

Sierra Leone Mission Trip

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Tamara Coxall
Jubilee Community Church, Maidenhead

Sierra Leone Country Profile

Key Details and Statistics

Official Name:	Republic of Sierra Leone
President:	Ernest Bai Koroma
Government:	Democratic Republic
Population:	5 million
Area:	71,422 sq. km
Official Language:	English,
Other languages:	Krio, Mende, Temne
Literacy:	23%
Life Expectancy:	42 yrs. (women), & 37 yrs. (men)
Infant Mortality:	82 deaths per 1000 live births
Religion:	65% animism (i.e. voodoo), 15% Muslim, and 20% Christian
Currency:	The Leone
Exchange rate:	£1 = 8,300 Leones (March 2016)
Natural Resources:	Diamonds, bauxite, rutile.
Average Income:	US \$300 P/A

Key Historical facts:

1400's	First visited by Portuguese Traders
1600's	British traders became prominent
1780's	Land bought from local chiefs by British Philanthropists to re-settle freed slaves
1808 – 1896	Western part of country became British colony, remaining land a British protectorate
1961	Country declared independent in commonwealth
1971	Sierra Leone became a Republic
1991 – 2002	Rebels form armies in reaction to government corruption and profits from exclusive diamond trade, with little wealth appropriated to country. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rebel armies are backed by Liberian Rebel Leader and later president, Charles Taylor. They are funded by diamond trade through Liberia.• Civil war ensues with Freetown attacked and largely destroyed in 1999. Brutality of inhumanities from man to man is indescribable.• 1999: British Army intervenes & ceasefire is agreed in Togo, where all parties are given amnesty of war crimes and human rights abuses. Disarmament, demobilisation & rehabilitation agreed of those involved in conflict. UN Security Council deploys peacekeeping force. War declared finished in 2002.
2006	UN Peacekeepers leave country
2007	Free & fair election, country has been at peace since. (Police do not carry guns)
Present Day	British Army continues to have a presence in country, working with police to keep order.

The Opportunity

Jubilee Community Church, Maidenhead, have been serving on Mission Trips to Sierra Leone since 1995.

Over the years, various teams have partnered with local organisations to work on the following building projects:

- **City of Rest** – Drug Rehabilitation Centre
- **St George** - Refuge for Street Kids
- **King George** - Home for the elderly

This trip, we were invited by local missionaries, Tom & Becky Brockelman, to and assist with work on the building of a residential block at Hosetta Abdullah Special Needs School, in the Kissy area of Freetown.

I hadn't planned to go on this trip, when it was first announced due to various reasons. But 9 weeks before the trip, things started to come together. I soon realised that I just had to go, this was an opportunity to serve other people in a way I couldn't do in the UK. I had done something similar in Brazil, in 2013.

Our team was made up of 6 people, ranging in age from 19 – 62. We were led by Ronnie and Mary Fleming. Ronnie is an Elder in our church, and has been on 29 mission trips, 13 which were to Sierra Leone, working on the above named projects.

He has worked in project management, executive coaching and is a co-founder for 'Mission Direct', which have setup partnerships for missions all over the world.

Mary has served on a number of mission trips too, 4 being in Sierra Leone.

Other team members were:

John Hindson – Accountant, UK charity 'Build It International', building schools in Zambia

Kathryn Hindson – Legal Secretary, (visited projects with John)

Sarah Meade – Gap Year, Church Volunteer (1st Mission Trip)

Tamara Coxall – Administrator (2nd Mission Trip)

During the trip, we stayed in Tom and Becky's house in the Grafton area of Freetown. We travelled to the work site everyday by 4x4, which took between 30mins – 1 hour depending on the roads and the traffic.

How do Mission Trips work?

Please see below see the goals and methodology for Jubilee Mission Trips.

Specific Community Campaign Goals

- Helping partners deliver a practical project, constructing a home, accommodation for orphans or the elderly, water and sanitary systems, refurbishing a school, a clinic, etc. in a cost effective and appropriate manner
- Providing training through Christian and health education films in partnership with the local church and community groups
- Contributing to the lives of the communities with whom we have previously worked e.g. bringing aid supplies, teaching, doing craft with the elderly, and sorting medical supplies
- Providing a funding channel to connect donors with people and projects where we are certain funds donated for a purpose is delivered to that cause.

Short Term Mission Methodology

Mobilising teams of volunteers to work in developing countries linking them to projects that impact both individuals and the communities they working with. This demonstrates and communicates the love of Christ to these people in order to bring hope and leave a lasting legacy of new life and transformed lives. It allows individuals to work on mission teams without giving up home life and employment and supports Missionaries working in difficult environments.

Partnering with local people by joining them in what they are already doing, we are helping to build capacity and alleviate life-threatening poverty. Community groups with a track record showing initiative and overcoming great adversity, who run their own programmes often have significant need. Whilst advice may be provided, our partner's management and ownership remains indigenous.

Volunteering transforms those who journey to the mission field and we look to embed their learning back into home settings. Those served cannot believe people would leave the comfort of their homes and want a relationship with them. This mix has brought micro-enterprise developments, such as a piggery for a Home for the elderly in Sierra Leone and a volunteer led education and training fund which helps a school to pay its teachers and train individuals with leadership potential. Most noticeable though, are the multiple acts of kindness displayed by volunteers. An operation paid for; a life saved; a disabled man set up in business; a man in a wheelchair rescued from the street and a home found for him. One by one progress is made.

This trip operates with no debt and a principle that 100% of money given or raised by the volunteer, goes directly to the project they are supporting.

How we choose our Projects and Partners

Our partners come about through relationships. We are introduced to a needy situation and then look to see how our key criteria will be met, principally:

- Will the project and partner continue what they are doing whether or not we get involved?
- Is there a clear track record? In principle we will not start anything however simply join those who are already doing a good job.
- Is the land clearly owned on which we might build?
- Do the partners have accountability?

Often Team Leaders living in the country get to know additional areas of need. Whilst the main Project Partners meet the above criteria, our team will no doubt engage in multiple acts of kindness as they respond to needy situations appropriately.

Matthew 25:35-40 is a guiding principle:

³⁵ *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

³⁷ *"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*

⁴⁰ *"Then Jesus will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

Main Projects and Partners

Partners: Tom & Becky Brockelman

Connections to Sierra Leone

Tom & Becky first visited Sierra Leone with a team from McKinney Baptist Church, Texas in May 2008 and then again in May 2009 & 2010 (with Mission Direct). Having previously been full time missionaries in Central America they felt a call to this poorest country in the world, and moved permanently in November 2010.

Their work

They work for several local NGOs including:

- A farming project helping war widows grow their own food
- The Hosetta School for special needs children building a dormitory and dining hall
- The Waterloo Street Boys reuniting children living on the streets with their family or with foster parents
- Margaret's Orphans that looks after abandoned children.

Tom & Becky's living expenses are paid for from donations from family and friends around the world who support their work. The projects are paid for by teams of volunteers coming mainly from the USA. These teams pay their own fares and raise money for the projects.

Their Adopted Son

In 2011, Tom and Becky were introduced to a local boy by the 'Waterloo Street Boys' project. He was suffering from a terrible skin condition, and because of it, was outcast by society. Surviving, by collecting scrap metal in the bush, he worked with another boy, who would sell the wares as people were too afraid to speak to him.

Tom and Becky took him under their care and ensured that he received extensive hospital treatments in both Sierra Leone and Dallas, Texas. The condition is now under control.

During this process, they took him into their home, and decided to officially adopt him.

At ten years old, he was mal-nourished, uneducated, and barely able to speak English. So Becky, who has a background in education, home-schooled him and bought him up to the correct standard for his age.

He joined them on their annual Christmas breaks to Dallas in 2012 & 2013, where he met his new extended family. From August 2014 – Jan 2015, when the Ebola crisis struck, they took him back to Dallas, where he attended school, and showed promising talent in martial arts.

He is now a healthy, happy 15 year old who, like all boys his age, is mad about football (especially his favourite team, Barcelona!). His standard of education is good enough for him to join other children at school. He attends very good school in the area that Tom and Becky pay for themselves.

I was privileged to be able to spend time with him during this trip, and in his own words he said:

'Because my skin condition was so bad, Tom and Becky took me into their house. Our relationship began to grow closer and later I decided to become a Christian. I saw the way they lived and I wanted to be that way. I wanted my life to be dedicated to Christ.'

My father, Tom, baptised me in the sea. In our culture, when you get baptised, you have to choose a Christian name, so I chose the name Emmanuel. I chose this because I wanted to have the name of Jesus, which means 'God is with us'. I never knew God's plan for my life. It was better than the plan I had for myself. If it was not for Tom and Becky, I would probably be dead by now'

Emmanuel is affectionately known to the family and friends as 'Bo', derived from 'Bobo', meaning 'little boy', because he was so small when they first found him, due to mal-nourishment and neglect.

Relationships in the Community

During the six years they have lived in Sierra Leone, they have built up strong relationships with local people, and have chosen to live in the community that they serve, instead of the more affluent areas of the city where other ex-pats live. Some people in the neighbourhood live in houses made from mud block or sheet metal. For their security, they employ 24 hour guards, and have a house helper.

Their driver, Abraham, is a good & trusted friend, and considered as another son, along with his own son 'Junior'.

Each morning, the house and security staff are invited to eat breakfast with them, which is cooked by Tom. Both the concepts of a man cooking and eating breakfast with white people was very strange to them in the beginning. But they have built great relationships, and there is lots of banter as Tom loves winding them up!

Added to all this, Becky speaks very impressive Krio, and is considered to be a local. They are referred to affectionately by those that know them as 'Mom Becky' and 'Dad Tom'.

You can follow their blog at <http://alifeonmission.blogspot.co.uk>

Projects

1. Hosetta Special Needs School Residential Block

Work on site started four years ago to build an accommodation block capable of accommodating 12 boys and 12 girls with associated toilets and showers.

The school at present has no residential accommodation and this was identified by the Board of Governors as their greatest need.

Although the main walls and roof were constructed this was to a very poor standard. The roof is covered with a single sheet of thin aluminium that has been punctured in numerous places where stones have been thrown at it.

The main wall lacked horizontal and vertical bracing and so risked falling on the children.

Progress on the site has also been held back by funding issues and the recent Ebola crisis.

Tom, who comes from a construction background, has been rebuilding the walls. Our team helped him and his builders by sifting large piles of river sand for concrete mixing, moving concrete blocks (that are made on site), and caulking/pointing (filling in mortar between block cracks).

Working on the site, was tough as it was so hot (average 35 °C, 90% humidity). We were also working under a tin roof! So we had to take breaks often and drink plenty of water. However, there was good spirit among the team, as we kept our focus on the goal of contributing towards completing the accommodation for the kids.

History with this project

Initial contact with the school was through the first team sent by the First Baptist Church of McKinney Texas, USA in 2008.

A local boy, John Conteh, bumped into one of the team, Brooke, as she left the church they were attending. She was moved by compassion for him as he clearly had special needs, was in rags and being chased and bullied by other boys.

However he ran away and it seemed that all possible contact with him was lost. The team leaders made enquiries and John and his Grandmother turned up at the team house the next day. John was under the care of his grandmother, the whereabouts of his parents was not known. He had received no education and lived mainly on the streets and was fairly out of control.

Arrangements were made to place John at the Hosetta School with his fees are paid for by Brooke. McKinney Church has sent a team each year since then with Tom and Becky, making Sierra Leone their home.

John's grandmother has died now, so he lives with the headmistress on the school site, with a couple of other children that she looks after.

It is understood by Tom & Becky that Hosetta is the only school of its kind in the country, that falls under the Ministry of Education. It hosts children with all learning difficulties ranging from severe mental & physical disabilities to simple deafness. The school provides a classroom environment with specially trained teachers, meeting each child at their level. They also teach life skill crafts like sewing for those more able to learn.

Recently, German masters level students have become involved with the school, passing on new skills and teaching methods for children at this level of education.

The school also hosts a few charter member students from its inception in 1979, who are still benefitting from the teaching curriculum.

While we were working on the site, John often came to the window to see what was going on, and try to interact with us. He is such a cheeky chappy!

2. Margaret's Orphans

This is a small orphanage about 5 minutes' walk from Tom and Becky's home. Margaret looks after 21 orphans and with their links to Tom and Becky, all of the children are sponsored through a Church in Jefferson City, Missouri, USA. Tom is in the process of constructing a new toilet and shower block for them.

The children currently live in no more than a shack and Tom and Becky would like to construct decent accommodation for them. However they only have a flimsy lease to the land they are based on and a more secure lease is needed first.

Background and history with this project

In 1999, Freetown was invaded by Rebel fighters who killed hundreds of people. During the siege Margaret learnt that her husband had been shot dead, so she fled the city with her four children. She never saw his body.

The area she landed up in, had tents setup by the Catholic church, and she was asked to look after some orphaned children. Having lost everything, she continued to care for the children in the camp, and after some time the church built a temporary dwelling for her and other abandoned children to live in, and raised funds to support them. After some time, the priest who was fundraising was no longer able to help due to old age.

So Tom and Becky's church started a sponsorship programme that later developed into the '25 Project', which is supported by churches and individuals all over America. (Some of them are PepsiCo employees!)

In their role as missionaries, Tom and Becky oversee the daily needs of Margaret and the orphans, giving help, advice and communicating with donors for specific needs. As well as ensuring that they are receiving not just food, but are eating a healthy diet.

The children are well educated, and some of the older ones are now entering university level education programmes. I got to meet some of them, and was humbled by how well bought up they were.

It goes without saying that Margaret has continued to face challenges. She has had to become wise to seemly well intentioned people, who want to adopt children, but end up using them as house workers or worse. In the past, without sponsorship, she has almost had to close the orphanage. Even, during the time that Tom and Becky have been involved, they have lost 3 children to common diseases like Cholera.

During my visit to the orphanage, I was moved to tears, by Margaret's service to these children, the conditions they are living in, and the fact that despite all the odds against them, they are all so happy.

Gifts and Donations

Thank you to everyone who supported my fundraising efforts through giving, cash, aid, buying my cakes or attending Zumba. These were gratefully received, and it was humbling seeing small things that we take for granted, being so celebrated.

I will reach out to all of you personally, but I wanted to especially thank my family, friends and colleagues for the support and encouragement you showed.

In 9 weeks, you helped me raise £747.51, which was split between the 2 projects. Your aid donations filled almost 6 suitcases.

Breakdown of my fundraising is below:

Cash donations - £407.37

Cake Sales - £165.14

Zumba - £175.00

Special thanks to:

Aid Donations: Helpeace and the Coptic Church <http://www.helpeace.org/>
 The generous people of PepsiCo & Creative Jar

Cake Sales: PepsiCo & Creative Jar colleagues for supporting these for 9 weeks!

Zumba: All participants, Fazila from Body Under Construction & Jubilee Church Office Staff

As a group, we raised just over £3,000, which will go towards these projects!

Hopefully the pictures below will help convey the grateful spirit in which your gifts were received.

Staff Children

We decided to bless Bo and the children of the staff that work for Tom & Becky

Margaret's Kids:

We gave clothes, toys, footballs, school stationery and toiletries to the orphans.

The college aged ones applauded when we told them we had scientific calculators and maths sets. Seeing how grateful these kids were was very moving.

Hosetta Kids:

These kids showed interest in our socks and signalled that they would like some. We also gave them a pair each, a football, tennis balls, and hair clips for the girls. Our focus on this project is the building work.

I captured a video of the kids reaction to receiving a new football: <https://youtu.be/dHzSSUtCeDQ>

The aid that we couldn't distribute at the time will be given out by the missionaries to families and individuals in the community as needs arise.

I left the trip earlier than some of the team members. But after I left, they visited the other charities that Tom and Becky support to donate bags of rice.

As a group, we also supported the work of a local woodcarver, Ebrahim, by buying some of his beautiful ornaments and commissioned plaques for our sponsors. At the end of the trip, he presented each of us with a handmade plaque to say Thank You.

Where we stayed

We stayed with Tom and Becky in their 4 bedroom apartment in Grafton, which is on the outskirts of Freetown. The area was populated by people fleeing the rebel siege in Freetown in 1999. So there are a variety of dwellings ranging from brick, mudblock and sheet metal houses.

I stayed in a room with Sarah, where we slept in bunk beds. The group shared a toilet, and a shower that only had cold water.

There is no tar road, no running water or electricity. Through significant investment, Tom and Becky have got the use of fuel run generators, a well with a pump and a water storage tank to provide limited use of electricity and have cold running water.

I captured a video of a typical Sunday afternoon in the neighbourhood: <https://youtu.be/g4IFl49DVhE>

How we spent our Free Time

During our free time, I played games like football and hand ball with Bo and the compound staff. On the weekend we visited local sites around Freetown including the Jackson Street Tourist Market, View Points on surrounding Hills.

On Sunday, we attended Tom and Becky's local church, where we sung traditional English Hymns and listened to a sermon by a pastor from Tennessee, followed by a trip to the amazing Tokeh beach.

Personal Reflections

Biggest Impacts

Poverty

I was not fully prepared for the level of poverty that I would experience in Sierra Leone. For the first 3 days, it made me feel very uncomfortable, at how badly people lived and the state of their environment around them.

The level of poverty is so severe, that people live in houses made from mud and metal sheets. The roads are in terrible condition, and there is no sign of traffic lights or rubbish disposal systems. People die every day from things that shouldn't exist in this day and age, and I felt hopeless.

But, the closer I looked, the more I was reminded of the heavy burden the country has borne in recent times. A civil war, the Ebola crisis, and I was suddenly filled with compassion.

At that point, I realised that the difference I could make, might not make a massive impact to many, but it would help a few.

Work of Missionaries

I was never exposed to Missionaries in the field before meeting Tom & Becky, I had only heard of people like them.

I always thought that missionaries were specially gifted, extra-ordinary people. However, after spending time with them, listening to their daily highs and lows, it made me realise how normal they are.

The thing that made them different is that they live by faith, they have committed their lives to God, and rely on His provisions to get them through each day.

When they felt a call to Sierra Leone, they left their children and grandchildren, sold everything they owned, (including the home they had lived in for more than 30 years), and fearlessly followed the calling to serve people in need. What soon became apparent to them was that every practical and financial need they had was met in one way or another, in ways they could not logically explain.

Their story and their lives are a true inspiration that you don't have to be someone great, to achieve great things.

Highlights

Despite my initial shock at the poverty, I began to see the common things that make people happy, no matter where you are in the world; sharing a meal together, playing an adhoc football game with strangers on the beach and seeing breath taking scenery.

I loved seeing the smiles on children's faces when you gave them gifts, how genuinely grateful they were for the smallest thing. I will never forget the way the Hosetta kids marvelled over socks, and screamed with joy when they got given a new football.

Experiencing the feeling of getting a round of applause when you announce that you are giving a group of university students some calculators. That can really make you put things into perspective.

The team had a great dynamic; we worked together well, and had some good laughs. We were led and looked after by some incredible people who were real and honest, and that really made it for me.

As well as learning about the Sierra Leone culture, I enjoyed getting to more familiar with Texans!

Challenges

Working in the heat was extremely difficult, and I experienced chronic swollen feet and ankles, to the point where I was starting to lose sensation in my toes. Thankfully, after some prayer and home remedies, it became manageable.

My mobile phone couldn't pick up signal, so I wasn't able to speak to my husband or family for the duration of the trip.

Coming Home

As soon as I landed back in UK, I was struck by the contrast of the world I had just come from, where there was no running water etc, to clean, automatic flushing toilets, smooth tarmacs, traffic lights and clean streets. I suddenly started to see my world differently, and appreciate everything that I had.

For the first few days that I was back, it took me some time to adjust to how lovely my home, neighbourhood and community are.

I started to notice that the way that I thought about things and people had changed. Small things that used to bother me, no longer did. Things I used to be afraid of, now seemed insignificant. I truly feel that this trip has had a profound effect on me in mental, emotional and spiritual ways.

Final Thoughts

If you are feeling inspired by the work being done on these projects, and would like to help, please see below:

Support the Missionaries

Please speak to Ronnie or Tami, if you'd like to find out how to support Tom and Becky

Sponsor an Orphan or Street Child

<https://www.25project.org/countries/sierra-leone/margarets-home/>

<https://www.25project.org/countries/sierra-leone/waterloo-ministry-drop-in-center/>

Or if you think you would like to do a mission trip, please have a look at Mission Direct's website (there are other Mission Trip companies available too, check them out online).

<http://www.missiondirect.org/>

If you'd like to learn more about what inspired me to do this trip, please read my personal testimony on next page.

Thank you.

Tami