

Commentary

By Abayomi Charles Roberts, PV General Editor, Edmonton, Canada.

Green Scenery is an organization which promotes awareness about the environment and helps in its conservation in Sierra Leone. It was founded in Freetown by a group of teachers and this year, 2009, the organization observes its 20th anniversary. Human rights activist and former teacher, Joseph Rahall, came up with the idea of involving school children much more in a nationwide environmental campaign. It was during a casual discussion in the staff room of the Government Model School where Rahall, some other founding members and I worked. That was early in 1989.

Children are more impressionable; through them we can also reach their peers, families, neighbours. reasoned Rahall, a graduate of Njala University College where he specialized in agricultural science. By the end of the school year (1988/89) we had canvassed and brought in other co-workers and teachers from other schools. Notably, there were Messrs Thoronka and Fasuluku from SL Muslim Brotherhood and Govt. Rokel schools, respectively. Teachers from Albert Academy and FSSG also joined us soon after. Green Scenery was officially registered with the government, as a non-profit body, on October 29, that same year 1989.

The original strategy was to help the kids form their own nature clubs and, among other schemes, mobilize them consistently for tree-planting sessions held by the government. The national tree planting exercise was an annual affair timed to take place around World Environment Day on June 5. The site was near Leicester village on Mount Aureol. There were teething problems for sure, but we were determined. With help from diverse quarters and through sheer tenacity and resourcefulness the group tackled the odds as they came. One big obstacle was the war and all the constraints it brought.

Green Scenery invariably triumphed and survived, even growing in the process. We had invaluable assistance and guidance from overseas bodies like The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the UK-based Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The latter sponsored the Kenema-based Gola Rain Forest Conservation Programme. Scot Peter Wood was its director and he often held workshops in Freetown, to which Green Scenery was regularly invited.

Locally, Green Scenery worked with The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL); Ms. Talabi Aisie Lucans CHECSL; and The Sierra Leone Adult Education Association which had Dr. Lettie Stuart at the helm. At this milestone Green Scenery cannot ignore the personal advice and moral support of the likes of Pa Turay who worked at the Forestry department at Tower Hill, as well as senior civil servant Val Collier. As I write the organization is a current member of the umbrella outfit SLANGO, The SL Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, as well as The National Forum for Human Rights.