

Community Healing, from the Inside Out— Systems Lessons from Fambul Tok in Sierra Leone

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“We are able to think for ourselves on these things.”

MARIAMA JUMU, RESIDENT OF DAABU VILLAGE, SIERRA LEONE

As the afternoon melted into early evening in Daabu, a tiny village in the remote eastern corner of Sierra Leone near the Liberian border, a lone drummer began a soft but insistent drumbeat, calling people to gather. A rebel stronghold during Sierra Leone’s 11-year civil war, Daabu had been both a command post for and site of many wartime atrocities. Seven years later, having had no formal or informal process for dealing with those atrocities, it still bore the physical and psychic scars. Tonight, that pattern of silence and avoidance would begin to change.

It was March 2009, and residents of Daabu and its neighboring villages were gathering for their fambul tok (“family talk” in Krio) reconciliation bonfire as part of a nationwide community-healing process, centered around local ceremonies led by the people themselves. These ceremonies drew upon the communities’ culture and tradition, in a process developed and facilitated by Fambul Tok, the Sierra Leonean nongovernmental organization (NGO) of the same name.

As the villagers gathered, other musicians joined and children began dancing, sensing that something important was happening. The spontaneous drumming and dancing turned more purposeful, both calling people to come and celebrating their coming together. As darkness settled in, village leaders lit the tall pyramid of wood in the middle of the worn circle of dirt around which people were gathering.

Gathering for the bonfire, Daabu

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The bonfire crackled, sparks shooting into the air in natural micro-pyrotechnics, as people gathered from neighboring villages, sitting on rocks, chairs, benches—anything they could find. Rain clouds threatened, but the energy was palpable. It played out in the desire both to participate in the community’s conversation and to sit back and watch what might unfold—committed and distant; eager to contribute, and wary and watchful at the same time.

Chief Maada Alpha Ndolleh, originally from this village and now the town chief of Kailahun Town (the capital city of the district of the same name, where Daabu is located) spoke first, to set the stage. He was the face of Fambul Tok in the district as chairman of the all-volunteer Fambul Tok District Executive. Chief Ndolleh reminded people of the reason they were gathered, that they had an unprecedented opportunity to come forward and tell their stories of what happened to them or what they had done to others in the war. He urged people not to be afraid to come forward, reminding them that they would not be prosecuted or get into any trouble for telling their stories honestly. He spoke passionately and from experience, reminding people that telling their stories would help unburden themselves and that this was necessary to moving forward. Also that they were there as a community, to help unburden one another and move forward together from the horrors of the war. Chief Ndolleh told about similar bonfires happening throughout the district, where people were finding relief in telling their stories (most of them for the first time), in apologizing, and in offering or receiving forgiveness.

Hardly able to wait for the introductions to finish, a young man immediately jumped up and walked with a purposeful stride into the center of the circle near the fire. He turned to face his community with eagerness and resolve to share his story. His name was Michael Momoh, and he told how he had been conscripted to fight for the rebels during the war. He described roaming the area with his rebel band looking for food and coming one day into this village—his village. Many people had fled, and one family had managed to bury their food and all escape—all of them, that is, except the seven-year-old daughter. The young girl was captured and ordered to tell the rebels where the family’s food was hidden. Whether from fear or shock or strength of will, the girl refused to tell the rebels anything. So they tied her to a chair. In shock himself, Michael described how he had been ordered by his senior officers to beat the little girl. Which he did. He beat her so badly, she later died.

“I need peace, and I want my conscience to be clear,” he said, with intention and intensity. “I am confessing so that they forgive me. It was not my wish, I was under duress. I did not do it out of my own wish.”

“Is the mother of the child here?” the community elder now facilitating the ceremony asked the crowd, with hardly a minute to process what Michael had just confessed. Mariama Jumu came forward, acknowledging that it was in fact her daughter whom Michael had killed that day. Michael approached her and leaned way over in a deep bow, the Sierra Leonean cultural symbol of repentance and submission. With the whole community watching, he begged Mariama to forgive him for what he had done. She touched his bowed head, a symbol of her acceptance of his apology, and said “Yes,” she forgave him. They embraced and danced together as the town watched and clapped,

Michael and Mariama, after their reconciliation

© Sara Terry for Catalyst for Peace



then joined in the dancing and singing.

A stunning moment at many levels. That the perpetrator had jumped forward to initiate the truth-telling and apology. That Mariama was so quick to accept his apology and express her forgiveness. That right away they could embrace and dance together, symbolizing in a bodily way their commitment to a new future—side by side, working together.

And that this testimony was not the only one to take place that night.

In fact, there was a constant stream of testifiers coming forward, sharing the stories of what had happened to them or what they had done to others in the war that had divided their country, just as it had divided their town, pitting neighbor against neighbor in the unfortunate cruelty that is a special tragedy of civil war. Wariness and watchfulness were trumped time and time again by the eagerness to move forward, by the desire to reconcile, by spilling out their stories to their community. By the desire to acknowledge, apologize and forgive ... together.

The Larger Context for Healing and Reconciliation

Daabu is a small village in Kailahun District in the eastern part of the country, the district where the war began and where Fambul Tok itself had its beginning almost exactly a year before this ceremony. I was in Daabu for their 2009 ceremony with our three-person film crew. It was the fourth of five trips the crew made to produce *Fambul Tok*, the feature film we released in 2011 (www.fambultok.com).

In follow-up interviews the day after Daabu's bonfire ceremony, Mariama spoke of how bad she felt about what had happened during the war, but she nonetheless reiterated her forgiveness. Since Michael had confessed, she forgave him. Deepening the story's poignancy, we discovered that Michael and Mariama lived literally next door to each

other in this tiny village. And they had never spoken of what had happened, not to each other nor to anyone else. Prior to the ceremony, Mariama had avoided Michael and any interactions with him. If he was part of an activity, she wouldn't join. If there was a meeting he was attending, she wouldn't go. As neighbors in the intimate circle of thatched-roof mud houses that make up the village of Daabu, they lived in isolation, both from each other and from the community itself.

But at the Fambul Tok bonfire ceremony, Michael had been quick to tell his story and beg for forgiveness. And Mariama had been quick to accept his apology and offer her forgiveness. As she explained in the interview we filmed with her¹, she felt that forgiveness was important "for unity and progress. For us to live together. For our community to forge ahead in terms of development." She continued, "If we are not together, for us to work, it would be very difficult" (M. Jumu, personal communication, March 2009).

While surprising for its certainty and generosity of spirit, Mariama's answer is also consistent with what so many others were saying throughout the seven years of Fambul Tok bonfires after they, too, had offered forgiveness to someone who harmed them. The speed of the forgiveness offered has been beyond most Westerners' comprehension, and hearing about it, a common response is suspecting people were being forced to act this way.

"For unity and progress. For us to live together. For our community to forge ahead..."

MARIAMA JUMU, RESIDENT OF DAABU VILLAGE, SIERRA LEONE

"Did someone tell you to think this way?" film director Sara Terry asked Mariama. "Or do you actually feel this inside your heart?"

Nodding calmly, even while looking slightly annoyed during the translation, Mariama quietly straightened and settled back on her bench, "Well, we are able to think for ourselves on these things," she said matter-of-factly. "Once we've come together, we are going to continue," she added with resolve. (M. Jumu, personal communication, March 2009).

"Able to think for ourselves" indeed.

A powerful and deceptively simple phrase. But it's astonishing how rarely the people of Sierra Leone have felt those coming to help them—whether to build peace, help them develop economically, or address any other communal problems—demonstrate a real belief in that. In every single community I've worked in across Sierra Leone, people describe experiencing most international aid as embodying an 'outside-in' approach. There is a one-direction flow, with resources, expertise and capacity coming in from the outside to help those seen as having need, lack of expertise, and little to no capacity.

¹ All quotes are drawn from events and interviews in March 2009; © Catalyst for Peace.

We call this an inside out approach to peacebuilding and development.

Conversely, it's astonishing how much transformational energy I have seen released in communities when their members do feel that their agency and capacity are respected and valued. When space is created for their local expertise, wisdom and resources not only to come forward but, in fact, to lead the peacebuilding or development process—and when those coming from the outside come as learners in the process—people in communities across the country have stepped in with incredible energy and commitment. We call this an inside-out approach to peacebuilding and development. It requires distinctive ways of working on the part of supporters, implementers and beneficiaries alike to actually build and run a program that the beneficiaries experience as both grounded in their wisdom and explicitly designed to build from that in its implementation. And not just through a single program or isolated event, but embodied in a sustained way, over time, in growing connection with others—in other words, with systemic support and impact.

The Daabu event, early in the multi-year program, was one of more than 250 similar ceremonies that took place in towns and villages across Sierra Leone as part of Fambul Tok's community-based reconciliation process from 2008 to 2015. Ceremonies drew on the country's cultural tradition of acknowledgment, apology and forgiveness to help people and communities heal from the wounds of the war. Fambul Tok has broken new ground operating a fully locally owned and led reconciliation process on a national scale. Catalyst for Peace, the foundation I established and lead, has been the primary funding and program partner for Fambul Tok throughout this reconciliation phase of its work, as well as a co-developer of the Inside-Out model of change. We have also documented this reconciliation work in various media, most notably through the award-winning film and companion book, both titled *Fambul Tok*.

When we first began Fambul Tok, Sierra Leone had had a Special Court, a hybrid national-international body that indicted the 13 men deemed most responsible for the brutal atrocities of the civil war. Some \$500 million later, according to United Nations estimates², the Special Court had convicted nine people (three of the 13 had died and another one had fled and was presumed dead). Sierra Leone also held a Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 2002 to 2004, but few perpetrators testified, and the hearings were conducted such that few of those most impacted could attend or participate. As a result, the rural populations most impacted by the war had little or no recourse to achieve justice or to reconcile and begin the process of healing themselves and their communities.

Under the leadership of renowned Sierra Leonean human rights advocate John Caulker, Fambul Tok stepped into the breach, creating and facilitating this process of community healing centered on village-level reconciliation ceremonies around a bonfire. It was also

² From the author's conversation with Michael von der Schulenburg, former Executive Representative for the Secretary General (ERSG) for the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), Freetown, Sierra Leone; January, 2011.

coupled with a community-mobilization approach that ensured long-term follow-up activities and enabled communities to transition from reconciliation to economic development.

At Catalyst for Peace, our goal was to learn in practice what it takes to support a process that is fully locally owned and led, but which operates on a larger, national scale and with the capacity for systemic impact. What are the national processes, structures, capacities needed to work this way? What is needed from the international level to invite, support and sustain it? Having seen a lot of good work at the local level that was isolated or episodic, in large part because funding and support structures made it impossible to think or act long term or large scale, we wanted to open up the space in Sierra Leone for those most impacted by the war to be able to lead in reconciling and rebuilding after the war. And we wanted to glean the lessons from it to open up more space for this way of working in general.

Growing local ownership and leadership requires a different way of working not just for those within local communities, but also for those who are working to help and support that work from the outside. Illuminating that dimension is my focus in the remainder of this chapter.

Broken Community as a 'Cracked Cup'

Thinking of a community as a cup illuminates a core part of the distinctness of Fambul Tok's approach to reconciliation. External aid for whatever purpose from NGOs, donor programs and government initiatives is like a bottle of water that gets poured in to the cup to help the community. The water doesn't remain, however—it drains right out because the cup is cracked. The cup itself is rarely seen, however, nor is the needed work of repairing the cup recognized or supported. The result is a cycle that is depleting and ineffective for all.

Fambul Tok's work is not pouring water in; they do not give money or other material aid to communities. Instead, their work is repairing the cup. The community reconciliation process served to reweave the torn fabric of the community and to help it heal.

If a cup has been repaired and a community healed, it can retain external resources. Further, healed communities are increasingly able to tap into the reserves of groundwater within, like a well, to access their own 'water'. In other words, with the right resources and capacities, communities can empower themselves, find solutions within to seemingly intractable problems, and unleash reserves of energy to do so. Then the community can build its own reserves of resilience and tap into them to become healthier through recovery, reconciliation, development, and inclusive governance.

Fambul Tok's community healing and reconciliation approach supports communities in mending their cracks—addressing the things that have kept them divided and without a sense of agency—which in turn frees them to be able to undertake needed development.



Kailahun District begins the planning for its *fambul tok* reconciliation process, 2008.

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NESTED CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND IMPACT

The community healing approach as Fambul Tok and Catalyst for Peace have developed it works as a system of nested circles of support and care, with each circle embodying its own wholeness and yet also directly feeding, and in turn being fed by, the circles within and surrounding it. These ‘circles’ combine to create the space that invites, supports and sustains reconciliation at the level each one encircles. This works through a combination of proactively issuing an invitation, affirming capacity, accompanying or ‘walking with’ people, inculcating values, and establishing processes and structures that embody the values in an ongoing way and that continue to be embedded in that space.

A lot of words there! Let’s unpack them.

Michael and Mariama’s story is powerful and complete on its own terms as an example of reconciliation after unspeakable hurt. They interact regularly now, and in fact Michael calls Mariama “Ma,” and she refers to him as a son. He carries water for her, helps with her farming, and does any other household chores where she needs help, effectively working to make up for the absence of the child who would have grown into a support for her mother and the family. They also work side by side on community initiatives.

As extraordinary as Michael and Mariama’s story is, however, it—like the thousands of others like it—took place within a larger context, one that supported and enabled this all to happen. There are, in fact, several layers of context surrounding this one story, and unpacking them will illuminate some important patterns.

Culture and Community

Fambul Tok emerged from local, cultural concepts and context that are often very different from the norm in the international system. Although Sierra Leone had a Special Court and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission after their civil war ended, most Sier-

ra Leoneans said neither brought justice. When asked what justice would look like, to them it wasn’t about separating and

punishing offenders, but rather mending the broken bonds of community, making the communities—and therefore the people in them—whole again. This illuminates how a critical, perhaps the critical, layer of context for Fambul Tok is Sierra Leone’s culture itself, especially the values, concepts and practices around justice, peace and relationships, all of which are embodied by the Sierra Leonean understanding of community.

Michael didn’t approach Mariama in the privacy of her home. He jumped up to tell his story in front of his whole community. In fact, several neighboring villages were there as well. Sierra Leone’s *culture of forgiveness* places a huge value on the presence of the assembled community as the crucial context for forgiveness. Acknowledgment of and apology for the wrong done needs to happen *in front of the community* for it to be considered the culturally appropriate response to forgive. Why? The ‘naming and shaming’ that occurs in this context is felt as fitting punishment and as even more severe than being sent to jail in most instances. Given the deep cultural value placed on your individual identity being inextricably connected to your community, and especially your contributing role in that community, this makes more sense. As Fambul Tok national staff member Tamba Kamanda noted, “Without your community, you are nothing.”

The community in Sierra Leone, as in much of Africa and other, especially indigenous, cultures as well, is understood to be a carrier of responsibility – the responsibility to care for all the individuals who are a part of it. Mariama had been carrying the burden of her daughter’s death by herself. Alone. That made it almost unbearable. But after telling and having her story told in front of the community, she feels the whole community now helping her to carry that burden. While not bringing her daughter back, it does lighten the load significantly. And in so doing, it also restores her dignity, as well as Michael’s.

Bringing her story to the community in this way meant that Mariama could count on a network of connections and concrete relationships that would support her in any future challenges she might face or sadness she might wrestle with around the loss of her daughter. From the perspective of someone seated at that bonfire, this relational mutuality would be felt as a concrete, tangible resource, not merely a theoretical possibility. So this resource was drawn upon *in advance* to support her in forgiving. In addition, she could now reliably trust that the community members would be co-guarantors that Michael would not hurt her or her family again. With the story told in their presence, they were now in essence obligated to play that role.

With such a strong community sensibility and culture of forgiveness, why didn’t a bonfire like this happen earlier? It’s perhaps easier to answer this question by asking what it took to enable them to take place at this particular time.

“Without your community, you are nothing.” TAMBA KAMANDA, FAMBUL TOK

What does it take to release a community's capacity to heal itself after war?

At each individual Fambul Tok bonfire there was a strong and vibrant community 'container' for the reconciliation ceremony. This was critically established in part by the ground rules for the event itself, which included an invitation for anyone who wanted to come forward, but with no pressure on anyone to do so. Coming forward to testify was completely voluntary, and it was made clear that there would be no punishment or prosecution for anyone who did so. Testifying would happen in front of the whole assembled community. The bonfire and the accompanying 'cleansing ceremony,' typically

held the following day, were both fully planned and facilitated by community members themselves, which was a core part of their work in

"No one's ever asked us what we want to do before." COMMUNITY LEADER, MANOWA

the lead-up to the bonfire. There was an understanding that the ceremony would not be the end of the process, but that it was, in fact, the beginning. So another core part of the preparation included establishing mixed stakeholder groups that could plan and lead ongoing follow-up activities.

As a rule, it took several months of this type of groundwork, all facilitated by Fambul Tok, to establish the trustworthiness of the community container for the events. In other words, *preparing* the communities to lead was the core work of the Fambul Tok staff. They were, in essence, creating the (social) scaffolding for the community to heal itself.

In Daabu, for example, preparing for their ceremony took three to four months, with repeated visits by District Fambul Tok (FT) staff over the course of that time. In those visits, staff gathered sectional stakeholders (a section is a collection of usually four to ten villages, and the ceremonies happened at the sectional level), explained the core FT process and values, and confirmed that the section did indeed want to participate. FT staff would have then facilitated the communities' identification of some of their most respected members from a range of stakeholder groups to represent them in the ongoing planning for the event and its follow-up. These defacto 'elders' (of a variety of ages and roles) would also receive training in mediation, trauma healing, and the FT values, to prepare them to serve as an ongoing Reconciliation Committee to support community members after the ceremony.

In addition to being necessary for ensuring full local ownership of the process, the repeated meetings were critical in establishing the trustworthiness of the process for outsider-wary communities. "No one's ever asked us what we want to do before," said a leader from Manowa, another section in Kailahun, citing centuries of varying 'outsiders' (first the Christians, then the Muslims, then the colonialists, then the NGOs and others offering handouts during and after the war...) who came ignoring or condemning local knowledge and asserting that it was the outsiders' beliefs and expertise that should be governing, the outsiders who had the answers and the solutions.

District Structures Invite, Support and Sustain the Local

Fambul Tok's reconciliation process was primarily organized in Sierra Leone at the district level. The process was overseen in each district by a small paid staff of three or four people drawn from that district, who together made up the core of the national Fambul Tok staff. But the real work was done by an all-volunteer District Executive drawn from across the district, with a Chairman and Chairlady at the helm to lead and coordinate. Together, the staff and District Executive (DE) would identify the communities where they would work next (subject to the communities' willingness to engage with Fambul Tok, of course), and then engage those communities in identifying the local-level individuals who would comprise the Reconciliation Committees (RCs) and Outreach Committees (OCs). These committee members would receive special training in reconciliation and in the Fambul Tok values and process; and the RCs and OCs would then lead the planning and implementation of the Fambul Tok bonfire and follow-up cleansing ceremony (another cultural tradition that had been lost in the war) in their community.

Unlike most typical NGO-implemented programming in Sierra Leone, Fambul Tok never planned programming from outside the target communities, only to bring it to them for implementation. The core process value is to "go to" and "walk with" communities in the planning and implementing of their *own* programming. This is at the heart of what it means that the process is 'community owned and led,' and it exemplifies the critical role for 'outsiders' (those from outside the immediate area of implementation) in supporting and maintaining the space for that community ownership to actually happen. "Going to" and "walking with" are enabling roles, or what we call *accompaniment*.

Once established by the communities, the Reconciliation Committees would remain in place after the ceremony, to help plan and implement a series of follow-up activities that would support and sustain the reconciliation process and the networks of connection that had been (re)established during the bonfire process. Community farms, for example, could be a space for victims and perpetrators to work side by side. Soccer matches and accompanying 'discos' could provide a space to play side by side. 'Peace



Fambul Tok Peace Mothers harvesting rice from their community farm, Kailahun District.

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trees' would provide a space for community members to continue to gather and collectively address new conflicts that might arise as the reconciliation process continued to unfold. The branches of ever-present mango trees not only provided much needed shade from the sweltering sun, but they defined a symbolic, ongoing living space for the collective, a space where roots, branches, earth, and the people gathered there form a symbiotic whole.

Sections also established Peace Mothers groups, as a space for women to come together as women. There, in the informal conversation time that infused their activities, women could find solace and support—a balm for the unique war wounds they carried. These Peace Mother groups naturally embraced an outward orientation, taking on projects to better their community as a whole. They became engines of community development across their sections, simultaneously feeding and being fed by the places they embraced in their projects.

All of these elements—the Reconciliation Committees, community farms, soccer matches, peace trees, Peace Mothers, and more—are like micro-communities that support and sustain war-impacted individuals. These structures continue after the ceremony, becoming the closest-in entity encircling the individuals who have testified, as well as the others affected by the war in that community.

Together, these living structures represent a strong, revitalized, *whole* community—whether fully realized yet or still in process—that is itself a circle of support for the individuals within it. This 'whole community' is the container that hosts and holds the storytelling, forgiveness and ongoing work of moving forward together.

Again we might ask, why did these communities not engage this potential on their own, before the Fambul Tok process came to engage them? In Daabu, prior to the Fambul Tok bonfire, the divisions from the war seemed hardened to the point of being nearly absolute. A former rebel stronghold during the war, half the village had fled, and the half that remained had been coopted by the rebels or was viewed as such by the returning population after the war. Michael and Mariama's isolation from each other was a microcosm for all of Daabu—people lived side by side, but the invisible divisions that were the legacy of the war were stronger than iron bars for keeping people apart. In addition, the individual weight of guilt, shame, pain and sadness, borne largely alone, had become like individual prisons, holding people isolated and apart from one another.

Given this kind of legacy, individual or community reconciliation wouldn't happen without an *invitation*—an invitation to collective action; an invitation that established a process and a set of lived values that could create the space for the invitation to be meaningfully realized. Ultimately, it was an invitation into a *space*. To be trusted, and to be effective, this space had to be local, and locally owned. Part of what made this both possible and trustworthy in our work was that the 'invitation' was giving voice to local desires and the people and communities had the full freedom *not* to accept it and act on it.

Importance of a National Container

While the district teams represent the locus of planning and implementation, they are not on their own. They are, in turn, a part of, and supported by, the *national* Fambul Tok staff. This national-level staff is the primary holder and tender of the Fambul Tok vision and values. In addition, as local staff are hired to lead work in a new district, they are brought onto the national team. Monthly national staff meetings have been key spaces where district teams share their learning, achievements and challenges, ensuring mutual learning, cross-pollination and rapid spreading of new ideas across all the districts. They have also been bulwarks against staff feeling isolated or burnt out.

Given the reality that Fambul Tok's way of working is so counter-cultural to how most NGOs in the country work, staff meetings have also been critical spaces for reconnecting with and re-grounding in the core process values undergirding the work. The meetings have nurtured a staff mentorship network within and across districts, which not only develops new staff capacity for program implementation, but also develops leadership capacity among the experienced staff in a self-nourishing loop.

The regular staff retreats created a strong internal learning mechanism for the organization, enabling program adaptation to meet new and emerging needs—what we call *emergent design*, a critical support for local ownership.

Besides fostering cross-district learning and sharing, ongoing staff development in practice, and ongoing, adaptive program design, the *national container* has imbued local work with an ongoing, expansive consciousness of its larger scope and significance, which supports local trust in it. The town chief in Ndaabu, for example, was hesitant at first to move forward with the process, given a habitual mistrust of new programming. But hearing about the results in other places, coupled with the longer-term presence of the organizing staff, helped him move forward.

And then there is the *organizational* capacity needed to coordinate and operate the entire process, which has been a critical focus throughout Fambul Tok's existence. Less glamorous and often less visible than the work in the field, nothing could go forward without functioning vehicles, kept in good shape and driven by skilled drivers; or phones and airtime for regular communication among staff and communities; or accurate budgets and reporting processes. And communications capacity is necessary for reaching national and international audiences.

Together, these living structures represent a strong, revitalized, whole community... a circle of support for individuals within it.

All Nested Within the Global Container

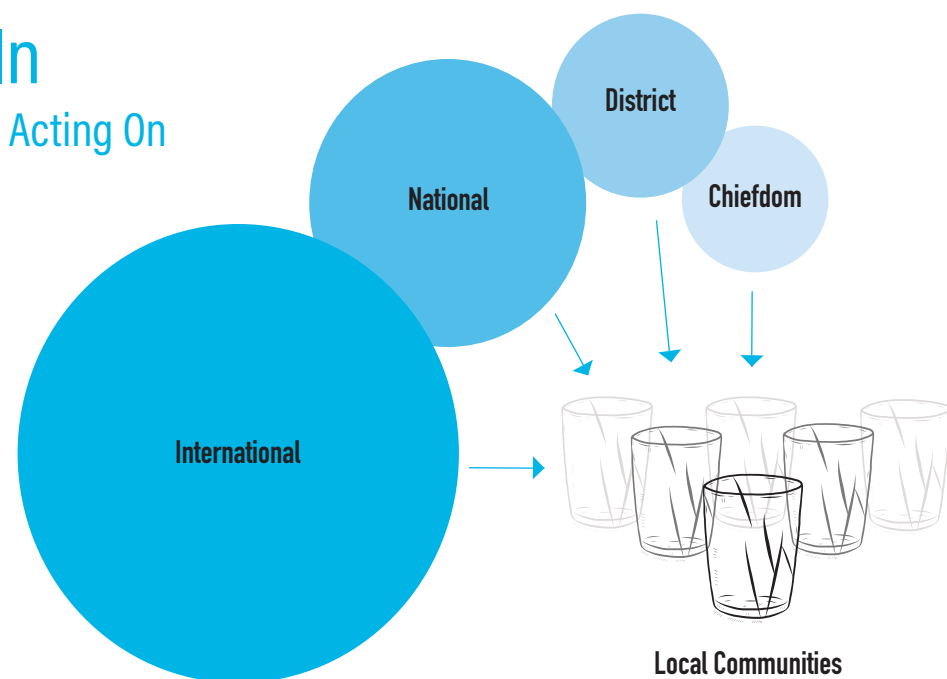
And, of course, there is the global dimension. Based in the United States, Catalyst for Peace has been the primary funder of Fambul Tok, as well as program co-developer and partner from the beginning. This has allowed for a maximum of creative freedom and responsive capacity as the work has evolved. By 'accompanying' Fambul Tok's development, including creating regular learning space to step back and reflect, reassess, and redesign—we supported emergent design from the program's inception.

Catalyst for Peace committed significant resources to documenting and sharing the stories of Fambul Tok's work with the world. Besides opening a channel for the global conversation, the various media have, in turn, become resources in furthering the program implementation on the ground. Having the film crew accompany the Fambul Tok staff in the early days of the program meant that as they entered communities, the staff could let villagers know that the world wanted to learn from their culture and their wisdom. That opened imaginative space for communities to see their knowledge and stories had global significance, which served as a source of pride and invitation. Participants could feel their experience being seen and valued, not just by the staff, but by those outside the community and even the country.

This global-level accompaniment made space for ongoing national-level learning and emergent design, both for the leadership and for the organization. We acted like a positive mirror, reflecting back the strengths we saw to the program leaders and helping to magnify, strengthen and build on those strengths. Together with the storytelling, this provided channels for stories and ideas to flow out to the national and international levels. Essentially holding a space of active faith and trust around the program and organization, we helped it to grow step by step, in organic and sustainable ways.

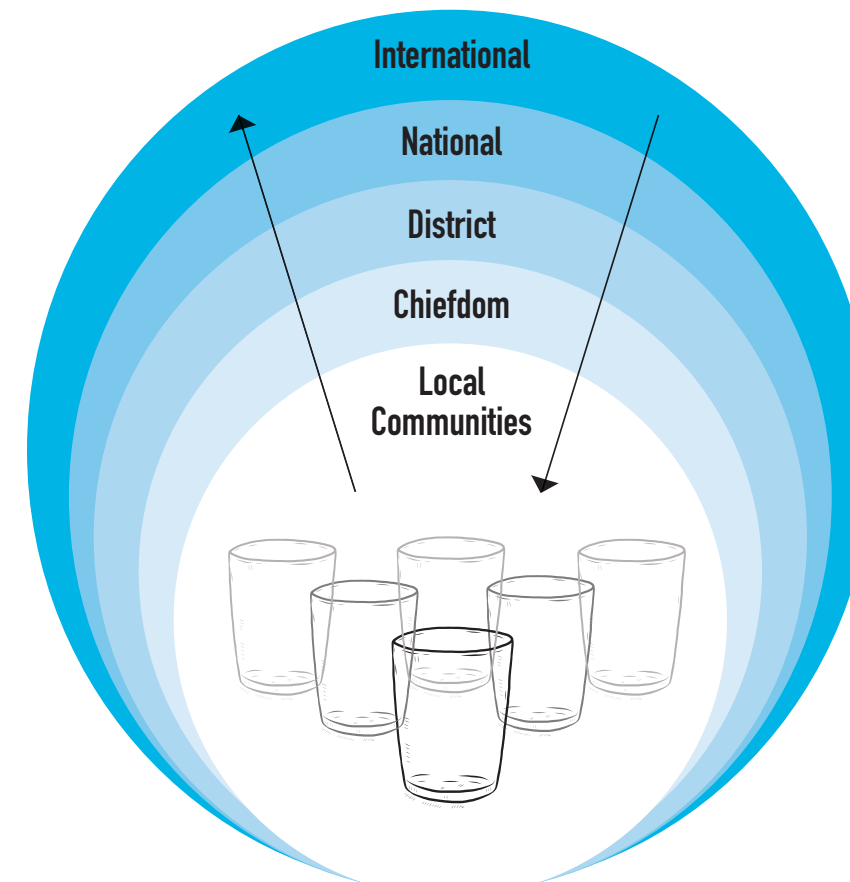
In traditional, outside-in aid practices target communities experience an assumption of separation between them and those providing help and support, reinforcing notions that they are the ones without resources and with the needs, in contrast to the aid providers.

Outside In Disconnected, Acting On



In contrast, in the Inside-Out model of social change, there isn't this kind of separation. Target communities are seen as at the center of the nested circles of support, with all actors working together in a larger, whole system. Different levels have different roles and resources, but all are seen as having both resources and needs. This enables resources and ideas to flow from the outside in and from the inside out. Creating this flow requires each level to create the space to repair the 'cup' at the nest level within—to recognize and invite the knowledge and capacity that is there to lead, to build on the resources that are there, and to share the learning with the next level, just outside.

Inside Out Distinct locations, roles, resources and needs all working together as part of a larger whole



Beside channels linking the levels, this approach requires an ongoing learning platform at each level—like the Reconciliation Committees at the local level; the District Executives at the district level; the national Fambul Tok staff at the national level, and the global learning spaces Catalyst created at the international level. The assumption is that 'transformation' isn't something happening simply at the 'local' level, but rather that there is transformation at every level, especially in terms of how to more effectively, in practice, support the 'inside' levels.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

When Ebola struck Sierra Leone in 2014, many of the same patterns from the post-war period emerged—a short-term, massive influx of aid from the outside, hardly reaching local communities or creating space for them to lead. What aid did reach local communities was often met with such distrust as to be counterproductive, in contrast to the success of the trusted local networks Fambul Tok had established, which became effective prevention channels.

As the crisis abated, Fambul Tok and Catalyst for Peace stepped up efforts to shift the national response and adapted their community-building methodology to post-Ebola recovery and development. The local level work was renamed the People's Planning Process (PPP), which we built on by then creating district-level inclusive governance structures (Inclusive District Committees, or IDCs) as a space for all of the district development stakeholders to collaborate. These structures, in turn, were a bulwark against violence during the hotly contested national election of 2018.

Sierra Leone's Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development realized that together the PPP and IDC process represented exactly what they wanted to see across the country. The Ministry stepped in to develop a national policy framework to do just that. The Ministry, Fambul Tok and Catalyst for Peace formed a partnership that drafted and then launched the first phase of the Wan Fambul National Framework for Local Government and Rural Development in the fall of 2017. In 2018, the partnership expanded to include the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development with the leadership of the Office of the Vice President. At the time of this writing, we are working together to carry the Framework forward to a multi-year implementation process, building toward a national People's Plan and national inclusive-governance process structures.

With government leadership now of the Wan Fambul Framework, together with Fambul Tok hosting its National Secretariat, the program is at the point where the inside-out and the outside-in meet and work together, as part of a larger, healthy whole. This holds the potential for a comprehensive, national infrastructure supporting a fully locally owned and led development and planning process.

Some core policy recommendations have emerged from this process, pointing to:

A primary focus on the work of 'repairing the cup' by rebuilding social infrastructure, starting with the community and moving out to each level from there.

The importance of long-term funding (ideally at least a decade) since 'repairing the cup' is a longer-term process.

The value and effectiveness of emergent design. Local ownership requires elicitive process in program design, to allow for real-time, organic program evolution and adaptation.

An ongoing action/reflection cycle, whereby each new stage is piloted then expanded, piloted then expanded, and so on.

The need for regular collective reflection and learning to enable adaptive programming and emergent design. Space is needed at every level of a process for stakeholders to gather and reflect on how things are going and to plan together how to address new and emerging issues. Committing to the time this takes is foundational.

Critical funding is essential to support people, time together and travel. Community-building requires staff and volunteers to go to and walk with local communities. The bulk of budgets will likely go toward unglamorous items like vehicles, fuel and repairs, and people's time—instead of visible structures in communities such as buildings or wells.

All of this is grounded in a fundamental assumption that "the answers are there". That communities have the answers and the creative and cultural resources they need to address the problems they face.

The role of 'outsiders' is fundamentally about creating and holding the space for local leadership. This is above all a process role. Those supporting a process must be committed to their own learning and transformation, as much as they are to others'.

CONCLUSION

The work of repairing the communal cup is long-term, process-oriented work. It involves developing the social infrastructure that can sustain decision-making agency at the community level, while creating linkages to collective decision-making bodies at each intermediate level, all the way to the national level. Any activity, when it is done with this flow in mind, creates new opportunities for growth, synergy, and sustainability. It invites and supports true transformation—at the individual, communal, and even system level. ●



