Editor’s message
By Nikki Skuce

One Sky staff have the fortune of working in some of the most difficult places in the world. Fortune because many of the people that we encounter who have absolutely nothing and may be war-affected or displaced by environmental degradation inspire us with their sense of hope. Situated in a country like Canada, how can we not also carry this hope and turn it into action to address the disparities and injustices in the world? In reporting on the difficult realities in the places that One Sky works, we have an obligation to point to inspiring people and stories and changes that exist. Too much bad news lures one into apathy. In the current state of the world, we can't afford complacency. In reading this newsletter that will provide some insights not only into our work but also into the personalities of our organization, I hope that it leaves you inspired. And remember: “The reasonable person adapts him/herself to the world. The unreasonable person persists in trying to change the world. Therefore, all progress depends on unreasonable people.” Go ahead. Join us in being unreasonable.

Photo: Diamond miners in Koidu

Touched by Diamonds
By Kristin Patten

The increasing presence of young black men walking singly or in pairs down the potholed road, seives in one hand, a shovel over the other shoulder with a bucket hanging from it, is the first sign that we’re nearing Sierra Leone’s diamond fields. Our destination is Koidu town, in the heart of Kono district. Kono was one of the most heavily fought over areas in Sierra Leone during the ten year rebel war, as the RUF fought for control of Kono’s rich alluvial diamond deposits.

Koidu town, as we enter it, is a movie-set of the Klondike during the gold rush days with its wide dusty streets, shops selling stacked heaps of basic mining equipment and rows of dealers buying diamonds and selling provisions back to miners. Except here, the scars of war are clear. Bombed out houses, roofless, doorless, some walls still standing, seem more numerous than intact ones. Inside, steam rises from pots over cooking fires, laundry flutters from lines, and sleeping mats are rolled up and put away for the day. These structures shelter former Kono residents and migrant workers. Residents are slowly returning to rebuild their homes and lives now that the area has been declared secure. Migrant workers from other parts of Sierra Leone and from surrounding countries are pulled to the district by the gamble of diamond-wealth, pushed there by poverty.

The diamond fields surround - and even enter - Koidu town. Formerly fertile river valleys are now miles and miles of mining pits stretching out on either side of the road leading into town. In one area, we’re told that the mine pits cover an area that is ¾ mile wide and extend for 7 miles. As we look down these former rivers towards the horizon, we can see hundreds of miners crawling ant-like as they move tonnes of topsoil to find and sift the gravel - and possibly diamonds - hiding underneath. Here at the source, it’s hard to connect diamonds, associated with glitter and gold, velvet displays, movie stars and slick ad campaigns, with such rough and almost medieval beginnings.

Generator powered water pumps move the water out of the pits. This water, these rivers, were once used for cleaning, bathing, drinking by villages along the river, and were a home for the fish that provide the majority of the protein in the diet of the Kono people. The environmental and social impacts of diamond mining is clear. The community doesn’t need to be “told” this. The problem is - what are the alternatives? 1200 Leones per day for a digger is enough to buy a plate of rice, which is better than no rice. The war may be over, but life isn’t easy in Kono. In fact, life has never been easy in Kono, despite its mineral riches.

(cont. p.2)
We’ve come to Kono - Mike, Ginny, and myself from One Sky and two members of the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, DD Siafa and John Moriba - to talk to government, NGOs, and community members to get a picture of the environmental impacts of the diamond mining, see what activities organizations are doing in this regard, and to assess a potential role for One Sky.

We meet people and talk. We meet Sahr Nyama, a former miner and now member of the Peace Diamond Alliance, a group working to try to bring the benefits of diamonds back to the Kono people. We hear the story of Ibrahim Kamara, who fled with his entire village to refugee camps in Guinea during the war and who is now working hard to rebuild his village where the rebels left only the foundations of houses, schools and clinics. I talk to Adam, a “supporter” who supplies food and equipment for the four miners working his area. I discuss mining with Andrew, a Kono who started mining when he was ten, mined with the RUF during the war, and now runs his own pit with twenty diggers working for him. We talk with Ministry officials who are aware of the huge extent of illegal mining, but are virtually powerless - and afraid - to stop the mostly ex-combatants mining the sites. We get a tour of Canadian registered Branch Energy, currently the only industrial diamond mining operation in Sierra Leone - although many more companies are busy exploring and prospecting. We hear from a Paramount Chief who offers to gather elders together within the hour to discuss the effects of mining on his village. Another chief tells us that 85 - 90% of the people in his village are doing diamond mining or are involved in diamond-related activities.

Up close in Kono, diamond mining is a complex interweaving of issues and impacts - community relationships, personal relationships, agriculture, clean water, food security, health, war, rebels, amputations, bombs, traditional power structures, race relations, corruption, lack of jobs, local trade, international trade. Nothing seems left untouched by diamonds.

There is no easy solution for Kono, but government, community members, chiefs and NGOs are working hard to implement a variety of strategies. These include credit schemes for miners, alternative income generation, diamond valuation training, community workshops and sensitization on government mining policy and more. One Sky is welcomed, hopes for future support are expressed again and again.

With the Blood Diamonds are For Never campaign, One Sky and campaign participants have been working hard to end the trade in conflict diamonds by strengthening the Kimberley Process (KP). Ensuring the success of the Kimberley Process is one step - and an important one. If effectively implemented, the KP will ensure that diamonds cannot be used to finance war and atrocities. But it’s clear that there is still much to be done to ensure that diamond mining benefits the people of Sierra Leone and that consumers in Canada can buy diamonds that are truly “clean”.

One Sky Thanks You!

Without community and donor support, we would not be able to follow through with our work. One Sky would like to thank the following people and organizations for their kind donations and volunteer time in 2003:

- Atlantic Container Lines
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- Nikki Skuce
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- Greg Drury
- Johan Boyden
- Gagan Leekha
- Melanie Morin
- John L’Orsa
- Ed Siwicki
- Janet Sondresen

All of the local businesses and volunteers for our 2nd Annual Goods and Services Auction.

All of the generous people who made it possible to send a school bus filled with resources to Sierra Leone.

And to the Canadian International Development Agency for their continuing support.

For more information on how to get involved or to make a donation, please contact us at:

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School Bus In Sierra Leone

By Chrisa Hoicka

The school bus, sent from Smithers August 1st, driven across the country and shipped out of Halifax, safely arrived at the Freetown port in Sierra Leone on September 17th. Of course, in true Salone style, it could not exit the port without vast amounts of paper work, stamps of approval, and special ‘what-is-that-paper-in-your-hand?’ handshakes at the port and Ministry of Education, taken care of by One Sky’s Kristin Patten, Olatunde Johnson of Friends of the Earth and Mr. Michael Kpulin of Sengbeh Pieh Memorial Secondary School.

Having packed the bus in Smithers, I knew Moose (the name given to the bus) inside out. I arrived in Sierra Leone nearly a month after the bus arrived. On that same day, Mr. Kpulin got word that the bus had permission to be released from the port. He thinks that Moose was waiting for my arrival so that I could be the one to unpack the donations.

My second week in Salone consisted of spending a day in the port where I directed the unpacking of the bus for customs, and the repacking of the bus. The next day I directed the unpacking of the bus for FOESL and Sengbeh Pieh and the repacking of the bus (how many times will I have to do this? I thought to myself!). There was much excitement amongst members of FOESL and Sengbeh Pieh as we hauled out hundreds of boxes of books, 24 bicycles, and piping and tools for the Eco-Center. Olatunde was running around with a huge smile on his face, and we were all dripping with sweat from hauling boxes out of an unventilated bus (the windows were boarded up) sitting under the hot Africa sun. Most staff were surprised to see yet another One Sky intern breaking gender, race and class barriers, as I hauled boxes off and on the bus alongside all of the young men volunteering. I’m discovering that this visual depiction of an educated white woman working hard and soaking her shirt with sweat is raising many eyebrows, and accomplishing One Sky’s goals of bringing positive challenges to social norms in Salone.

On November 5th, in a school celebration complete with photographers, television camera crews, members of the Ministry of Education, cultural groups (dancing devils!!) and hundreds of skul pikin (school children), One Sky officially handed over the school bus to Sengbeh Pieh School and FOESL, complete with a special handing over of the keys. Members of One Sky were rewarded with a diploma of having graduated as good students from Sengbeh Pieh School, and some beautiful gara cloth and flowers.

It has been wonderful to arrive in Sierra Leone and start this phase of my internship seeing one of One Sky’s projects become a success, and to feel a sense of partnership and accomplishment amongst these three organizations. A say ‘tenki’ that the bus made it, and soon it will be driving along that red dirt road bringing skul pikin and Salone closer to higher education and literacy levels.
Youth Intern Perspective

By Mali Bain

What is Nigeria like? Nigeria is the happiest country in the world - and the 2nd most corrupt (after Bangladesh). Living in Calabar is like living a 3-D video game, lecture series, and cocktail party while wearing bunny ears and walking on stilts in a strange town - if you know what I mean. At times being here feels natural, but then someone calls out 'I love you', laughs at my nose, or adds the standard ‘mbakara’ (foreigner) tax. People are friendly, they're interested, and above all they want to come to America (Canada - that's in America, abi?).

How many times have you begun a conversation about the rain, the snow, the heat, the wind? Imagine that many conversations on the topic of 'I am interested in NGO work', and you've got Calabar. In Calabar a population of approximately 10,000 students attend the University of Calabar; several hundred of those are in the 'Environmental Protection and Management' and the 'Environmental Education' programs. University graduates are working in the market, driving taxis, and driving machines (motorbikes). They are looking for jobs, for opportunities to apply their skills; if they're lucky, they will find a friend who can give them a job in a bank or in the government.

One Sky opens the window of opportunity, connecting Nigerian organizations with Canadian organizations in the Nigeria Canada Coalition. In the past month we have hosted Kris Dartnell, CMA, management consultant with Salasan Geospatial, working with key Nigerian NGOs on financial and project management. "I am inspired by the high level of dedication and commitment shown by environmental organizations in Cross River State", said Dartnell. "It is encouraging to see the progress groups are making towards becoming strong, sustainable organizations".

John Baine, a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer and computer specialist as well as a One Sky Board member, was enjoying his first visit to Nigeria. "I am pleased to be here to work with our Nigerian partners to enhance computer infrastructure and know-how", said Baine. He conducted computer training with five Nigerian partner organizations, including assisting the Non-Governmental Organisation Coalition for the Environment (NGOCE) to set up an internet cafe.

Chief Bassey Archibong, Acting Executive Director of NGOCE is delighted by the support Mr. Baine is able to provide. "Internet communications are a vital link to local, national and international knowledge and networks", said Chief Archibong. "It will enable the environmental sector in Cross River State to access state-of-the-art resources which can be adapted to our local context. The members of NGOCE will be able to apply new environmental information to the betterment of Cross River State".

The CRE Project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), features an innovative approach to capacity development, partnering five Nigerian NGOs, three Canadian NGOs, and two private companies in the "Nigeria-Canada Coalition".

The CRE Project partner organizations are working in the buffer zones surrounding two key protected areas in the Cross River bioregion of Nigeria. These protected areas represent the largest remaining contiguous Tropical Moist Forest in West Africa with the highest biological endemism in the region.

For the month of November two Canadian professionals arrived in Calabar as part of One Sky's Cross River State Environmental Capacity Development Project (CRE Project).

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One Sky Updates

Nigeria News: Two Nigerian partners - Alade Adeleke of NCF and Bassey Archibong of NGOCE - attended a two week training course in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation in Kisumu, Kenya. Excellence Uso has coordinated Cross River State input into the African Environment Outlook for youth report. A meeting was hosted by One Sky on December 2nd with participation by 40 young people. Excellence is on a short-term volunteer assignment with One Sky until December 5. One Sky board member John Baine, Project Coordinator Jennifer Castleden and Project Consultant Kris Dartnell met Prime Minister Jean Chretien at a reception held at the Canadian High Commissioner’s residence in Abuja, Nigeria. The event was held in conjunction with the Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting.

One Sky office: One Sky staff have been busy speaking and participating in conferences such as Amnesty International’s conference “Up in Arms: Raising awareness for war-affected children” held in Vancouver, the Canadian Environmental Network’s AGA in Montreal and international conference on Community Resource Management in Oaxaca, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation’s workshop on “Building Knowledge and Capacity for Policy Influence” in Montreal, and an Environmental and Energy planning conference in Terrace. Upcoming engagements include a UBC Student Leadership conference, the Guelph Organic Agriculture conference and the opportunity to be part of an Association for Responsible Mining.

On-line: Michael Simpson was featured for a week in November in the on-line zine GRIST. His daily entries written while in Sierra Leone can still be read by visiting: http://www.gristmagazine.com/dearme/simpson111003.asp.

Youth Clubs: Do you know a group of keen, locally-acting and globally-thinking youth who are looking for international connections? One Sky is supporting conservation club activities in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. If you’d like to connect with these clubs, please email Mali at mali@onesky.ca

The Doctor Is In
By Nikki Skuce

One Sky is hoping to have more local initiatives in the coming year. Part of that is the development of an ecological footprint programme that will highlight the potential for energy savings in a Northern office context. We hope to inform people through a community supported renovation programme to become more aware of energy conservation, energy alternatives such as solar power, effective recycling and zero waste policies as well as urban food security from a small town perspective. There is a need to increase the capacity of Northern communities to understand climate change and its relation to energy. One Sky has a mentorship policy and is hoping to include training and local participation in the development and renovations to ‘green’ their building.

To kick-start this initiative, Greg Drury, also known as the ‘House Doctor’, gave a workshop on December 6 at the One Sky office. Installing a canvas door with a hole for a blower to depressurize the building, we were then able to walk around the office building and feel all of the leaks where cold air was streaming in. Armed with sticky notes, we labelled the problem areas including the eye-opening leaks of all electrical outlets on the outside walls.

In four hours we dealt with some of the leaks with simple solutions – putting plastic on remaining windows, caulking an attic trap door, putting foam around water pipes, sealing larger cracks with spray foam, and taking apart one electrical outlet to learn how to caulk holes within and install a switchplate seal. While a bit more work needs to be done to close the building envelope, these small efforts in a short time will make a big difference.

Greg’s goal would be to have every North American spend 4 to 6 hours on quick, easy solutions to tighten their building envelope. Not only would energy use decrease substantially in our northern climates, but so would our energy bills. Through various calculations, Greg can almost guarantee at least $200 savings in energy bills a year for only 6 hours of efforts.

For more information, contact One Sky at info@onesky.ca or visit www.thehousedoctor.info/
A Moment in Nigeria.
By Michael Simpson

Sometimes a moment catches the essence of a country. My window was rolled down and we were stuck in Nigerian traffic. The informal or marginal economy of Lagos gives the traveler a very poignant sense of the cities reality. In many third world economies people sell things on the street. In Lagos they run along in traffic, between cars and dodging motorcycles. A sale is made while running a gauntlet of broken automobiles going far too fast interspersed by unlicensed motorcycle drivers that vary in skill from motor-cross aficionados to inept learners mastering the concept of the clutch. Each driver shares a willing faith and a high probability of mishap or injury. Each street vendor is willing to place themselves in the way of this maddening, slowly moving traffic jam or “hold-up” as they call it. I saw one fellow run at least half a mile making a sale on underwear through an untrusting half rolled drivers window... another girl quickly passed off her basket of oranges to sprint after a car hoping for her change. The desperate nature of the informal economy here is underlined by the dodging, the running, the near misses of metal and flesh all to make a sale on a bottle of water, a bag of peanuts or a beer. A world marked more by people's attempts to make a living honestly through an insane trade than the crime ridden world that Lagos is rumoured to be.

I was pondering all this when I heard wailing... the kind of crazed wailing that immediately turns heads in a world of sounds and honking and yelling and shouting. I saw a young girl, like so many thousands I have seen on boulevards and under overpasses in poverty struck worlds of concrete and exhaust. She was different though; muttering and wailing and banging her head and biting on a plastic bottle and making unworldly sounds that drew the attention of the street vendors. I watched as a crowd formed around her partially obscured by diesel smoke and the traffic. People were discussing what to do while she continued to bang her head and scream in what looked like an autistic fervour.

In that crazy world of poverty I saw a man reach into his bag of drinks and pass the poor girl his profit margin. She picked the bottle of water up and began to mutter and bite and gesticulate her thanks on that grimy, oil soaked boulevard amidst the traffic and wondering stares. I could not help but think that Lagos and Africa is marked more by cooperation than chaos....More by solidarity in the face of poverty than a dog eat dog competition. Yet I know better than to romanticize this insane world. Lagos is not for the light-hearted and Nigeria is no place to hang out if you don't want to witness human misery. But there are moving moments that underline our decency and prove that people care in a careless world.

Traffic jam, not from the Lagos story, but in Calabar. Photo: Kris Dartnell

One Sky is a pretty small gesture. We are a small group of people, living in a small rural town in a very big world of troubles. I like to think that we are doing something, anything to change the world for the better and at times I convince myself we are being strategic about it. In the end we cannot know the full impact of our actions but I intuitively know that when that man reached into his bag he took action based on principled intention. He may not have tackled the root causes of that girl’s plight but he did what he could do. Based on the dedication of our staff and board members and all those who support us I feel like we are on a similar track. My recent travels in Africa and visits with One Sky folk have underlined this feeling for me. There has been a lot of personal sacrifice by One Sky folk based more on a feeling of solidarity than charity. The nature of environmental problems is such that we seem to recognize our collective predicament in a globally intertwined world. Who knows what the end result of our actions will be. But it feels like it is in the right direction.
New Onboard
By Tom Buri, One Sky Director

I’ve been acquainted with a fair number of corporate entities in the course of my legal practice over the last 25 years. I’ve been a director on quite a few boards, and I’ve been legal counsel for a great many more. All kinds. Provincial and extra-provincial companies, partnerships, limited partnerships, joint ventures, societies, associations, clubs, churches, municipalities, regional districts, foundations – you name it. I’ve brought many of these organizations into existence. Usually by incorporation under a statute, but sometimes just out of paper. I’ve been their registered and records office – right now for 3 or 4 hundred of them. I’ve worked for big ones with lots of shareholders and huge operations, and I’ve worked for ones that weren’t anything more than an Ltd. on the end of some guy’s name.

I’ve been there through all their infinite transformations – the buying and selling of them, their winding up and dissolution, their amalgamations and restorations, their butterflies and rollovers. I’ve litigated their hostilities and challenged their capacities, the take-overs, the oppression of minorities, the shotgun buy-sells, the deadlocked boards and the conflicts of interest …

Well, I thought I’d seen it all … but nothing, nothing I say, prepared me for One Sky. One Sky – and this now is a poet speaking – is to all these other entities what dreaming is to conscious thought, what intuition is to deliberation, inspiration to afterthought. The members of its corporate body cannot be identified by any objective device. I suspect they are recognized by their aura or some such magic. Recognized? By whom? More likely the mystical body simply coalesces in moments of need. And the directors, they appear on the board as would the players on a field of dreams. If you build it they will come. Things happen in a world with One Sky because an idea’s time has come. The web flutters with breezy One Sky chatter. Money comes and goes, not so much a medium of ex-change, but a metaphor for-change.

I think of Mike wondering why he was up at 1:00 a.m. backing up his computer and then trying to get his tractor chains fixed on his snowplow and his car battery charged at 7:00 a.m. before he raced to the airport, reports in hand, late as usual, for a month-long trip to Nigeria and Sierra Leone and I think there is no other way this kind of organization – or should I say disorganization – happens. If it were as organized as in those moments we might wish, no one would ever get to those places. It is the tariff they extract, the price to be paid. The places to which One Sky reaches require a quota of chaos to get there where they exist.

Ah, I see an auditor coming down the hallway. A jet lifts off with its monstrous load of fuel. Somewhere a party begins with palm wine and another Valentine’s Day rolls around. How does it feel to be a new director? I only shake my head.

Another Welcome

One Sky would like to welcome Patricia Eyamba as our most recent staff addition. Tricia is the Gender and HIV/AIDS Coordinator for the Cross River Environmental project. She is working with the Nigerian NGOs to mainstream gender and HIV/AIDS in both the organizations and the communities that our partners are working in.

Global Classroom Initiative

One Sky is working in collaboration with teachers Janet Sondresen and Natalie Charlton to produce educational kits on “A day in the life of a child in Sierra Leone” for schools in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Kristin Patten is collaborating with a committee of teachers in Sierra Leone to provide feedback on the units. Filled with photos, stories, interviews and activities, these educational kits will be distributed in July.
Micro Finance Initiative  
By Ginny Stratton

In December 2002, FOESL began to expand its Gender Program through the inception of a women’s co-operative and micro finance initiative. Over the last decade micro finance has emerged in many impoverished and war-torn countries as a powerful tool that can work to assist people in reestablishing their economic security and rebuilding their communities. At its most basic level, micro finance can be defined as a system that seeks to enable people living in poverty to amass usefully large sums of cash through the provision of financial services dealing with small deposits and loans.

The FOESL micro finance initiative targets women’s groups in 8 different communities throughout the Western area of Sierra Leone. Each of the women’s groups is required to form subgroups whose members must then work co-operatively to carry out their businesses. Loans are disbursed to the subgroups of each community group on a rotating basis through the maintenance of a revolving loan fund. Each women’s group has initiated a group savings fund which they will be encouraged to use for developments such as the construction of a school or health center or as an education fund for the children of the program participants, although the ultimate decision as to where these funds are to be allocated is to be left to the women themselves.

This initiative also entails an accompanying development program that will be developed through a participatory approach in order to enable each community to define the set of challenges that they face in terms of both gender and the environment and the strategies that they want to use to overcome such challenges. As this element of the micro finance initiative is to be based on the experiences and knowledge of the women in the program, it will vary in each community and the exact shape that it is to take will become more evident as the project progresses. As the program evolves, the women will also be invited to share the lessons they learn with other members of their community.

For more information on this program or if you have wisdom or ideas to share with the program coordinators, please write to ginny@onesky.ca.

One Grain, One God...a perspective on food and faith in Sierra Leone...  
By Jennifer Thompson

In Krio, one of the ways to say "by yourself" is one grain - like one grain of rice. If you are alone in the house, you say Na me One grain na di os. If you are moving around the city by yourself, you say A de go walka walka ton me one grain.

Maybe its not such a good thing to be alone here.

What good is one grain of rice on its own? How much is one grain of rice worth?

Not much when it takes a full plate to fill one’s belly.

Hunger.

Bring all the grains together and you’ve got a meal. Community.

What do you do when the price of rice nearly doubles? You pray to God to let the price of rice go down again.

Bring all the grains together to pray. One Grain, One God.

Food. Chop. Where is it? Its everywhere and nowhere at the same time. There is food around. But not everyone can afford to eat.

International food distribution patterns that reinforce international hunger patterns. And this week, those distribution patterns shifted by the ending of Ramadan. Imagine food scarcity at the end of a month of fasting - food scarcity for such a massive Muslim meal.

Supply and demand: Certain times of day, on certain street corners - you can buy grilled fish, or bundles of cassava leaf, or little baggies of ice cream. Other times of day, none to be found. I hear the mangoes are rotting in the streets during mango season. Food rots in the street, when people are walking by hungry. Something wrong with access. Sometimes I can wander around our neighborhood for half an hour looking for water to drink.

Tap water.

Why is the sky blue? God made it blue.

One Grain, One God.

It’s cheaper to eat out than it is to stay in and cook for yourself, unless of course, you cook for more than One Grain....

Maybe its not such a good thing to be alone here.

Why would you be only one grain, when you could be two? There is a song on the radio: One grain bobo, na you de make A shine so: "You are the guy/boy that makes me happy/shine." Romanticizing rice? An insistence that two is better than one...

But not when it comes to God. One God, no more. Whether you are Christian or Muslim or a Rasta variation of one or the other, this country holds firm belief. People preach in public transport, and at meetings for non-religious NGOs. It’s a firm belief, a strong belief, a deep belief. One God saved this country and its people. And so people give thanks through prayer. People have hope through prayer.

One Grain prays to One God.

In Salone, it seems unheard of to not want marriage. Even more unheard of is to question the existance of God. So it therefore seems I’ve got a whole lotta people praying for me.

In Krio, when you want to convince someone of something, you say you want to "confuse" them. Well, many people are working hard to confuse this One Grain...