



Ex-Combatant Youth Learn Carpentry

Aiah Josiah, manager of carpentry at the Community Youth Training Center in Yengema, had an idea to help the youth in his village through carpentry. "This is really a war-torn area," says Aiah Josiah, "and getting money is very difficult. Instead of war, war, war, I thought, 'why don't we do something that can help ourselves?'"

Josiah had some training in carpentry in junior high school, and although the war interrupted his plans, he says he always dreamed of returning to the profession as an adult. "The USAID Education for Peace training revived the idea back in me," he says. With so many ex-combatant youth both unemployed and lacking skills to carry out economic activities, he decided to teach them what he knew.

Josiah had nothing at all for capital, so he started working by cutting straight mango tree branches to rebuild frames and bars on windows for people in his community – demand was high since most windows on houses had been destroyed during the war. He then found support for his project through the USAID Skills Training and Employment Promotion (STEP) program.

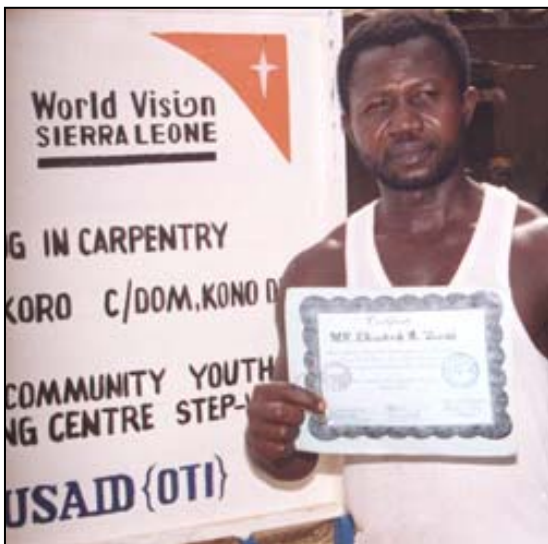


Photo: Laura Lartigue

Aiah Josiah proudly holds the certificate he earned after completing the Education for Peace program – the inspiration for his idea to teach carpentry skills to local ex-combatant youth.

As part of USAID activities to establish peace, security, and stability in Sierra Leone, the STEP program works to mitigate lingering sources of conflict between communities and ex-combatants by promoting cooperation and creating mutual understanding and trust – first through training sessions, and then through collaboration on community rehabilitation projects that also bring about tangible economic benefits for participants.

Sierra Leonean citizens like Aiah Josiah are slowly rebuilding the country, with support from USAID. Josiah was provided with carpentry tools and \$300 to buy his first planks of timber to facilitate the production of furniture for sale to the local community. The community in turn supported Josiah by providing both the land and the training center where the carpenters work.

In 2003 alone, USAID helped 5,088 ex-combatants and war-affected youth participate in communal civic works projects, and 144 community organizations effectively managed and implemented self-selected development projects like the Yengema carpentry project.

Josiah says that now he arrives in the morning and sees the young men already organizing themselves to set up shop for the day, and to do different work tasks. "They've changed," says Josiah. "They have surprised me."

The youth training center is now winning contracts from neighboring towns and building up the business little by little. Josiah himself fled to Freetown when his village was burned during the war, but now he has decided to stay in Yengema. "Our family is much happier now that we're back in a rural area," he says. "Little by little, we are getting by. I've started this business, we have enough to eat, and the children are growing up well."

