Section 1

The Skidmore College Davis Project for Peace in Regent has had many positive developments, some dramatically so. This report is about what was accomplished in the implementation of the Davis Peace Project in the length of 6 weeks.

Our project proposal outlined three main goals: cultivation of rice and vegetables on the farming land, construction of a drying floor and storage facility, and establishment of a revolving fund. In the time that we have had, we have progressed well on all goals, and have even more successes beyond these initially stated objectives. The work on the farm was successful and the plants have been growing well.

When we first went to Sierra Leone, we had a meeting at AID SALONE, which was the NGO that was involved in this project. In the meeting there was also an agricultural extension officer who the ministry of Agriculture and food security assigned to this project. We reviewed the proposed budget and discussed about the implementation of the project. We worked closely with Mr. Young who is the agricultural extension worker to choose the farmers who participated in the project. There were a total of thirty-two farmers chosen and they were put into two groups: group 1 which had 16 members and group 2 which also had 16 members. The groups alternated the days of work on the farmland. We initially had difficulties with receiving the money that was wired to the bank. We had to borrow some money in order to begin the project on time. However, after a week, we received the money and we moved on.

Preparation for swampland cultivation by brushing and removing weeds and scrub was the first step. The land was then prepared for transplantation through the process of puddling, in which the farmers used their rice boots to break the sod left behind by the weed roots and mixing it into mud for rice planting.

The rice was nursed for 21 days in closely planted beds (pictured at left) before being transplanted to the swampy, puddled plots of land. On the nursery, rice seeds were broadcasted onto the seedbeds and saw dust was sprinkled on top of them to keep birds away.

Transplantation of seedlings from the nursery beds to higher spaced swamp plots began on Monday 11 June. All of the puddled plots were planted, and the former nursery beds were also puddled to make room for the last rice seedlings. According to the farmers, transplantation of seedlings promotes a higher yield than directly broadcasting the rice seeds on the swamp lots.

The farmers have constructed all the terraces needed for hillside vegetable cultivation. They planted cucumbers, bean seeds, carrots, cabbage, and onion seedlings. Between the vegetable terraces and rice swamps, about an acre of land was farmed and is still being farmed today.

Drying floor construction was completed in about five working days. Pictured, at left, are the blocks for construction of the floor, below left, workers removing tree stumps to clear the land for the floor and below, the floor partly completed.

Instead of constructing a new facility from scratch, we renovated an existing storage facility at the site. This let us save time, money, and land. Situated in the background of the stump removal picture is the storage facility.

Renovation took several parts: all the old, leaking zinc roofing sheets have been removed and replaced by new sheets, two windows have had iron bars replaced with cement louvers for extra security of tools and harvested food kept in the store, and the old wooden door replaced...
with an iron steel door, again for security. The floor has been re-leveled with new cement, repairing old chips and holes. Also the walls of the storage were whitewashed and painted.

The farmers were very cooperative and we were able to complete the implementation of the project in six weeks. All the farmers that participated in this project would benefit from it after the harvest. About 50% of the harvest will be put in the revolving fund to ensure the sustainability of the project. The organization that owns the farmland called the Boys Society will also benefit from the project. The Boys society is an organization that formerly used the farmland to train street teenagers how to farm and help them have a career in farming. They also have an auto-mechanic training program where they train street teenagers’ skills in order for them to find a job and make a living. However, after the ten years of civil war in Sierra Leone, they were unable to obtain funds to continue training street teenagers/ young adults. By using the farmland once again in Regent to do farming the Boy’s society organization will be able to recruit more street children who have no place to live and equip them with skills of farming so that they could start their own farms and earn a living. Furthermore, the ministry of Agriculture and food security in Sierra Leone has been establishing Agricultural Business Centers in the country. However, the Regent community and other communities close to Regent do not have an Agricultural Business Center. The project we did at Regent is a prototype and a small scale of what the Agricultural Business Center is. We met with the Deputy minister of Agriculture and food security and presented the idea to him about the government expanding our project to an Agricultural Business Center that would serve Regent and the other communities close by. The minister encouraged us to write a proposal for that project.

Section 2

Peace is when people lay aside their fears, prejudice and differences and work together for a common good. Throughout their ten year civil war, the people of Sierra Leone had a first hand experience of what it means not to have peace. From the context of the experience of the people of Sierra Leone, peace is when one wakes up in the morning and they don’t have to worry if they’ll make it through the day. Peace is when one doesn’t have to abandoned the comfort of their homes to sleep in a basement in fear that too high an elevation would cost them their lives. Peace is when one doesn’t have to dodge to the floor on hearing the sound of an airplane or a loud noise because of fear that he or she would be a target. Peace is when a farmer is able wake up every morning and tends his crop having the hope that harvest is right at the corner. With the exception of one of our colleague in the project, we have lived this experience and therefore we are totally in agreement with these definitions. They resonate with us as if it were yesterday. There is no limitation to one’s ability when one is at peace and productivity is at its best.

Our project will contribute to peace in the short term by helping the farmers in the Regent community with finances to help them farm. In the long term it would help street teenagers or young adults acquire skills that will enable them to earn a living. Also, an expansion of the project into an Agricultural Business Center, with the help of the ministry of agriculture of Sierra Leone, will further help farmers in Regent and communities close by with seeds, harvesting machines and storing facilities. Through this peace project we have acquired a new way of viewing our world.

We have been encouraged to appreciate and experience the needs of others that are less fortunate. Moreover, we now clearly understand what it means to say, “Little bits of water makes mighty ocean.” The drops of water we’ve added will flow through the many tributaries of hope and the swords that are now being used to ploughshares will contribute to the mighty flow of change, peace and prosperity in Sierra Leone. Prince Moses and Ajibu Timbo.