use of the facility.

She disclosed that during her visits to communities, she told them of how an independent peace builders (CPS) had settled the misunderstanding and that the issues were

River basin. For Sierra Leone, the network comprises eleven partners who are working on various thematic areas in the 4 regions of the country. The core mandate of this network is to build on the fragile peace the country is presently enjoying in line with Goal sixteen (16) of the Sustainable Development Goals. In short, the CPS program has helped partners to main-

stream peace building activities at the national, regional and community levels and continues to yield lots of dividend for the country. That is more the reason why network members in the Northern region engaged the Manewa community by bringing them together to live in peace and harmony just as it was before the elections.

According to Salamatu Conteh who works for the Mankind's Activities for Development Accreditation Movement (MADAM) and who was also part of the mediation team, the CPS network, since its inception

continues to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for all and sundry. She furthered that the act of peace building is a building block to sustainable development.

Conteh explained that the Manewa's case is not the only success the network has recorded over the years noting that in other parts of the country, similar impasses had been settled as a result of CPS's intervention. This is how she said the network is contributing to maintaining a lasting peace in Sierra Leone.



Community people including MCH Aid Macdonald embracing each other after the peace mediation meeting organized by the CPS Northern Region team in September 2018

would not move freely within the community but when this writer was there, she was spotted walking around and chatting with some of the community people in a friendly atmosphere.

The Assistant to MCH Aid Macdonald; Mary Tarawalie said that though she was not present when the misunderstanding took place, she learnt about it immediately when she was posted to the health center. Few weeks after her transfer, she noticed that community people were not utilizing the facility rather; they were going to access health facilities from the other sections. She explained how concerned she became to the extent that she embarked on community

amicably settled. At the end of the day, the clinic started to see large turnout of community people including pregnant women, lactating mothers and children flooding the clinic on especially Wednesdays and Fridays in the week.

"After that misunderstanding, the clinic started recording low turnout of people as low as 5 people coming here for medical treatment. After the peace brokers came, and now that I have done community outreach, we're now getting well over fifty (50) people coming to access our facility weekly". She maintained

This is more or less the essence for the existence of a peace building network like CPS in the Mano

Sierra Leone to Host 2019 CPS-MRU Network Meeting

One of the two Coordinators for the Sierra Leone chapter of the Civil Peace Service (CPS) Network; Dr. Sheku Kamara has told partners that this year's Mano River Union Network meeting will be hosted by Sierra Leone after Liberia had its turn last year.

Dr. Kamara made this disclosure during the first quarter meeting for Bread for the World (BftW) Partners held on Tuesday 26th March, 2019 at the Conference Room of the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), Congo Town in Freetown. The meeting was well attended by all partners of the network from across the country including the newest professionals; Sigrid Schell-Straub and Gunther Straub attached to Sierra Leone Adult Education Association (SLADEA) and the Sierra Leone Opportunities Industrialization Centres (SLOIC) respectively.

According to Dr. Kamara, the Network meeting is a capacity building event that enables attendees from partner organizations to do contextual analysis from Sierra Leone and Liberia with the aim of looking at how the peace work the network is carrying out fits into the contexts and how to strategize in order to match up with the evolving contexts. He emphasized that the network meeting is a very important event that normally attracts the participation of the Berlin team.

Dr. Kamara explained that during the said meeting, there is normally the Mobile Team that move along

with it to facilitate and to give support in the implementation process of activities of the network. He added that the mobile team had now been replaced with the Support Team which renders similar assistance to coordinators in the region. Dr. Kamara noted that he was not sure whether the Supporting Team will join this year's meeting considering the fact that the team did not attend the 2017 MRU meeting held in Sierra Leone.

He noted that the CPS Project normally last for 3 years and the previous project ended in 2018 and a new one was near approval and when approved, it will span from 2019 to 2022.

On her part, Madam Adenike Cole disclosed that they (Coordinators) received 2 professionals whom they had taken through orientation sessions in March 2019. She explained that Sigrid Schell-Straub is Skills Development Officer attached to SLADEA while Gunther Straub the capacity building Trainer attached to SLOIC. According to Madam Adenike, the 2 professionals are

integrating at a faster speed and wished them well in their new assignments.

Both professionals, in their brief remarks said that they were very impressed with the kind of reception they received from their respective organizations and the Network. They promise to do their best at their placement noting that they will come up with new ideas that would go in no uncertain terms to uplifting their organizations.

According to the coordinators, in addition to the Network meeting, the following activities have also been earmarked to be carried out in 2019:

- i. Mano River Cross-Border Youth Reflection on Elections (Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone & Liberia Youth Participation);
- ii. International day of Peace celebration;
- iii. Do No Harm training for partners in Sierra Leone.

Partners present also welcomed the two professionals to the CPS family promising their unhindered support to them.



Participants of the 2017 MRU meeting held in Makeni, Sierra Leone. In the centre, group of Sierra Leonean partners doing context analysis using the fishbowl technique