



Amadu Suma, Teacher, Learns to Listen

Amadu Suma used to think there was only one way to solve problems – authoritarianism. He made all of the major household decisions by himself. He ordered around his children and didn't listen to what they had to say, and always told his teenage daughter "no" to outings with friends, which caused constant conflict between the two. "Even with my wife," says Suma, "whenever I went out and she asked where I was going, I didn't even respond. I felt she was a woman and didn't need to know where I was going."

In 2003, USAID trained 183 community leaders in nation building skills as part of the larger USAID goal to promote peace, security, and stability in Sierra Leone. "Now after the training," says Suma, "I am able to listen to people. The question I ask myself is, 'Suppose somebody else does the same thing to me – how would I feel?'"

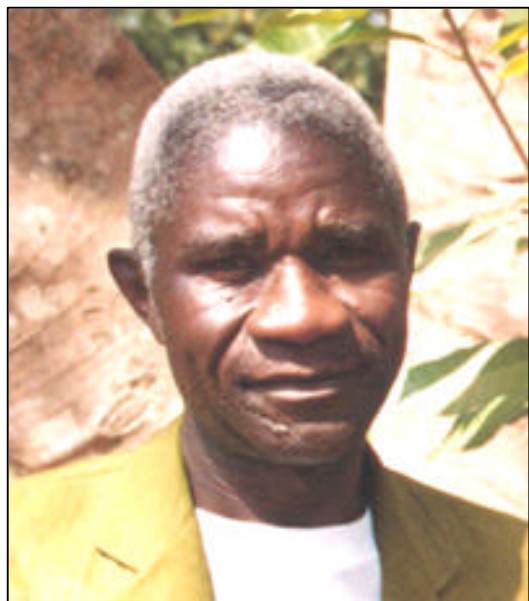


Photo: Laura Lartigue

Nation building training has been delivered to a broad group of leaders in civil society, including men, women, and youth to promote peace, healing, reaffirmation of community values, good leadership, conflict management, and the rebuilding of better-run, more transparent government institutions.

Participants like Suma have found the training invaluable in learning to demonstrate love and cohesion within one's family, and then extending those ideas out into the community to promote honesty, settle disputes, and fight corruption.

Suma and other participants echoed the desire to see the training extended to recently-elected Paramount Chiefs and other leaders to help resolve upper-level disputes, and as a way to help promote regional stability. "If our rulers are trained to settle conflict amicably, they can use these peaceful methods of resolving conflict, even with our neighboring countries."

"We once were involved in corruption, but now we're trying to move away from it and gradually help educate people of the risks involved in being corrupt."

- Amadu Suma

Suma and several other nation building participants have since formed a working group to promote better garbage collection in their community, and to discourage littering. They have also formed a community anti-corruption committee.

"Old habits die hard," he says, "but the nation building participants are now advocates for constructive change."

