

## A New Season in Sierra Leone

Dr. Conrad Van Dijk

I arrived in Sierra Leone in August to help improve the management, administration, and effectiveness of SCHDO's work. We've had workshops, prayer meetings, small group discussions, and have identified several spiritual blockages: ineffective prayer, fear, lack of hope, unclear vision, and inadequate knowledge of the word of God. Spiritual strengthening will be done with prayers of repentance, redefining the vision and mission statements, and ensuring good use of these by the staff. The SCHDO organization will review its management structure, and plans to hire a strong and experienced operations manager, strengthen their monitoring and evaluation system, and review all working protocols.

Because there are so many challenges, it is not easy for our farmers to maintain a positive outlook on life. It was stressed that the SCHDO staff needs to permeate the fragrance of hope that comes through an active relationship with Jesus Christ. Organizational and personal integrity were also emphasized.

Operations have been scaled down to ensure strong, effective management and currently, SCHDO is working with about 20 farmers. The chickens are doing very well and everybody is very encouraged. We are putting all the actions and suggestions from the workshops into play. Another important reason we carried out this review was to make sure our project staff is prepared for expansion prior to submitting our grant application to CIDA.

Sierra Leone has recently dropped back to being the poorest country in the world again, according to the UN Human Development Index. However, in general, people are hopeful. A number of things are happening to improve the situation in Sierra Leone. The government (elected a year ago) is making development and progress very high priorities. Where I was staying in 2007, Government-supplied electricity was 0%, and now it is about 80%. Freetown's traffic congestion has eased off significantly due to rearranging the public transport system of privately owned taxis and Poda Podas (minibuses holding about 20 people). The biggest problem is still the high cost of food. Since last year, the price of rice has doubled and corn has quadrupled. This has a huge effect on the ability of the majority of the population to have daily access to food and it has also had a major effect on the cost of our poultry production.

We need your prayers asking for the Lord's favour on the work we are doing here, for continuing funds for this growing project, for wisdom and guidance, and that project beneficiaries will see Jesus' compassion in the workers here.

## Forgiveness for a Rebel Soldier

Dr. Conrad Van Dijk

*Bambay Sawaneh came to visit me at the YMCA. He is a young man who lost both hands in the war. I talked to him for a couple of hours and very quickly he showed that he is very excited about the Lord. He is also very excited about raising chickens so we have a couple of things in common....*

Ten years ago, during Sierra Leone's Civil war, Bambay Sawaneh, then 15 years old, lived with his mother in the bush over 20 miles outside their village. They lived quite peacefully, secluded from the war and from other people. Eventually, however, they ran out of food. Bambay headed back to their village and after walking all day, he arrived in the dark. He very carefully entered and saw cooking fires and heard voices and found that they were mostly his relatives. Everything was very peaceful, they felt safe, and were happy to see Bambay. They said they'd give him food but he must stay for the night.

In Freetown, Army soldiers had recently staged a coup throwing out the elected government. But because of the instability of the country, there was a West African peace-keeping force known as ECOMOG who immediately chased the soldiers out, right into the area where Bambay was staying in his village that night.

The village was overrun by angry soldiers who grabbed everybody in sight and carried out all kinds of horrible things. They cut people's limbs off and wrote on their bodies with knives or sharp tools. Out of all 25 of his relatives, only one other than Bambay survived. Many bled for several days and died for lack of medical care.

Years later, Bambay was in a compound with other amputees receiving physiotherapy when he saw the man who had cut off his arms. Immediately he started crying in anger because it brought back awful memories. The other amputees soon found out what was bothering him. They wanted to kill the man. The amputees all gathered around and said that they would wait and if the man did not come out, they would burn the building down. The standoff lasted for some time.

Meanwhile, Bambay started to collect his thoughts. He was a Christian and knew Jesus had died for him. He also knew that Jesus had said if you do not forgive others, then your Father in heaven will not forgive you (Matthew 6:15). He had to forgive this man. Bambay was still crying but he started explaining to the other amputees that they must forgive this man and he explained why. The other amputees could not understand this but finally relented. Now Bambay is living a victorious life in accordance with James 1:2, not an easy life but with the "joy of the Lord" as his strength (Nehemiah 8:10).