For nearly 30 years, Operation Classroom has partnered with the United Methodist Church in Liberia and Sierra Leone to help improve secondary education through student sponsorship, shipping of educational supplies, construction of schools, equipping of libraries and laboratories, and coordination of volunteer teams.

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the youth population of Sierra Leone, aged 15-35, comprises one third of the population, and youth unemployment was a major root cause of the outbreak of 1994-2002 “civil war”. Approximately 70% of youth are underemployed or unemployed and an estimated 800,000 youth today are searching for employment.  

Bishop Yambasu challenged us to engage with the Sierra Leone Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (SLUMC) to find a way to have a more substantial impact on the situation. A series of conversations, collaborations, and colloquiums, in Sierra Leone and the U.S., were held with educators, government officials, tribal leaders, United Methodist Church officials, SLUMC staff, and potential partners - both in the public and private sectors. THE CONCEPT OF A PILOT PROJECT in central Sierra Leone at Taiama emerged from those conversations that we’re calling: Taiama Enterprise Academy (TEA).

“What you see out there is an absolute recipe for disaster — for social unrest.”

– Bishop Yambasu –
The traditional approach to development has been to “provide things for people.” If people lack education, we build schools. If they are unhealthy, we build hospitals and provide doctors, or we drill a freshwater well. If their small businesses are stagnant, we provide microcredit so they can borrow. While each of these interventions can be helpful in the right context, mere provision fails to address root causes: the behaviors, social systems, and mindset that are created by poverty. Indeed, every time we provide something for someone in need (that they could provide for themselves), we send a subtle message to them that we believe they are incapable of doing so. In effect, when we “provide”, we’re stealing from the very people we’re attempting to help. We’re stealing their dignity, we’re stealing their initiative, and we’re stealing their self-worth. The key to ending poverty resides in the capacity of human beings (and their view of their own capacity) to facilitate positive change, and engage in productive enterprise. Wydick, 2013

The Enterprise Academy concept (of which the Taiama Enterprise Academy is the “pilot project”) has been designed to help youth in Sierra Leone develop the capacity to deal with their situation in ways compatible with their cultural setting and context, using locally available resources.

**ISSUES**
- Graduates in West Africa face few available jobs, resulting in unemployment.
- Native tribal culture works against the development of an entrepreneurial mindset.
- The number one impediment to economic improvement is corruption.

**OBJECTIVES**
**Develop a model of Entrepreneurial Education which:**
- Recognizes and builds upon the intrinsic positive values of village/tribal culture
- Engages students at an early age when it’s possible to change their perspective.
- Equips students with experience in agriculture, auto mechanics, construction and more.
- Can become self-sustaining in short order by incorporating incomeproducing ventures into the program.

**STRATEGY**
Implement a pilot project, at a site currently owned by the SLUMC at Taiama, incorporating a residential “Enterprise Academy”, for 160 students. The site is part of the Taiama United Methodist Junior/ Senior Secondary School that was severely affected by the civil war, thus a number of facilities have never been rehabilitated and are available for reuse. The goal is to develop “Farmers, Framers, and Fixers.” We are NOT interested in producing agriculturalists, teachers, or office workers. The goal is to equip students to become independently productive in a whole variety of fields.

Taiama Enterprise Academy

Solving the Poverty Puzzle

For more information about the Taiama Enterprise Academy and ways that you can help “Solve the Poverty Puzzle”, including providing scholarships for students @ the TEA, go to operationclassroom.org

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