

SABRE FOUNDATION  
COMPUTER TRAINING AND BOOK PROGRAM  
DEVELOPMENT

PRESENTED

BY

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In a letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2002, I was invited by Sabre Foundation to visit the USA as part of the computer and Internet training for partners and Book Program Development. The goal of the visit is to strengthen the capacity of the Sabre Foundation Partner Organization (Sierra Leone Book Trust) to manage and provide wide access to educational materials and training.

The Sierra Leone Book Trust is a voluntary, non-profit, non-governmental organization with the aim of creating a literate environment in Sierra Leone through the provision of books. After its inception in April, 2002, the Sierra Leone Book Trust with support from Sabre Foundation has trained ten information professionals from libraries in Sierra Leone on computer and internet search skills in July, 2002, at the Center for Media Education and Technology in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Tim Nikula, ICT instructor at Sabre Foundation, conducted the training.

The contribution of the Sierra Leone Book Trust to discussions and planning of the Book Program Development for Sierra Leone in Cambridge, Massachusetts was considered essential. The visit lasted for twenty-one days; beginning 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2003 to 16th February, 2003. Fourteen days was spent in Cambridge, Massachusetts and seven days in Virginia.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES FOR THE VISIT**

The visit to Sabre Foundation headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in January, 2003, has the following specific objectives:

- To discuss and further plan the Book Program for Sierra Leone
- To train in advanced computer and internet search skills
- To foster relationship and links
- To visit organizations, learn and share experiences

## **3.0 TRAINING**

The ICT training modules I went through were Access, Excel, HTML, Advance Microsoft Word, E-Mail File Attachment and Advanced Internet. All the modules are relevant in my organization for effective service delivery, Book Program Development and management of personnel, material resources and training of trainees. My training Instructors were Tim Nikula and Roger Gill. The training program was scheduled for twenty-eight hours. The patience and teaching methodology of my Instructors carried me through successfully in the training exercise.

As part of the training exercises and assignments, I designed and presented traveling claims to Sabre Foundation using Excel, created a mailing list and book database, sent file attachments via e-mail, created a web page for the Sierra Leone Library Board ([www.geocities.com/sielib2002](http://www.geocities.com/sielib2002)), used search engines to get details of texts, flight schedules, weather information and news to name but a few.

#### **4.0 PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT / PARTNERSHIP**

Formal and informal meetings were held with staff of Sabre Foundation to update, highlight shortcomings and map out strategies for excellent Book Program and Partnership. The meetings formalized the partnership between the Sierra Leone Book Trust and Sabre Foundation with the signing of an agreement on the 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2003. Also, the discussions and meetings gave an insight into the present socio/economic situation in Sierra Leone and work of the Sierra Leone Book Trust amidst the difficult social and economic realities and the capability and limitations of Sabre Foundation.

Decisions reached were as follows:

- The first shipment of books to Sierra Leone is scheduled for summer 2003.
- The books will be distributed to libraries, schools, training colleges, universities, professional institutions, the needy, and community development organizations after stamping with “Not For Sale” stamps supplied by Sabre Foundation.
- Recipient should complete and sign institutional holding form.
- The Executive Director of the Sierra Leone Book Trust should study the Ghana Book Trust model and operations for a week in Ghana between April and May 2003.
- One quarter (\$ 1250) of funds raised for book purchase for donation in Sierra Leone by the Sierra Leone Book Trust should go towards the acquisition of local language textbooks prescribed for schools in Sierra Leone. A report should follow the book purchase.
- Three quarters (\$ 3750) of funds raised for book purchase for donation in Sierra Leone by the Sierra Leone Book Trust should go towards the acquisition of reference materials already identified in the USA.
- The management of Sabre Foundation would give backing to Project proposals from the Sierra Leone Book Trust for Book Program Development.
- Sabre Foundation shall facilitate meetings/links between the Sierra Leone Book Trust and potential donors/funding agencies for program sustainability.
- That a USA citizen is sort for membership in the Board of the Sierra Leone Book Trust as provided for in the constitution of the Sierra Leone Book Trust.

Issues which no concrete decision was reached but of concern were:

- Private office space for the administration of the Sierra Leone Book Trust as required by the Non- Governmental Organization Policy Regulation of the Government of Sierra Leone.
- Funding for the second shipment of books to Sierra Leone. Funding could be difficult to access within Sierra Leone because of the present socioeconomic situation of the country, especially from the government and people. The priority at the moment is to resettle the displaced population, returnees, plus the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructures. Discussion on this issue will continue with Sabre Foundation; although discussion on this issue started when I was in Virginia with organizations like Friends Of Sierra Leone and Sierra Leone Progressive Union, all based in the USA. Nevertheless, I am soliciting the help of interested organizations to come in and compliment the efforts of the Sierra Leone Book Trust and Sabre Foundation in the drive to create a literate society in a country whose population has gone through the trauma of war for ten years, rendering close to 70% of the population illiterate.

## **5.0 PROFESSIONAL VISITS**

### **5.1 SABRE BOOK WAREHOUSE**

Description is not enough to make up the size and content of Sabre Foundation Book Warehouse in Lawrence, Massachusetts. To be conservative, it is 1.5 acre, well organized with boxes of books and educational materials filling almost every space available.

One question that I keep asking myself is how such a big task is handled by relatively few members of staff. I was expecting a score of warehouse staff and equal figure at the headquarters of Sabre Foundation to man the work Sabre Foundation is doing in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. It is incredible to know that about seven to eight staff manned the headquarters; half of which are on part time and two staff manned the warehouse. The task is really commendable.

I had the opportunity to examine the content of the warehouse and determine the relevance of the content to the Book Program for Sierra Leone. Books and educational materials examined were relevant for the advancement of education and reduction of the literacy rate in Sierra Leone.

### **5.2 BOOKSTORES**

A visit to bookstores was considered significant to my visit for two reasons:

- To have an overview of the types of bookstores and what they offer.
- To make better judgment when it comes to acquisition of reference materials for distribution in Sierra Leone. After the visit I was in a position to better recommend the type and quantity of reference materials to be considered for acquisition.

### **5.3 LIBRARIES**

A means of Sabre Foundation strategy to build on the capacity of partners, the scheduled visit to public and academic libraries in Cambridge and Boston was informative and educative. I visited the Central Square Branch Library in Cambridge, the main Cambridge Public Library, Boston Public Library and Harvard Houghton Library.

One common element of the visitation to public libraries was the concept of civic engagement. The concept is closely related to our programs in Sierra Leone with communities in the provision of libraries and information services. The visit to Harvard Houghton Library proved very useful. I was able to set eyes on historical documents on Sierra Leone – a list of these materials I already have and would be presented to the management of the Sierra Leone Library Board. Also I was able to identify an old photograph of a street in Freetown for the librarians to classify. This has been a problem for the librarians to discern.

The visit actually created the opportunity to meet with colleagues in the profession, exchange ideas, experiences, and establish links. Key among them were: Louise Goldstein, Central Square Public Library, Mary Frances O'Brien, Boston Public Library, Betty Falsey, Harvard Houghton Library to name but a few.

## **6.0 SELECTION**

Book selection was part of my schedule in the visit. The selection exercise took me to MIT Libraries Gift and Exchange office. I selected relevant, up-to-date reference and management texts to be included in the consignment for Sierra Leone in Summer 2003. It is hoped the selection from MIT Libraries Gift and Exchange office would be a useful addition to the book requirement for Sierra Leone and may likely contribute to fill the book requirement gap.

## **7.0 GENERAL**

The warmth of the staff of Sabre Foundation was unimaginable. Members of staff were always available to make me comfortable. Means of transport to and from the guesthouse was provided by Roger Gill, Tim Nikula, Tania Vitvitsky and Robert Spurr, manager of the guesthouse. Robert and wife Dianne were very helpful and I enjoyed my stay with them at the guesthouse. I enjoyed special lunch and dinners with Sarah, Tania, Colin, Kim, Tim and his wife, Allie. I have to mention that Tim Nikula and Allie were exceptionally hospitable. I also enjoyed social evening (basketball game) with members of staff. Special visit took me to the Science Museum and Prudential Center in Boston. These visits were marvelous and I still have memories of them.

Aside from the hospitality of members of staff and their families, Librarian at Harvard Houghton Library, Betty Falsey, invited me, some staff from Sabre Foundation and friends to dinner at her home. It was really a pleasant evening for us, I was able to meet people and make friends, talk about our respective careers and share experiences. The warmth and friendliness was climaxed with a farewell dinner in a hotel in Cambridge.

## **8.0 OBSERVATIONS**

There has been a steady progress in the partnership since the idea of forming the Sierra Leone Book Trust was born in Accra, Ghana, in January 2002. Since the inception of the partnership, Sabre Foundation through the Sierra Leone Book Trust, has contributed to institutional capacity building and manpower development in Sierra Leone.

Also, Sabre Foundation through the Sierra Leone Book Trust, has started supporting the indigenous publishing industry in the acquisition of local language texts for distribution to schools in Sierra Leone. Hopefully by the end of the year 2003, more areas will be targeted that are in dire need of material and technical assistance and support, especially in the area of education.

## **9.0 ACTION POINTS**

Knowledge and experience gained from the visit would be directed to:

- Advocacy
- Strategies that will sustain the Book Program for Sierra Leone

## **10.0 SUMMARY**

Sabre Foundation has been providing technical and material support to the Sierra Leone Book Trust since January 2002 to help the Sierra Leone Book Trust drive to create a functional literate society in a country devastated by civil conflict for ten years. The visit was a clear manifestation that Sabre Foundation and Sierra Leone Book Trust would work together to lessen the burden created by the just concluded civil conflict especially in the area of availability of relevant and up-to-date books, educational materials and technical support.