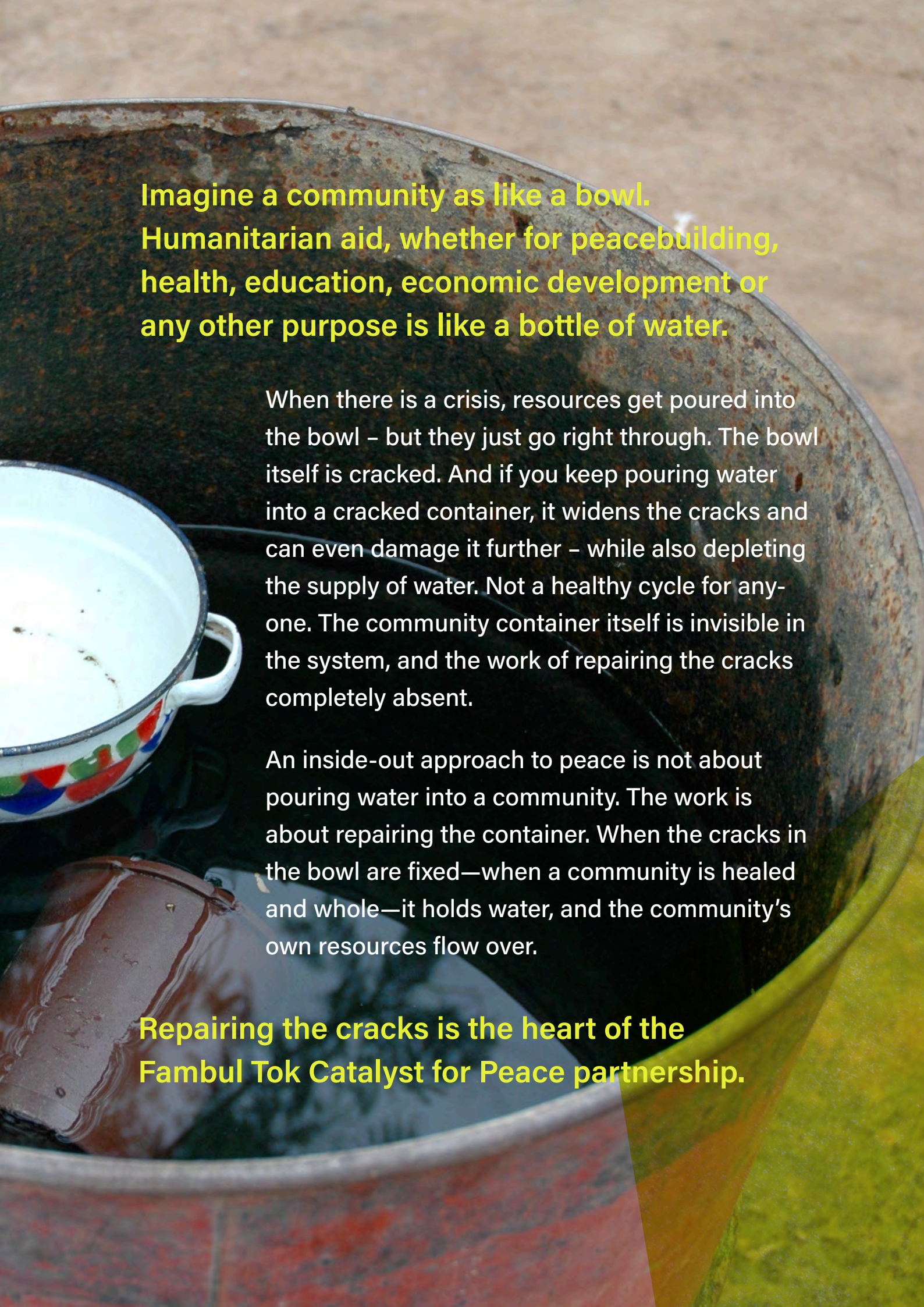




Building Peace from the Inside Out

A Transformational Approach to Partnership

BY LIBBY HOFFMAN 5-29-19




**Imagine a community as like a bowl.
Humanitarian aid, whether for peacebuilding,
health, education, economic development or
any other purpose is like a bottle of water.**

When there is a crisis, resources get poured into the bowl – but they just go right through. The bowl itself is cracked. And if you keep pouring water into a cracked container, it widens the cracks and can even damage it further – while also depleting the supply of water. Not a healthy cycle for anyone. The community container itself is invisible in the system, and the work of repairing the cracks completely absent.

An inside-out approach to peace is not about pouring water into a community. The work is about repairing the container. When the cracks in the bowl are fixed—when a community is healed and whole—it holds water, and the community's own resources flow over.

**Repairing the cracks is the heart of the
Fambul Tok Catalyst for Peace partnership.**

A photograph of two young boys in a field of tall grass, with a hazy mountain range in the background. The boy on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and the boy on the right is wearing a striped t-shirt. They are both looking down at something in the grass. The background shows a vast, hazy landscape with rolling hills and mountains under a bright sky.

It began with a pioneering, community-owned and -led post-war reconciliation program, drawing on Sierra Leonean culture as a resource in restoring the wholeness of people and communities. It has yielded a national policy framework for community-led planning and inclusive governance, championed by the Government of Sierra Leone. And in the 12 years since it began, the partnership between US-based operating foundation Catalyst for Peace and Sierra Leonean peacebuilding and development organization Fambul Tok has lived out a practice and a system of building peace *from the inside out*—opening space for ordinary people to lead the work that transforms their lives and communities.

Rooted in the core assumption that *the answers are there*—that the people and communities impacted by war and crisis have the resources within to address their challenges—the partnership between Catalyst for Peace and Fambul Tok has forged an internationally-supported, nationally scaled system designed around fulfilling the potential of ordinary people in community. Looking for that potential, inviting into expression, mirroring it back, and facilitating people's journey of putting their creativity, their energy and their ingenuity toward the goals they've set for themselves—this is how cracks get repaired.

ORIGINS



History

Sierra Leone's 11-year civil war left over 50,000 people dead and one third of the population (two million people) displaced; it razed whole communities and destroyed infrastructure across the nation. More than 10,000 people, according to best estimates, were victims of amputation, one of the most notorious tools of terror during the war, and another 10,000 children were forced to take up weapons as child soldiers. Women were especially targeted, with an estimated 250,000 women victims of gender-related violence.

When the war ended in 2002, international efforts to bring justice and reconciliation focused on the hybrid national/international

Special Court and a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The Special Court indicted the 13 people it deemed most responsible for the war, resulting in 9 convictions (3 died in custody and 1 remained missing and presumed dead), and costing over \$500 million, according to UN estimates. Sierra Leone's TRC concluded in 2004, but the limited nature of the proceedings (hearings were held in Freetown and in the capital cities of the districts, with only a few days in each location) meant most people impacted by the war weren't able to participate in it or to engage in meaningful reconciliation.

Fambul Tok grew out of that gap.

When Libby and John met in 2007, they saw that their visions and sensibilities were aligned and began working together to create the program that became Fambul Tok.

Libby Hoffman,
Catalyst for Peace,
with John Caulker,
Fambul Tok





Initial Fambul Tok consultation in Manowa Town, Kailahun

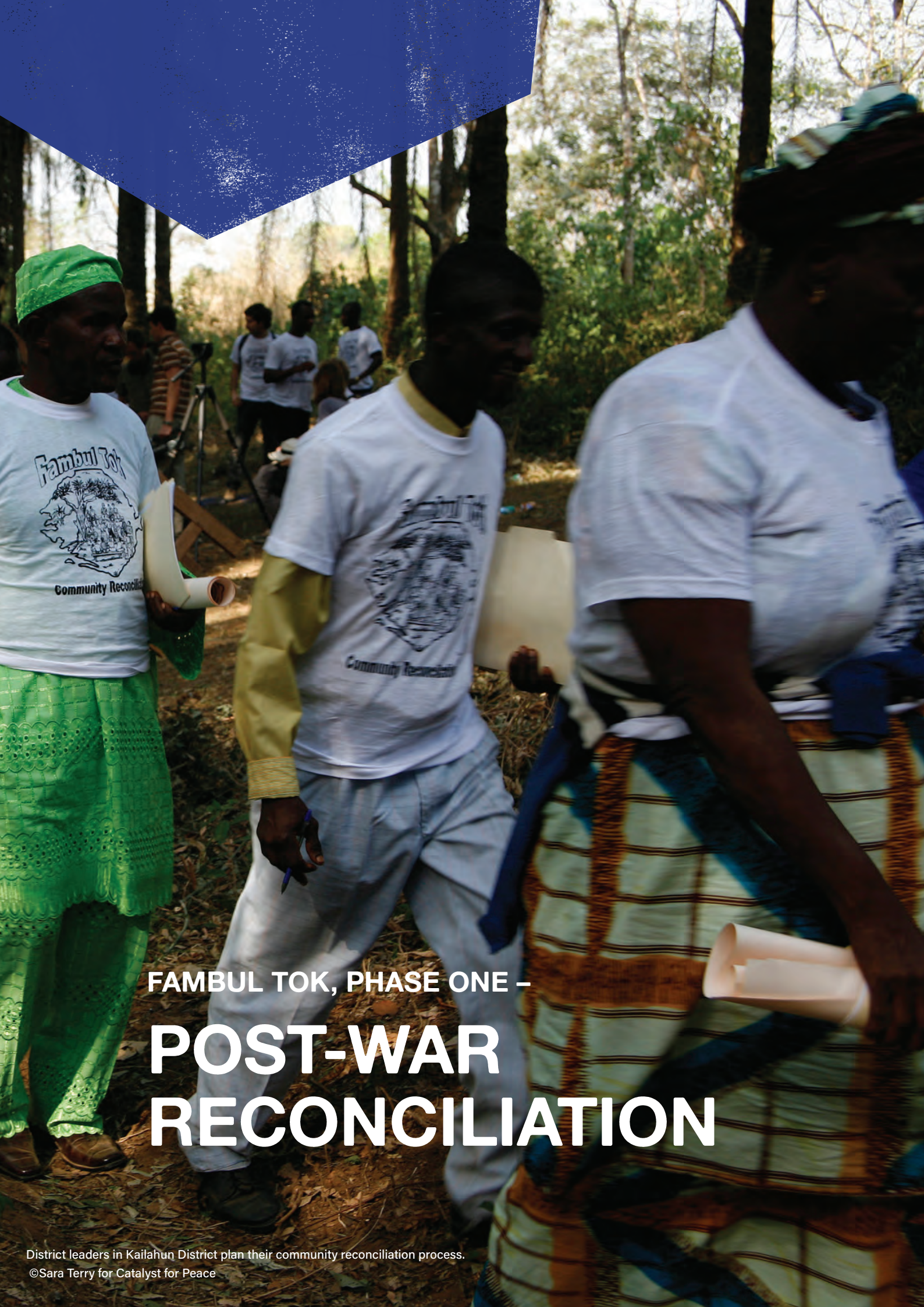
John Caulker, a leading Sierra Leonean human rights advocate during the war and a founding champion of the TRC who later led the TRC Working Group, had advocated all along for a reconciliation process centered in the rural communities, where the impact of the war was most strongly felt. He envisioned local communities embracing a restorative justice process, drawing on their culture and tradition, and leading the process themselves. His vision had gone largely unheeded, even dismissed as naïve or impossible, as this approach had never been done before.

Meanwhile, Libby Hoffman, who started the US-based foundation Catalyst for Peace in 2003, was crafting an approach to peacebuilding designed to support ordinary people and communities in leading in the work of building the peace. Libby saw a lot of powerful work happening at local and community levels around the world, but she was frustrated that it was mostly isolated and episodic. She wanted to see local community ownership and leadership supported in more systematic and strategic ways. Libby

believed funding mechanisms were often part of the problem: they were often heavily short-term and emphasizing predetermined outputs that made it very difficult to do what most needed to be done—to invest in good *process*, which is critical to fostering local ownership in practice.

When Libby and John met in 2007, they saw that their visions and sensibilities were aligned and began working together to create the program that became Fambul Tok—bridging the gap from the Special Court and the TRC, creating a space for real reconciliation at the community level, where the Sierra Leoneans most impacted by the war could lead the process, drawing on their own culture and tradition—and committed to sharing the stories and lessons from this work with the world.

In the 12 years since they began working together, Fambul Tok's work has evolved from a focus on post-war community reconciliation to people-led planning and development. But community healing has always been at its core.



FAMBUL TOK, PHASE ONE –

POST-WAR RECONCILIATION

District leaders in Kailahun District plan their community reconciliation process.

©Sara Terry for Catalyst for Peace

Family Talk



District leaders in Kailahun District plan their community reconciliation process.
©Sara Terry for Catalyst for Peace

Fambul Tok (Krio for *family talk*) was conceived and designed to be co-created with the people and communities of Sierra Leone, building in an ongoing emergent learning and design approach from the start. The program launched in 2007 with a series of district level consultations across the whole country, first asking varied groups of district stakeholders *if* they wanted to reconcile (universally, the answer was yes), and then what justice and reconciliation would look like from *their* perspective. These consultations themselves were the first step of the larger community mobilization process that characterized the entire Fambul Tok approach. And the consultations impacted

program design in an ongoing way. For example, Fambul Tok staff initially envisioned ceremonies at the chiefdom level. When communities expressed a strong desire to base the ceremonies even more locally in order to enable access and full participation, Fambul Tok re-designed the program and planned for ceremonies at the sectional level. (There are currently 16 Districts in Sierra Leone, each with an average of 12 chiefdoms; there are usually 5-10 sections in a chiefdom; a section is a gathering of typically 5-15 villages.)

The focal event of the Fambul Tok reconciliation process was a ceremony of truth-telling, apology, and forgiveness around a community

The focal event of the Fambul Tok reconciliation process was a ceremony of truth-telling, apology, and forgiveness around a community bonfire, where victims and perpetrators could come forward and tell the stories of what they did in the war or what happened to them, apologize to those they had hurt, and offer forgiveness.



Fambul Tok bonfire in Gbekeledu, Kailahun District. © Sara Terry for Catalyst for Peace

bonfire, where victims and perpetrators could come forward and tell the stories of what they did in the war or what happened to them, apologize to those they had hurt, and offer forgiveness. This was followed by a traditional cleansing ceremony, rekindling indigenous practices that had been lost even before the war, and a community celebration and feast.

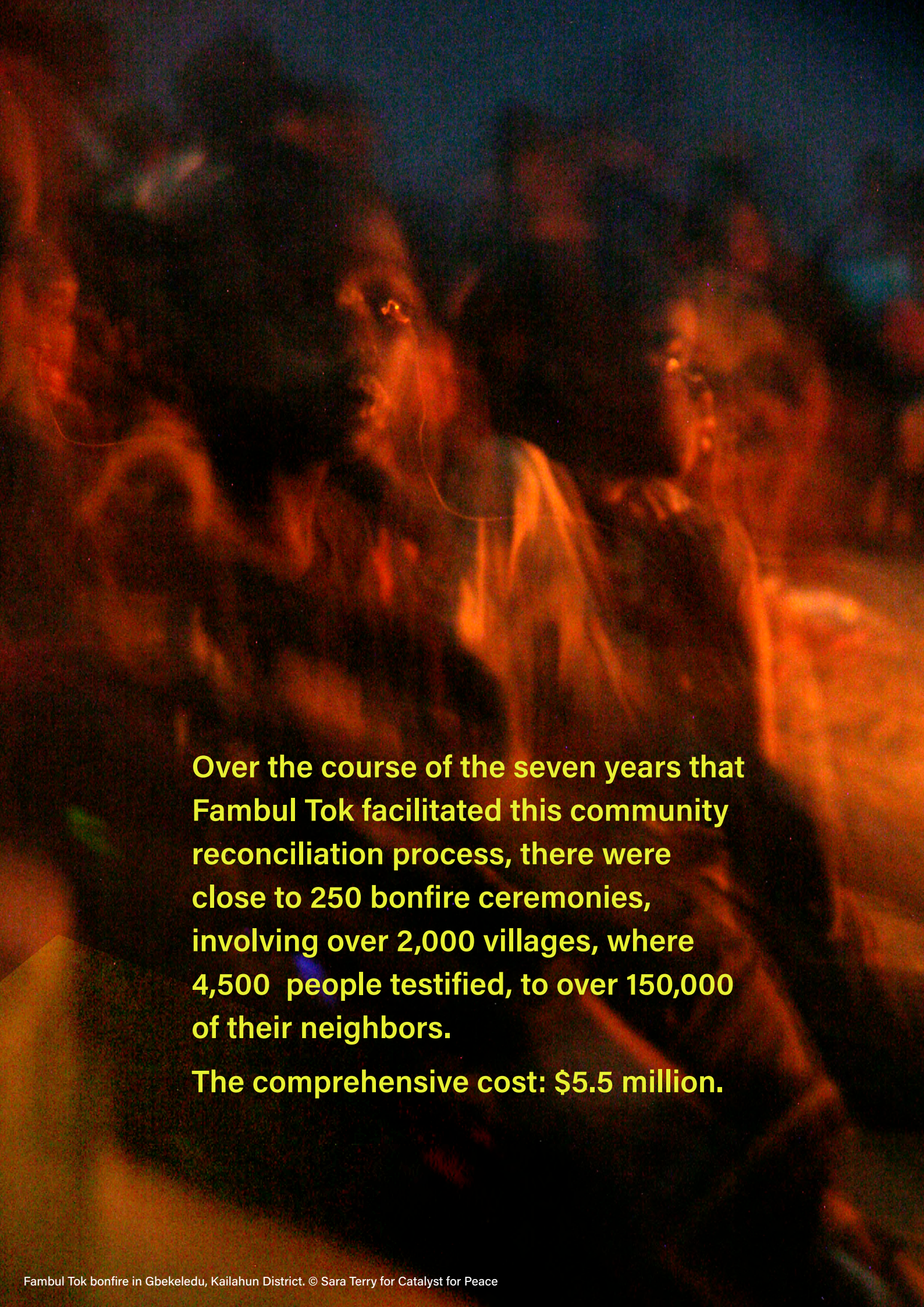
Fambul Tok guided the communities in planning and implementing their ceremonies, so that even the event preparation was part of the community healing process. Fambul Tok's careful facilitation was designed to cement local ownership and create a trustworthy container for the delicate work of individual and communal reconciliation.

The preparation process took 3-4 months in each community, during which time local reconciliation committees were established to take the lead with planning and to carry the commu-

nity healing forward after the ceremony.

The ceremony was seen as the *beginning*, not the end, of the reconciliation process. Communities had chosen their reconciliation committee members themselves, according to Fambul Tok guidelines, which emphasized diversity and having the respect of community members. In this way, all stakeholder groups were represented in the committees, which also emphasized equal participation by women and men. Brought to life through the Fambul Tok planning process, these committees continued after the focal event of the bonfires, and they went on to plan such varied activities as community farms, football matches, Peace Mothers groups, dialogues under peace trees, and school clubs.

In addition to healing the wounds of the war, the process was rebuilding social capital—repairing and weaving anew the community fabric that had been torn by the war.

A large bonfire at night, with bright orange and yellow flames rising into the dark sky. Several people are visible in the foreground, their faces partially illuminated by the fire's glow. The scene is set outdoors, and the fire appears to be a central part of a community gathering.

Over the course of the seven years that Fambul Tok facilitated this community reconciliation process, there were close to 250 bonfire ceremonies, involving over 2,000 villages, where 4,500 people testified, to over 150,000 of their neighbors.

The comprehensive cost: \$5.5 million.

Responsive process design

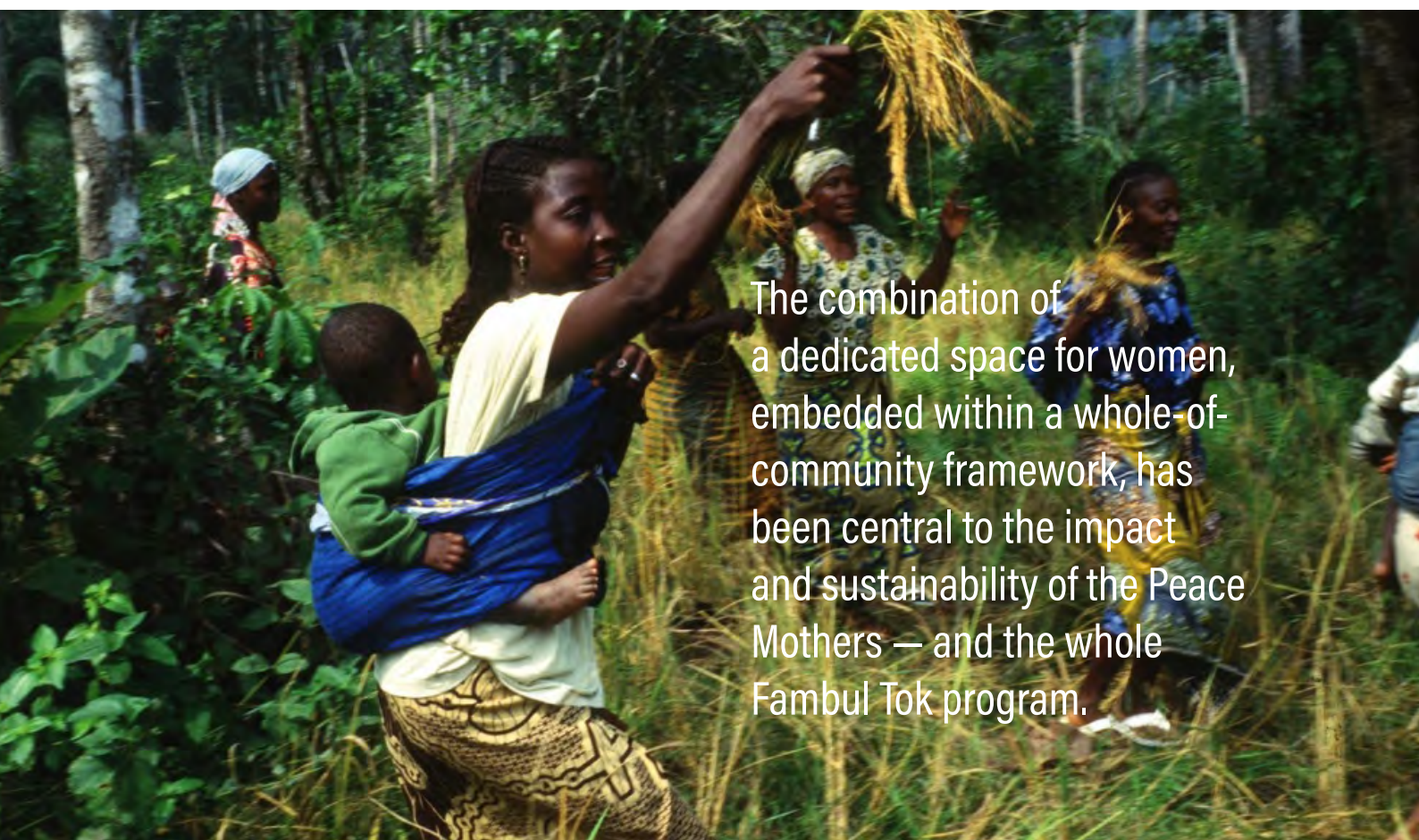
Gender-equal representation is a core Fambul Tok value and was built into every Fambul Tok community structure. Nevertheless, in the second year of the program, women participating in the Fambul Tok process expressed that they needed something more. They had suffered uniquely in the war, and they said they wanted and needed a space to come together just as women. Fambul Tok convened women from across communities to design an initiative or an approach that would better meet women's needs in the community reconciliation process. At the meeting, the women said that they simply wanted a space to come together as women and work jointly for the benefit of their community. They wanted a non-political name and space, and they chose the name Peace Mothers. As a result, establishing Peace Mothers groups became an official step in the post-bonfire process and a core part of the activities designed to strengthen and sustain the community's reconciliation.

Like the other follow-up activities, Fambul Tok helped with the initial set up, facilitation, and activity planning, covering travel and food for the initial meetings. The Peace Mothers groups sprang into action on behalf of their commu-

nities with energetic commitment, soon taking full organizational and financial responsibility for their meetings. They adopted a range of micro-economic enterprises, from soap-making to farming to market initiatives, very quickly becoming a powerful engine for community transformation from within. As they grew, some groups attracted outside funding, and were able to buy things like rice-hulling machines, which they put to use at the chiefdom level, and they continued to strengthen and grow their impact.

The social impact was as evident as the micro-economic one. Women became more and more comfortable being vocal in their communities. As the men saw the positive impact and new development in their communities, they voiced strong support, even in places where there had been initial resistance. The combination of a dedicated space for women, embedded within a whole-of-community framework, has been central to the impact and sustainability of the Peace Mothers—and the whole Fambul Tok program. Since that time, Fambul Tok has built this kind of gender-positive programming into all its work.

Peace Mothers harvest rice from their community farm, Kailahun district © Sara Terry for Catalyst for Peace



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Learning-in-practice spaces

While the community reconciliation work was unfolding on the ground, Fambul Tok and Catalyst for Peace were living into a partnership designed to support the program operating at a national scale and to share its stories and lessons globally. The commitment to local ownership meant that the program design needed to evolve and adapt as the process went forward—a process Catalyst for Peace called *emergent design*. The foundation of emergent design is creating an *invitational space and presence*. That is, the person leading the work on the ground is supported externally by someone inviting and supporting their leadership. Supporting this approach to work in the creation and implementation of Fambul Tok required an ongoing tending of the emergent design process, and of the consequent learning, at every level from local to district to national to international. That in turn required significant commitment to creating collective reflective learning spaces—time for staff and program leaders, at every level, to be together on a regular basis.

Fambul Tok staff knew that creating the space for community ownership of the process at the local implementation level primarily meant creating space for community members to come together and then facilitating collective decision-making processes in that space.

It quickly became clear that having a national-level organization that supported working this way required the staff regularly coming together, too, to share, learn, and problem solve together. Monthly staff meetings, like mini-retreats, became standard practice, and when budgets became tight, Catalyst held firm that this was one part of the program budget that shouldn't be cut. These staff meetings became a living-learning space for Fambul Tok—like a nerve-system for the organization. And the relationship-strengthening between and among staff supported by the meetings became an important source of support for the staff dealing with the difficult stories they were hearing from people, and for the strains of the work itself.

With so much time committed to *going to*, *inviting out* and *walking with* the communities engaging in the reconciliation process, Fambul Tok's way of working was time and travel intensive—in a way that was countercultural even within civil society. It took a great deal of focus and energy to counter the prevailing 'NGO culture' and the educated community expectation of just getting money or direct aid from NGOs. The rewards of doing so were tremendous, and sharing the stories of success—as well as, of course, the challenges—through these regular gatherings strengthened and deepened the staff internalizing the program values, while also renewing their faith and vision.

This kind of living-learning space was also structured into the work at the nexus of the national and international levels. Catalyst for Peace held a space to invite and support national leadership in program design and implementation. Libby and John talked at least weekly by phone or Skype, drawing in other senior leadership or outside expertise as needed. The work evolved so rapidly on the ground, that for John and his core team, regular updates for peers across the ocean became valuable processing and synthesizing time. It took significant time and extraordinary commitment on everyone's part to work this way. But it proved critical in strengthening the organizational support for the work, supporting staff development, and in building a nimble, responsive program design.

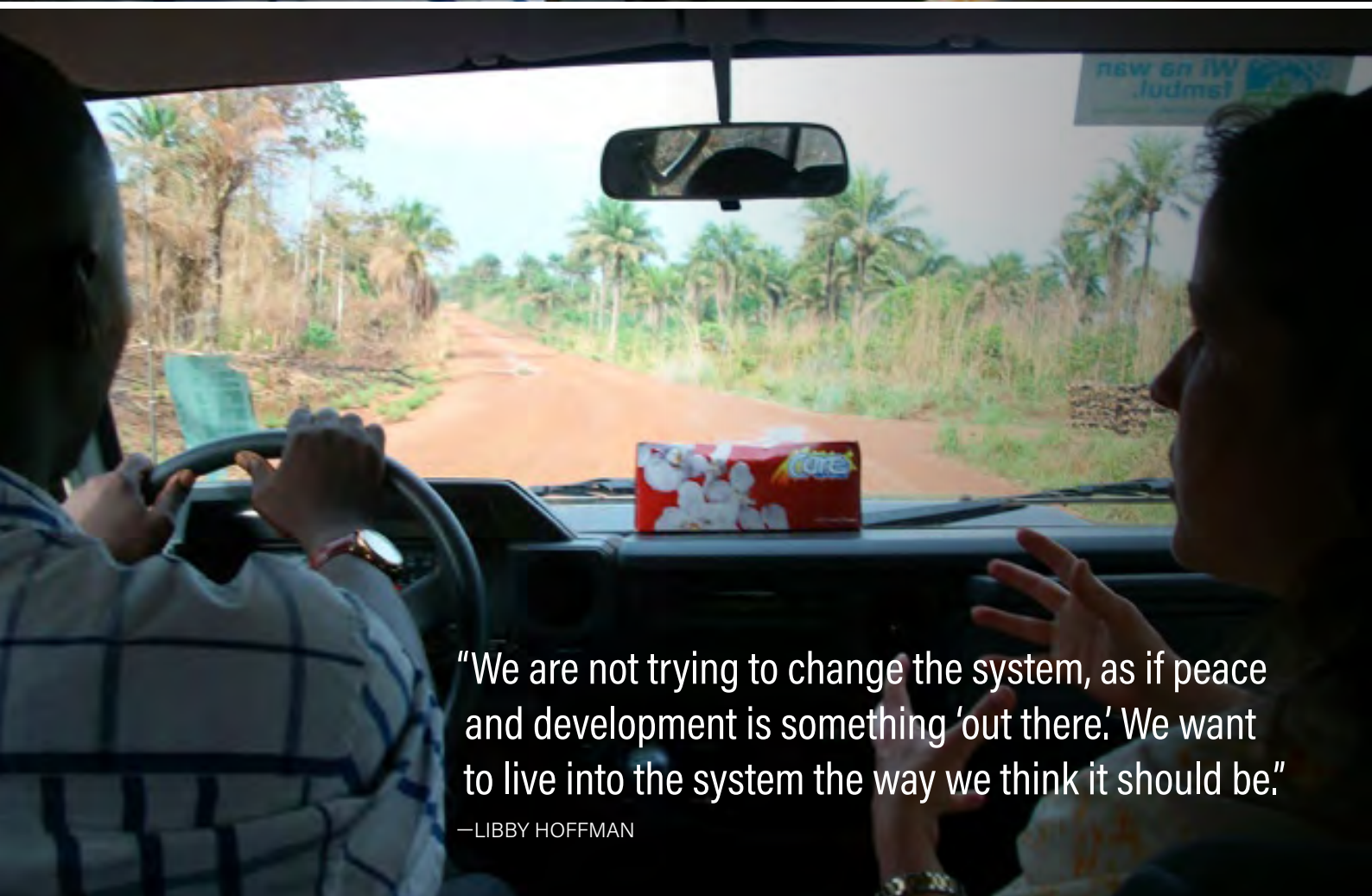


Fambul Tok and CFP staff gather for retreat in Kenema, 2010



"We see everything as a process, and we build the foundation of that process. We want to be sure that process is sustainable and owned by the people."

—JOHN CAULKER



"We are not trying to change the system, as if peace and development is something 'out there.' We want to live into the system the way we think it should be."

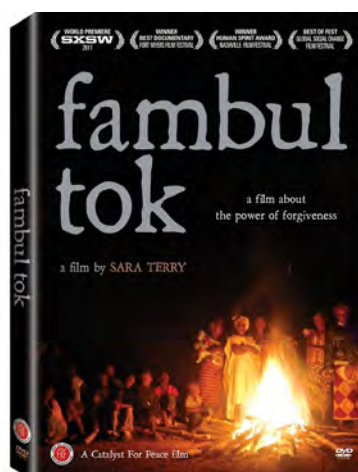
—LIBBY HOFFMAN

John and Libby had in-person time together roughly every two months, either in the US or in Sierra Leone. Catalyst for Peace made a commitment to bringing senior Sierra Leonean leaders to the US for an extended retreat once a year, in addition to convening one all-staff general planning retreat each year in Sierra Leone. US-based consulting firm the KonTerra Group facilitated these meetings, in addition to facilitating interim in-person and Skype meetings with John and Libby, bringing unique organizational development expertise so critical in the early program development. The full range of these meetings was emblematic of the intentional space and support for individual leadership development that Catalyst prioritized in programming and funding. Libby and John explicitly made tending the individual and organizational relationships, including theirs, a component of their work. They cultivated space and capacity for addressing difficult issues with honesty and common commitment. The conversations around money and financial reporting were, as would be expected, often the most tense. But with commitment, practice, good outside facilitation, and clarity about their boundaries as well as their common commitment and values sensibility, they were able to work through even the most difficult challenges.

Storytelling as peacebuilding

Catalyst for Peace built a comprehensive storytelling component into its program accompaniment, with an award-winning documentary film and companion book, as well as multiple communication tools in different media. These tools opened a global conversation and expanded the learning space for/of the work from the earliest days. The storytelling pieces also amplified a feeling of pride in the people and communities engaged in the frontlines work, as each element both focused the program's tools and offered a positive mirror to the people on the ground, nourishing and strengthening them as a result. Journalist and documentarian Sara Terry was a part of the early core planning team, helping with messaging and honing and sharpening the language used to describe the work. Having the film crew document the process from the beginning provided a channel for reflecting back to staff and participants the transformational work they were doing, which played an important magnifying role. The video documentation became helpful in introducing Fambul Tok to new communities especially in the early days, when the staff could show a clip from one community to another, bridging trust in places that harbored justified mistrust of anyone and anything coming in from the outside.

The vision behind all of this was not to support storytelling *about* the work, but to embed storytelling *as part of the peacebuilding work itself*.



Crisis Response

EBOLA PREVENTION EFFORTS

Effective adaptation

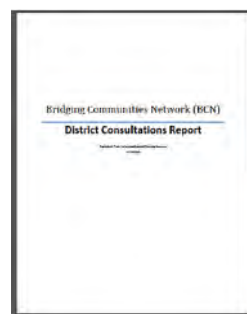
When the Ebola crisis hit Sierra Leone beginning in 2014, it quickly became obvious that the local community networks established by Fambul Tok's community mobilization approach were distinctly effective channels for communicating Ebola prevention messages. In Sierra Leone's rural areas, mistrust of outsiders—whether national or international, organizational or governmental—could be strong enough to undermine government initiatives to remediate the spread of Ebola. For example, soap from the government was believed by some to be secretly *transmitting* Ebola rather than preventing it. In contrast, local networks like the Fambul Tok Reconciliation Committees or Peace

Mothers groups were known and trusted. Peace Mothers groups that had been making soap as part of their market initiatives stepped up their production, using Fambul Tok's national Peace Mothers networks for distribution, along with educational materials in formats rural communities could easily understand. Because of Fambul Tok's close connection with rural communities, it was easy to design materials that would be well received. One clear lesson of the effectiveness of Fambul Tok structures in responding to Ebola was that, done right, the process of addressing the crisis of the war and its aftermath could strengthen a community to better respond to future crises.



The process of addressing the crisis of the war and its aftermath could strengthen a community to better respond to future crises.

Peace Mothers leading Ebola prevention demonstrations and making soap in Pujehun District.
Photos by Fambul Tok.



A BCN District Consultation and the BCN summary report, fall 2014. Photos by Fambul Tok.

The only way to create space for community voices to lead the conversation was to create programming that embodied those values in practice, step by step, beginning at the most local level — in other words, from the inside out.

The national and the local

In the immediate Ebola response, a disconnect was often felt/experienced between those making national policy and those on the receiving end of it. John Caulker characterized the international response at the time as based on an understanding of the problem as *medical*, and not also as communal, which he saw exacerbating the challenge the disease posed. Rural populations commonly felt some of their core needs or values—culturally sensitive burials, for example—were not being incorporated into Ebola response practices, hindering acceptance of the response. Fambul Tok took a lead in coordinating civil society across the country to create a bridge to community voices and perspectives for national Ebola response entities. Working with the United States Embassy in Freetown, Fambul Tok gathered community leaders from Kailahun District, ground zero for Ebola, to discuss what was needed and what was missing in Ebola prevention efforts. It became clear,

for example, that it was critically important to communities to know that their dead would be tended by someone of the same gender, in order for them to trust the process. As a result, Ebola burial teams were re-designed to always have both men and women, making them much more easily accepted locally. This is but one example of how the 'Bridging Communities Network' (BCN) helped strengthen the country's Ebola response by bringing community perspectives into policy formation.

Changing the aid conversation

And yet the preponderance of international aid during Ebola perpetuated patterns common during the war—a massive influx of mostly short-term aid, coming through large INGOs with little connection to communities and little commitment to creating space, in practice, for local leadership. John went so far as to lament that it was as if Sierra Leone was being recolonized—by aid.



Leaders from across Moyamba District plan their Ebola recovery and re-development in fall 2015.
Photo by Fambul Tok.

John and Libby despaired together about the repetition in the Ebola response of the same problematic dynamics from post-war aid practices, with little acknowledgment of local communities as agents of change themselves, and little vision of the important resources they *did* have, in spite of the challenges they faced. The effect of such an approach was to further erode local trust in outsiders, to further fracture community bonds and to diminish the energy and creativity of communities. Aid agencies and organizations realized the inadequacies of these “outside-in” approaches, and they voiced a strong desire to work differently, using language about the importance of “local consultation”—but the patterns proved almost impossible to change in practice.

Libby and John realized there was a broader conversation needed—and that they were uniquely placed to lead it. Their work had created and supported space for community leadership of the reconciliation process, embodying an “inside-out” approach to aid, and they had lived

it out in practice at a national scale. Catalyst for Peace was ready to shift its programming focus to catalyzing the national and international conversation about crisis response and aid more generally, focusing on healthy partnerships between international and national actors. In 2015, Catalyst launched a national Catalyzing Healthy Partnerships Dialogue in Sierra Leone.

There was widespread interest in the dialogue among the government and international policy community in Freetown, reflecting a deepening understanding of the call to work in different ways. And yet, even with that interest, Libby and John felt that *modeling* an inside-out approach to Ebola response and recovery was also needed, and that the only way to create space for community voices to lead the conversation was to create programming that embodied those values in practice, step by step, beginning at the most local level—in other words, from the inside out. So began the next phase of Fambul Tok’s work.

FAMBUL TOK, PHASE TWO –

PEOPLE-LED PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT



photo ©Sara Terry for Catalyst for Peace

People-led planning

AT THE CORE OF IT ALL



Village stakeholders gather to begin their Peoples' Planning Process. Photo by Fambul Tok.

In spring of 2015, as the Ebola crisis was lessening and more and more parts of the country were being declared Ebola-free, Fambul Tok adapted its community reconciliation approach into a people-led Ebola recovery, planning, and development program, called **the People's Planning Process (PPP)**. It piloted the PPP first in Kissi Teng chiefdom in Kailahun District, nestled near the borders of Guinea and Liberia and ground zero for Ebola in the country. Through the PPP, Fambul Tok gathered people in widening circles from village to section to chiefdom, inviting their consideration of four core questions:

What could they do to make sure that Ebola didn't come into their communities and region again?

How would they define their most important peace and development needs?

What resources did they have already to begin addressing them?

What outside support was required, in order to move forward with their priority needs?

The PPP walked communities through establishing sectional-level **Community Welfare and Mediation Committees (CWMCs)**—the next-generation evolution of the earlier reconciliation committees—and additional **Peace Mothers** groups. Fambul Tok trained and mobilized them to begin to move forward on their own with the local development needs they had prioritized.

Even in the areas most affected by both the war and the Ebola crisis, the response to the PPP was nothing less than astonishing. There was a huge release of interest and energy and a commitment to work together on behalf of the community and the needs they had identified. And they did just that. Once organized, the CWMCs and Peace Mother groups took on active development projects in and for their communities, from soap making to small market initiatives, to community farms. With the money they made, they began addressing local needs one by one—paying school fees for children that couldn't afford them; building health posts; building roads or bridges or schools—all priorities chosen by the community members themselves.

As of March 2019, Fambul Tok has facilitated the PPP across 15 chiefdoms, in 3 districts. Its community mobilizing process repairs the community bowl, thereby unleashing community potential for action.

Even further, when a community is made whole again, the bowl becomes something more than just a passive container. It becomes like a

well—tapped into deep reserves of groundwater, making what exists below the surface accessible. These are resources already present—but invisible—in the system. The groundwater is energy and capacity—of vision and determination—to work together for the benefit of the community. When there is a limited sense of agency along with division, mistrust, unresolved conflict, and fractured relationships, it is very difficult to tap into the full potential of a community. But when the cracks in the bowl are repaired—when space is created for people to work together for a common vision that helps the whole community—hidden reserves of individual and community resources become activated and visible.

When that happens, new resources come into the system—indigenous knowledge, energy, capacity for hard work, inspiration, cultural wealth, and strong spirit, among others. These resources come flowing out and bless the community itself, and when shared outside the community, can inspire and inform others in important ways.

Examples of what tapping the well of local community potential through the PPP unleashed:

THE PEOPLE OF NEINI CHIEFDOM, KOINADUGU DISTRICT,

contributed 15 cents a week, every week, for 79 weeks. After 18 months, they had raised

\$13,000

and started building the bridge they needed to connect their community to a main travel route.

THE PEACE MOTHERS OF DASSE CHIEFDOM, MOYAMBA DISTRICT,

developed a three-acre farm. Their cassava, corn and okra harvests generated

\$5,000

(more than 40 million Leones) in 2016.

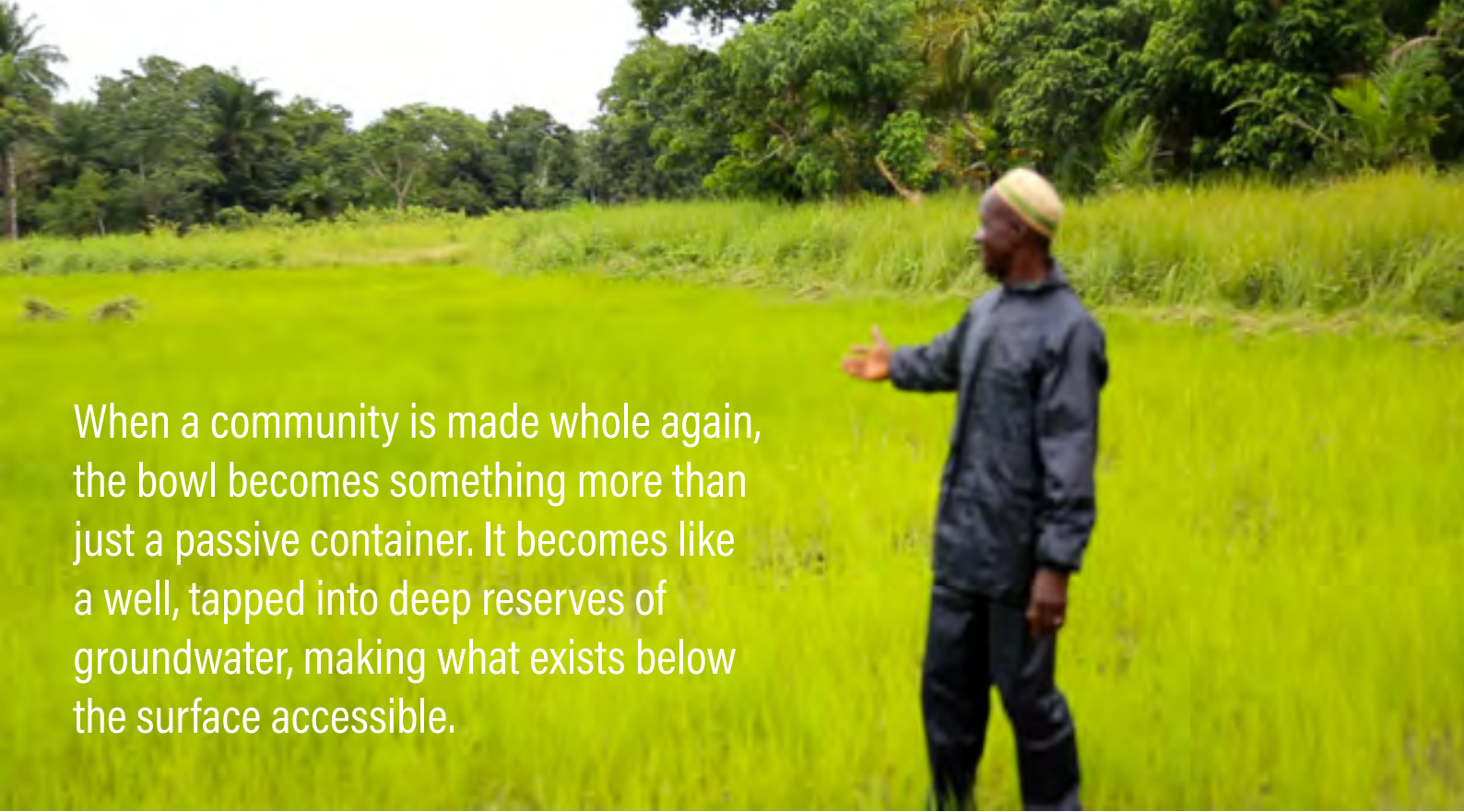
THE PEACE MOTHERS OF FAKUNYA CHIEFDOM, MOYAMBA DISTRICT,

pooled resources to start a soap making business. In just one year, this new venture earned

\$4,000

which they invested at the bank and used to issue loans to Peace Mothers and their families.

When a community is made whole again, the bowl becomes something more than just a passive container. It becomes like a well, tapped into deep reserves of groundwater, making what exists below the surface accessible.



TOP Community swamp rice farm, Kailahun District

MIDDLE RIGHT Building their community center (barray) in Koinadugu

LEFT Community-built health center in Koinadugu District

LOWER RIGHT Peace Mothers counting their market earnings

Inclusive local governance – the missing link between community and national policy

While the local results of the PPP were unquestionably powerful, John and Libby knew that for the PPP to be more broadly impactful and sustainable, it needed to be connected in to local governance and planning processes. Local populations might have voiced what they wanted and needed, but the right people also needed to hear that voicing, and to be able to act on what they heard, and the PPP needed broader support to roll out in other chiefdoms across the district.

Ebola response, like development more generally, was coordinated in Sierra Leone at the district level. Inclusive district capacity was the missing link between communities and national policy. In July 2015, Fambul Tok and Catalyst for Peace worked in partnership with Kailahun's District Ebola Response Committee, or DERC, to convene a first-of-its-kind gathering of all of the Ebola response and development stakeholders at the district level in Kailahun. Participants included the District Council and District Officer; traditional leaders (Paramount Chiefs); relevant government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs); national and international NGOs; the WHO and other international bodies focusing on Ebola response at the time; representatives of underrepresented population groups, including the disabled, women, and youth; and Muslim and Christian leaders.

At the center of this group of stakeholders, 20 people from Kissi Teng Chiefdom also came to present their Chiefdom People's Plan, the culmination of four months of work and aggregation, and to describe—themselves—the process and impact of creating it. Many had never been to Kailahun Town or interacted with the levels of leadership represented there. They electrified the gathering with their energy and spirit, and with the details of their plan and their description of the process of creating it. Seeing the powerful living example of what happens when space is created and held for communities to lead their own recovery and development processes, district leaders affirmed a strong desire to repeat the PPP across the district. Similar processes were repeated in Moyamba and Koinadugu districts, with similar results.



PC of Neini Chiefdom and his people present their People's Plan to Koinadugu District Council

Owning the definition of the problem – and of the solutions

Just as the PPP had invited villagers to identify their own needs and their desired ways of meeting them, so the gathering of district development stakeholders did the same thing for local government leaders. Those leading development in the district described the problems they saw and felt with the way things had usually been done—problems with roots in the many conflicts and broken relationships among the varying district stakeholders, as well as a prevailing feeling of disrespect or lack of support, in local leaders' view, for their role from national and international actors and practices. When invited to think about how they wanted to do things differently, there was a realization that all of these district stakeholders needed a place to come together and collaborate in an ongoing way.

From this was born the **Inclusive District Peace and Development Committee**, or IDC. In the three pilot districts, Fambul Tok facilitated the IDCs choosing their mandate; identifying the core values they wanted to operate by; and creating the organizational makeup and structures each IDC would need. The IDCs affirmed that they wanted to see the PPP cascade across the rest of the chiefdoms in the district, and they began building the linkages between what communities wanted and the services that would support them. Truly, this was democracy in action.



Koinadugu District stakeholders approve the newly formed IDC mandate and structure

Once formed, the IDCs created a cyclical process of identifying priority issues in their district and implementing their plans to address them. They have addressed outbreaks and threats of violence, including surrounding the national elections and connected to youth disenfranchisement, and they have monitored the implementation of national projects in their districts for quality, among other issues. They have addressed longstanding conflict between and among the district stakeholders, through it all building collaborative capacity, the absence of which had been hampering the success of everyone's efforts. The IDC was creating a space for all the stakeholders to see themselves as part of a common 'we'—and it became possible to address even difficult issues within that framing.

This was sorely tested by deep conflict between local councils and traditional leaders, which had been endemic and emerged as a priority issue for each IDC. Conceptually, the two governance bodies should be the twin engines of local development, but their relationship had been eroded by years of suspicion and mistrust, in particular about the collection and use of tax revenue. The challenge crystallized first in Kailahun District, at the beginning of the IDC formation process.

The conflict over revenue collection had become so entrenched that the paramount chiefs were threatening strikes, protests, and even violence if/when district officials were to visit chiefdoms and collect taxes. "The council was talking about its legal right to collect taxes," John remembers, "while the paramount chiefs were saying, 'This is our territory, this is our community, you cannot just come here to collect tax when you're not accountable to us.'"

It quickly became clear that the heart of the problem was not money or territory, but communication. A lack of transparency was experienced in both directions as a lack of accountability.

Fambul Tok invited the sides to dialogue and played a facilitation and accompaniment role as the paramount chiefs and the district councils met four times to express their grievances and to find a way forward. The process was lengthy and not without difficulty, especially around documentation standards. After patient discussion and facilitation of concerns about transparency and fairness, the parties agreed to allow the district councils to collect taxes, and the district councils agreed to remit 40 percent of the revenues collected back to the paramount chiefs. Both parties agreed to keep detailed records and to audit their spending.

Using the success of the process in Kailahun District as a model, revenue-sharing consultations were also held in Moyamba and Koinadugu Districts (both of which had similar conflicts threatening district unity). And landmark revenue-sharing agreements were also negotiated in both of those districts.

The negotiations easily could have stalled, and both groups could have returned to their earlier entrenched positions, with tensions simmering once more. Instead, the Inclusive District Committee process, in its founding moment, found a path to solving a long-standing governance challenge—moving communities past what they identified as their greatest obstacle to their own development, and deepening trust in a process grounded in conversation, consultation and collective, community-led problem-solving.

With all stakeholders being represented, the IDCs are trusted, transparent entities, and places where any villager can bring a grievance—

even if they involve chiefs or elected officials. As a result, the IDCs have, in practice, become new spaces of conflict resolution, averting or resolving dozens of conflicts that might previously have remained simmering or broken out into active violence, threatening to derail communities' achievements and development.

Building to national level

Just as the PPP on its own in a chiefdom needed a larger district structure to support and sustain it, so it became clear that the pilot IDCs on their own needed a larger national structure to support them—one that existed beyond Fambul Tok with the support of CFP, both of which were already operating at their capacity. The pilot IDCs wanted to learn from and with each other. They wanted to forge better rela-

tionships with the national government. And they wanted to see the IDC structure expand to other districts. In November 2016, CFP and Fambul Tok convened an Inter-District Learning and Sharing Conference, to further those goals. Witnessing the power and effectiveness of the pilot PPP and IDC process at the conference, Sierra Leone's Minister of Local Government and Rural Development committed to help roll it out across the country. Thus began the partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone to build a national policy framework to put in place a national People's Planning Process, supported by inclusive local governance infrastructure in each district.

Landmark revenue sharing agreement signed between Moyamba District Council and Paramount Chiefs, Feb. 2017. Photo by Libby Hoffman.



Deepening trust in a process grounded in conversation, consultation and collective, community-led problem-solving.

The Wan Fambul National Framework for Inclusive Governance and Local Development

With leadership from the Ministry of Local Government, Fambul Tok and Catalyst for Peace, together with leaders from the pilot districts, distilled the lessons from the pilot PPP and IDC process into a draft national policy framework—the *Wan Fambul National Framework (WFNF) for Inclusive Governance and Local Development*—and they began the work of building the infrastructure and support to operationalize it. National elections in 2018 put the process on hold for a time, but the incoming administration reaffirmed and deepened government commitment to the Wan Fambul Framework, ensuring that it was integrated not just into local governance policy but also into the new National Development Plan, released in February 2019.

Some people might misunderstand this as small scale because of the local focus—and that would be a huge error. The results show how an integrity of process at the most local level, over time, supports results and a kind of aggregation well beyond common expectations. “Small-small” is a common saying in Sierra Leone, often used to promote patience with limited capacity or when only small steps can be taken at a time. But Catalyst for Peace has taken to saying that a core lesson from Fambul Tok has been, “Small-small, over time, is big-big.”



Sierra Leonean government leaders and international experts crafting the support infrastructure for the Wan Fambul National Framework, at a planning conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in November 2018.

Explaining the inclusion of the PPP in the National Development Plan, Sierra Leone’s Director of National Planning, Dr. Sheka Bangura, illuminated how ‘small-small’ could in fact lead to ‘big-big’ in national economic terms.

There is much work still to be done to build the national infrastructure and international support to implement the Wan Fambul Framework. But the foundation is strong, and the demand clear, which bode well for its success.

Drawing on the results of a scoping study of the pilot PPP and IDC districts, Dr. Bangura extrapolated the national economic implications:

Establishing two Peace Mothers groups in every section of Sierra Leone could produce an additional \$13 million in revenue — all going directly to the communities.

If every community in every chiefdom followed the example of Neini Chiefdom and **SAVED 15 CENTS PER WEEK FOR 18 MONTHS**, their savings would total more than

\$2 million.

If communities could **SAVE \$1 PER PERSON PER WEEK**, those savings would generate

\$20 million

in the same time period.

If every section built a Maternal and Child Health post like Heremakono section in Koinadugu District (long neglected by humanitarian aid organizations, empowered by the PPP to act on their own behalf), there would be **MORE THAN 1,300 NEW HEALTH POSTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY**, a total building cost of

\$27 million

—a massive investment/savings, made possible by allowing communities to articulate their own needs and prioritize their paths forward.

**“Small-small,
over time, is big-big.”**

A photograph showing a group of people, including men, women, and children, walking away from the camera on a dirt path. The path is flanked by tall grass and trees. The lighting suggests it's late afternoon or early morning. In the foreground, a man in a green tank top and a woman in a blue t-shirt are walking. The man in the green tank top has a small tattoo on his left leg. The woman in the blue t-shirt is holding the hand of a young child in a striped shirt. The text "THE WAY FORWARD" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

THE WAY FORWARD

Photo by Libby Hoffman

Challenges and Opportunities



Planning for reconciliation in Koinadugu District. Photo by Jina Moore for Catalyst for Peace.

Even with the strength of the framework foundation and the desire, however, success is not guaranteed. The transition to effective national implementation of the WF Framework—of *any* framework—is not linear.

Maintaining process values

A core challenge specific to the implementation of the WFNF will be navigating the transition to larger-scale funding in a way that preserves the integrity of program, process, and values that has been so core to the success of the work to date. How do you maintain the strength that has come from the work's organic, emergent process while moving to the next level of scale and complexity? This will be an important question

to hold as the Framework goes forward. At early meetings to plan national expansion, IDC leaders spoke of the critical need to maintain the *spirit* of the work—something invisible to the eye and difficult to define precisely, but like wind, you know it when you feel it.

A specific dimension of the challenge for process-oriented work like the WF Framework is evaluation and assessment. What kind of assessment processes best serve the program goals for process-over-time work? CFP, in its support for Fambul Tok, has been especially interested in internal learning cycles that feed into ongoing program development. How do—and should—those cycles get built into national level programming?

How do you maintain the strength that has come from the work's organic, emergent process while moving to the next level of scale and complexity?



Participants working in the IDC formation meetings.
Photo by Libby Hoffman.

Challenges to funding from the inside out

Catalyst for Peace has been the primary funder of the work to date, which brings both gifts and challenges for the present moment, as its funding comes to an end. CFP's long-term, dedicated funding and program support has functioned like a house for the emergence of the work—walls and a roof that have held space for the idea of an inside-out process and its systems to emerge into full and vivid expression, free from most externally-imposed agendas or needs. Only long-term funding (5 to 10 years at least, in most arenas) can build those walls and roof—without which, holding any truly consultative space and tying it to activity and program design is difficult.

Distinct from a lot of product-focused mainstream development and humanitarian work, the work of the CFP/FT partnership, and now the work of the WFNF, is essentially *process work*. The process is the product. That reality allows for a much more holistic approach than

traditional funding and program mechanisms typically do to define development/peacebuilding issues and to programming in general. And yet those traditional mechanisms are the ones most available for funding the work at the scale that is necessary for national roll-out. Navigating the conversation between this new way of working—unfamiliar, inside-out, holistic—and the more common and therefore familiar ways of funding and supporting peace and development is difficult and important, and it will take time and intentional focus.

...TIMEFRAME

The major large-scale, national-level funders in Sierra Leone are well-established bureaucracies, with well-honed proposal or funding processes, both of which determine the shape of the work successful in funding applications. And yet social change leaders across the board in Sierra Leone describe how the realities of these funding processes are often an obstacle to the very impact they are designed to achieve. While expressing a strong desire to support and strengthen local leadership, funding cycles and M&E structures generally do not envision the kind of time horizon needed to build that support to any degree of sustainability. Good process is necessary to local ownership, and good process takes time. It's taken twelve years just to lay the foundation for a national framework in Sierra Leone—and will take many more to implement.

...FRAGMENTATION

Issue segmentation also works against a process focus. Defining *process* as a core product often yields a wide-ranging, interconnected range of issues to be addressed, the scope and overlap of which are much more representative of the way communities experience them. Social cohesion, economic development, women's empowerment, education, healthcare—these are not isolated or disconnected from each other in the lived lives of rural Sierra Leoneans. Yet funding processes typically break them down and separate them out. As a result, new programming effectively engineers itself into silos, undermining capacity for cross-cutting initiatives, no matter what words are used in the ToR,



Chieftdom validation of their Peoples' Plan. Photo by Fambul Tok.

and moving far away from, rather than toward, intentionally holistic ways of working, despite their clear benefits. Related, when an initiative is cross-cutting in implementation, individual programming strands/goals/impacts can get obscured or ignored. Finding ways to describe process-oriented, holistic initiatives without diminishing their often very significant programming impacts, is a unique challenge.

For example, the WFNF addresses several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. But global conversation around the SDGs can often take place around individual SDGs, perpetuating a perception that they exist in isolation from each other. Even with a broad recognition of the cross-cutting realities of the SDGs, there can still be a de facto steering of funding mechanisms toward a focus on individual tracks, which has the effect of channeling new programming in those directions, with issue areas framed in isolation. Segmentation breeds segmentation.

As an already existing, fully community-owned and -led infrastructure, the WFNF encounters this dynamic from a unique perspective. Funding calls that reflect a segmented conceptualization of change processes could have the effect of forcing the breakdown of

the WFNF's already-working structures and processes into smaller, segmented program pieces—simply in order to get them funded. If this happens, it could undermine the overall program impact and sustainability, and at a certain point the very identity of the programming.

...PROBLEM-BASED FRAMING

There is a disconnect between the inside-out process the WFNF embodies and the problem-solving orientation and language of most traditional programming and funding. The PPP and the IDC process do indeed address many underlying problems in practice, but they are not conceptualized around that kind of deficit-based framing. They are grounded in orientation toward *fulfilling potential*, not merely solving problems. Solving problems is of course necessary to fulfilling potential, but the WFNF centers doing so from a positive, asset-based starting point, and follows a way of working that springs from that orientation.

Leaders across levels have expressed their perception that global support framed through a problem-solving lens—i.e. “poverty reduction” or “fragility” programming—ignores and obscures the resources and capacities that do already ex-

ist, even in places with great need. Yet funding initiatives insist on the integrity of their own language, a dynamic especially reinforced in large bureaucracies, which in effect forces program leaders to conform their design and terminology if they want to get funding. This is true even when they feel the language choices distort and even demean the work itself. The persistence of problem-solving, deficit-based framing of global humanitarian work can be received by partner populations as dehumanizing, while also perpetuating the perception of an external savior complex—even when that is not the intent.

The hope is that with the WFNF now going forward at a national policy level, Government leadership should mitigate some of the neo-colonial legacies (perceived and real) of global funding mechanisms. Yet governments are not immune to pressure to adapt and conform to outside funders' expectations and modes of working either. And governments can find it difficult to work in longer-term timeframes as well.

Re-connecting intent and impact

No matter the intent, there is simply a dearth of direct funder experience with a process-over-time definition of a program itself—the long-term, iterative programming that emerges when program direction is truly community-led. This is true even among funders who understand the demonstrable value of long-term, organic, community-centered programming. As a result,

the reality of the disconnect between funders' intentions and impact remains.

This raises several key questions for the future of the WF Framework in Sierra Leone. How can the Government of Sierra Leone and the WF Secretariat together work to repair the disconnect, so the WFNF can move forward and fulfill its potential? How can they move forward with funders keen to build on and replicate this work's demonstrable achievements, despite funders' as yet limited capacity to absorb the process model that facilitated that success? What will—and what should—be required by funders from Government and civil society leaders to adapt to funders' needs? And conversely, what would enable funders to adapt to support the needs of Sierra Leone's own successful working model?

Strengthening leadership

The reality is that there is a dearth of direct experience leading large-scale, process-over-time defined programming across *all* sectors—funder, government and civil society. Supporting more leaders across the board to step into their capacity to work at and with multiple levels of engagement over long time horizons, from local community through national civil society and government and international funders, is a core need of the moment.

Global learning and practice

Supporting locally-led work requires a unique way of working—for those leading, and for those supporting. In accompanying the emergence of the work in Sierra Leone, CFP built channels for its own learning into the program cycle. A core question for CFP right now is: What does it look like to maintain a larger scale learning-in-practice community at the national funding and governance level of the process? How can that happen? What kind of *global* learning and practice community would support the work going forward in Sierra Leone—and in the process, support and strengthen inside-out work in other places?



CWMC training. Photo by Fambul Tok.

Partnership

TRANSFORMING AND TRANSFORMED

The nature of CFP's partnership with Fambul Tok has changed and evolved over time—like the work itself. That is one of the realities of long-term partnerships, and it is an obligatory component of an accompaniment approach to supporting peacebuilding and development, at least as CFP has embodied it.

Prior to the PPP and IDC formation, Catalyst for Peace consciously played a background role in Fambul Tok's work and process in Sierra Leone, focused primarily on inviting and supporting the program and the organization stepping into its full strength and capacity. CFP perceived this kind of behind-the-scenes, accompaniment role as critical for the work having local impact, credibility, and sustainability. Catalyst never put its logo on Fambul Tok publications, for example, or wanted it on meeting banners or printed documentation. This paralleled the way Fambul Tok worked in the communities—they didn't come in with big logos on their vehicles or leave behind NGO signs in the communities where they worked.

As Fambul Tok's second phase took shape, however, Catalyst began to take a more public role in the work in Sierra Leone, as a visible partner in the process. Naming and sharing about an inside-out approach and the core concepts, values, and processes behind it became an important part of growing the work itself. Ad-

ditionally, having CFP be present as an international organization and as a funder helped make the relationship between a funder and a national partner an explicit part of the conversation.

With the launch of the Wan Fambul National Framework, the need for Government leadership and ownership of the process is critical to successful implementation. This coincides with Catalyst stepping out of the funding dimension of its work (not just with Fambul Tok, but across the board, as the foundation moves through its strategic plan of spending down and sunsetting its endowment). Catalyst is directing its resources now toward growing and strengthening the *global* learning and practice community of inside-out peace and development.

The nature of CFP's partnership with Fambul Tok has changed and evolved over time — like the work itself.



Libby Hoffman and John Caulker in Sierra Leone.
Photo by Charles Gibbs.

Seeing the System

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

In a fragmented system, target communities are defined as those with needs, and outside communities as those with resources. The system perpetuates a limited view of what constitute both resources and needs.

In this framing, the flow of resources and support (whether from district, national, or international levels) is one-way—from the outside, in to the community in need. By dichotomizing *resources* and *needs*, however, an outside-in system de facto keeps them from coming together, creating cycles of co-dependency.

In a system that is *whole*, the varied levels of aid and support are not fragmented and separate from each other and from the target community (an outside-in system), but rather are nested all together as parts of a larger, interconnected whole. Each level is its own bowl—a ‘container’ that holds the highest purpose and potential of that sector or level.

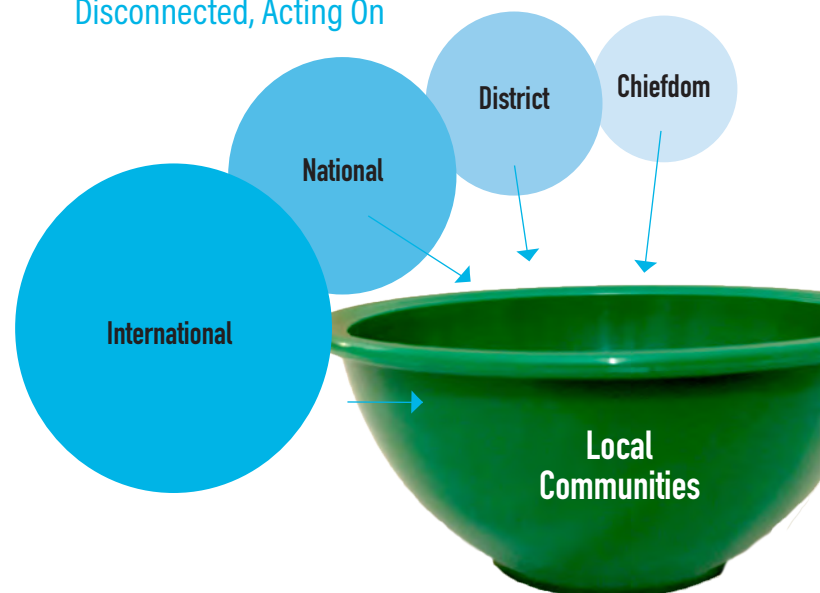
The role of the bowl within (the ‘insider’) is to draw together in honest conversation with peers about needs, goals, challenges, desires, even when that means having ‘frank talk’ about difficult things; to name and claim their own agenda, and to work together to achieve it.

The role of an external ‘bowl’ (the ‘outsider’) is to hold the space to see, invite and magnify the voice, leadership and capacity of the level within. Creating channels to share learning from ‘within’ to the next level ‘without’ ensures the ongoing flow from the inside out.

The process by which the external levels invite, support and magnify others’ capacity is what CFP calls *accompaniment*.

OUTSIDE-IN

Disconnected, Acting On



INSIDE OUT

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





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