

## AHKOM UPDATE – 7<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2023

### CHANGING TIMES

Times have changed. The world is less kind: winter approaches!

The scourge of covid was first replaced then compounded, for Ahkom by the strife of the Russia/Ukraine war. Now added to that is the equally distressing reality of the Israel/ Palestine conflict. The global fallout from these traumatic disruptions is changing hearts and minds; gradually swaying them away from the ethics of “just giving”, into the more cautious one of “just thinking” about giving; ending up often with “*not* giving!”

On June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Sierra Leone held its general elections. It was won by the incumbent Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP). The chief loser was the main opposition All-People’s Congress Party (APC), which had previously held the reins of governance for 11 years having been elected under similar controversial circumstances but was now crying foul! But life went on all the same. Albeit in a more strained manner informed by the increasingly dire economic situation in the country.

According to the recently released Bank of Sierra Leone Monetary Policy Statement:

“Inflation has increased significantly from 44.81 percent in June 2023  
to 50.94 percent in August 2023 and it is expected to remain high until  
the end of 2023.”

But many believe that once the European and now the middle eastern wars rage, the existence of high inflation in Sierra Leone shall persist even beyond 2023 and may grow worse. And staff at Ahkom will, naturally, continue their stressful fight for the survival of themselves and their families.

### CURRENTLY

Given the failure, to date, of the so-called *Teachers Service Commission* to place any one of our teachers on the government payroll; and the fact our government assisted status precludes us from collecting school fees that could be used to pay our staff a decent salary and tend to other school requirements, the school Board of Governors along with the school Community-Teachers Association saw it fit to convene separate meetings to discuss the option of reverting to Ahkom’s original status as a private funded school. The option was unanimously voted for in both forums. To this end, letters were drafted in August of this year to heads of the relevant departments of the Ministry of Education requesting our release from “government assisted” status, preferably by the 2024/25 academic year; citing the fact we had received no significant assistance whatsoever going on five years. As we await the ministry’s response, our financial woes mount.

We still have to cater for the stipends (we cannot afford salaries) of around 29 qualified teaching staff plus a librarian, cleaner, two security personnel; plus taking care of school maintenance and

procurement of supplementary learning materials. That, in face of all this adversity, we have been able to persevere and maintain the high academic standard for which Ahkom Junior and Senior schools have, over the years come to be known when other institutions in similar circumstances have closed, remains a mystery to some.

But we often tell those who admire our continued academic success that it was not by chance, but one promoted by three main factors:

i) the presence of a dedicated hardworking staff who, despite all the odds, have stuck doggedly by our side;

ii) a student body determined to succeed;

iii) assistance from sponsors, in the main a small core group from Oxford, UK, who have maintained selfless support for Ahkom, despite having their own pressing needs to address. A show of altruism that we'll never forget. That core group are, in the main, members of the Charity "Love Sierra Leone" (LSL) and members/ former members of St Andrews Church in Oxford.

#### THE RUB

We cannot ignore the fact that the growing economic stress (exacerbated by the tripartite evils of ongoing conflicts in Europe, the middle east and the effects of climate change) are currently impinging on and haranguing humanity. And none more so than the poorest amongst us. Such as our dedicated team of teachers and ancillary staff who in the main are forced, with their families, to live on less than £30 a month. You get a clearer picture when you imagine the current cost of a single return bus fare from Kono to Freetown, is £10.

*In difficult times like this, we feel compelled to appeal to anyone who can find it in their means to contribute towards the salary of a teacher or two, or an ancillary staff. Or to even sponsor the education of a student, many of whose impoverishment takes its toll on our meagre income because at Ahkom, our credo of "helping the poor" makes it difficult for us to turn our backs on the most disadvantaged, particularly students, preferring to share the little that comes our way to ensure they meet even if not all but some of their education needs. Which, even if not always the best financial decision for us, gives us the satisfaction of being able to "help" the neediest.*

**Persons interested in aiding us please contact a member of the team at *Love Sierra Leone (LSL)*, for directions on how to process donations/contributions intended for Ahkom.**

So that even if winter is coming, we can turn it into a *merry Christmas* for the beneficiaries whilst also assuring them that summer will surely follow.

Allow me at this juncture to digress by telling you a familiar story told back home in Kono. The story goes that Kamanda, a political prisoner, was asked by prison guards to point out three persons to benefit from a government amnesty to free a limited number of political prisoners. Kamanda did as he was bid, pointing out three. As they were being led out from their shared cell, he also made for the door but was pushed back and the door locked in his face. The senior warden

then told him through the chow hole: “Mr. Kamanda, you’ve missed your chance: you didn’t count yourself.” Thereafter avoidable missed opportunities have been referred to by Kono people as doing “a Kamanda.”

To avoid doing a Kamanda by forgetting myself, I'd like to take the opportunity in this update to formally inform all good friends that I arrived in the UK on the 27th of September 2023. My one-way ticket was paid for in part by sales from the cassava harvest from our Lei farm. Another portion of the remaining income from the sales went towards the stipend of two of our part-time teachers and labour costs for the next planting season. We were also able to apportion part of the harvest to the parents of some of our most needy students.

I plan to return by the end of November 2023. If any kind soul should deign to make any small contribution towards my humble return ticket, I will not do a Kamanda by ignoring the offer.

I'll leave you now with pictures below of a few of our devoted staff and students who have benefited from your generosity and others we pray may. *We want you to know that your kindness has not been in vain.*

Thanks, and God bless.

David Sandi

(CEO, Ahkom)

1. **Mr. Turay. 13 years at Ahkom (Agriculture/Finance teacher /Bursar, Ahkom Secondary School) & Children, all of whom are educated free of cost at Ahkom. Part of Mr. Turay's stipend is sponsored by the LSL team.**



2. **Pastor Cole & family. 18 years with Ahkom (Principal JSS. Teacher: Math, Further Math, Physics, Biology) Also part sponsored by the LSL team.**



3. **Judith & family. Judith has been 17 years with Ahkom . She started work at the Tec Voc before transferring to the Secondary school which was opened in 2005. She's presently Headmistress of the Preparatory/Primary division the opening of which she spearheaded in 2015.**



**4. Ami, on the left and Esther, on the right below are beneficiaries whose further education was funded by Vicky/ Nic Russell and friends. Both are former Head girls at Ahkom school. Ami is a final year student at Milton Margai University studying Civil Engineering. Esther is completing a course in Public Health at Njala University.**



**5. Hannah, immediate below left is a beneficiary part sponsored by Antonio. She's now in Class six studying for her National Primary Secondary School Examinations (NPSE)**

**6. Francess, immediate below right, just started Form one. She continues in our care as we look for someone to sponsor her.**

**7. Faith, bottom left, is now a final year SRN student. She hopes to embark on a Bsc Nursing degree thereafter. Faith is part sponsored by Diana Snape.**





8. Rebecca, immediate top right, is one of Ahkom's latest wards. She's a bubbly child. Her teenaged mother left her with her grandparents when she was a baby and relocated to Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown. No one knows her location. There is also no record of her father. Both grandparents have since passed.

Rebecca has been receiving assistance from locals, but the dire economic situation has reduced this assistance considerably. We decided to step into the breach until we can find her a reliable sponsor.

Other students being sponsored whose photos are, unfortunately, not available are David in Form 2; the other Franciss also in Form 1; Isiah in form 3.

A photo of Mr Sessie, Principal of the Tec Voc, computer guru and our longest serving staff - 21 years, is also not available now. Mr Sessie is the stuff of nightmare for computer manufacturers, being able to keep a unit alive well past its death date for years on technical life support; thus, precluding the expensive option of having to buy a new one.

All the above named have been variously sponsored by LSL, Eekelaars, Sunshine, Hillary, Christine, Andrea, Komeh, Keebles, other friends from St Andrews and their associates in addition to providing much needed infrastructure, mobility and learning material support. We thank you all.

**And now, the highlight of this piece. I bequeath to you a much sort after and highly collectable visage of the one and only King of Cassava himself, CEO of Ahkom, David Sandi. Unshaven jaws and all, alongside his dedicated agricultural sidekick.**

*Please do not adjust your screens, I assure you they will not crack. Technology says so!*

