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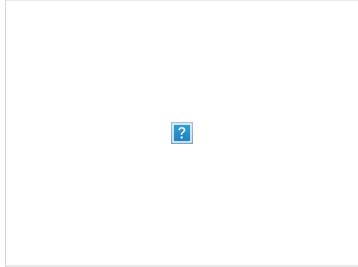
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SLFND: Building a solid foundation for future generations

Posted by Editor on 2017-10-13

By Ruksana Hussain

While the mention of Sierra Leone usually elicits images of war, there are individuals and organizations at work building communities and affecting progress on the ground. One such organization is Sierra Leone Foundation for New Democracy (SLFND), based in Minneapolis, MN and founded by Hindolo Pokawa. A



native of Sierra Leone, Hindolo, experienced firsthand, the effects of civil war and is now using his education and skills, earned in the United States, to make a difference, starting from his own village in Mondema.

During a visit back to Sierra Leone for research on teenage pregnancy, Pokawa realized there were lots of children in rural communities that did not have any early childhood education or support. This gave rise to the birth of SLFND three years ago. In Mondema, he discussed this

with local community members, and thus began the process of building the first village preschool program in the country. So far, 250 children are registered, three successful teacher-training programs conducted, and ten teachers recruited in the village. The school will open January 2018.

“We have created a framework that puts ecology at the center of education so we can teach children using locally based resources within the communities,” Pokawa explains. “This is a curriculum that recognizes local culture, traditions, and belief systems encourages storytelling and history, and partnership between mothers and grandparents.”

Sierra Leone is a country where mothers take care of the children because the men are in mines digging for gold and diamonds. Mothers walk a mile or two carrying these children every day on their backs and then leave them unattended in a hut while tending to their farmlands. SLFND affords mothers the opportunity to leave the children in early childhood centers so they can fulfill their responsibilities while providing their children the critical literacy that is needed for their foundational progress.

Of course, these results do not magically unfold without financial resources. Given his 15 years of community development work experience, Pokawa believes in grassroots mobilization. SLFND has organized fundraisers, social media outreach and applied for grants but Pokawa finds traditional letter writing and public speaking opportunities the most effective to raise funds. SLFND also recently rolled out the ‘Friendship for Sustainability’ model requesting birthday donations as one fundraising channel.

There have been many hurdles along the way. One challenge was introducing the concept of early childhood care for children 2-5 years old since elementary school in Sierra Leone only begins from age 6. Another challenge was non-acceptance from community members of a model where the child is left with a stranger. The understanding was only made possible by the trust Pokawa built over the years.

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To assist in SLFND's efforts, visit their website to donate. Sponsor a child or a classroom, but also dedicate your birthday to the cause, and even head over on a circle trip, organized twice yearly, to see what is being done on location. Next up on the agenda - building a museum to archive the national history and legacy, to preserve all that Sierra Leone represents.

Website: SLFND.org

Direct donation link - SLFND.org/donate

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