

## MMYDA – The Malal-Mara Youth Development Association



### History

MMYDA (*pictured above*) were established in 2000 whilst Sierra Leone was in the latter stages of a devastating, decade long civil war. The region in which MMYDA operates was a stronghold for the rebel militias which perpetrated untold violence and carnage upon the local population during that period. Thankfully, Sierra Leone is now at peace but the legacy of the war lives on and the population who were largely affected by the violence (then only teenagers) are now young adults and it is this population that are still clearly traumatised.

MMYDA is a community-based action group with about 100 members and 1000 beneficiaries. When projects are being funded (usually by external organisations like Village Aid) around seven executive members are able to draw salaries whilst around 30 facilitators are paid part time for their working supporting community group's learning and farming activities. When MMYDA's work is not being funded the members contribute 2,000 Leones (40p) a month to its operation. This membership provides many benefits but mostly it's about cooperation and mutual support. If a member falls ill the rest of the group ensures that they receive appropriate treatment and pay for medical costs. Members can also take small loans from MMYDA to set up small scale business enterprises such as village provision shops, goats/sheep fattening and group farms.



This membership is drawn from MMYDA's beneficiaries and does not exclude people who cannot afford their fees. Whether MMYDA are being externally funded or not they still offer free literacy training and deliver development programmes to around 1000 individuals in 30 communities.

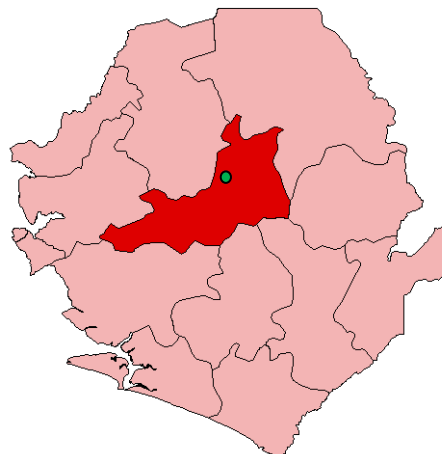
Village Aid has worked in Sierra Leone for nearly 20 years. Our approach of supporting grassroots partners means we always work through already established organisations populated by individuals who better understand the issues and cultural differences relevant to overcoming development challenges.

A really important factor that needs to be understood by anyone involved in community work in Sierra Leone is that the country and its population are still in a state of recovery. Village Aid has been moved by the resolve of local people to put the troubles behind them and move on. Everyone we meet and work with wants to progress, to develop and to live healthier, happier and more fulfilled lives.

## Geography and Demographic

MMYDA are based in a village called Malal-Mara within a district of Sierra Leone called Tonkolili (much like a UK county or national park in size). The Tonkolili district is landlocked and makes up just below 10% of Sierra Leone's land mass. It is situated in the centre of the country (*see picture below*). Tonkolili has an estimated population of 370,000 people with the vast majority of these being subsistence farmers.

The local economy of Tonkolili is 70% agricultural with people selling vegetable crops and livestock at local markets. Very little is produced within Tonkolili for the international market but recently large deposits of iron ore have been discovered which has led to government investment in the antiquated rail network and a degree of economic input from external parties looking to take advantage of this wealth.



*Tonkolili district is highlighted in red with Mala-Mara represented by the green dot*

## Programme Delivery

As a small, locally based organisation serving the Tonkolili District and villages within the Malal-Mara chiefdom, MMYDA deliver the following development activities:

- **Reflect Literacy** workshops and numeracy training to 28 villages. 411 men and 305 women (716 individuals) are participating in this training. In terms of cost to Village Aid and our supporters these 716 people receive this training for around £1,000 per year. That's £1.39 per person per year.



This figure does not take into account other costs that MMYDA ensures so this figure is likely to be higher but no more than £5.00 per person per year. We feel that this represents excellent value for money. MMYDA quite literally offer people the ability to learn to read, write and practice basic maths. This opens up a host of opportunities for participants and many individuals have gone on to get better jobs, earn more money for their families and escape the grip of extreme poverty.

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- **Micro-credit lending.** Village Aid has often used micro-credit distribution in our programmes. Micro-credit loan schemes is a way of investing small amounts of money into local communities. These communities then use the money for a whole host of investment activities with the aim of growing the money and paying it back. Communities which MMYDA work with invest in the following:
    - **Rearing livestock**, particularly sheep and goats. These can be bred and sold or used for meat.



- **Farming.** Communities in Malal-Mara grow primarily vegetables and rice although they also grow cassava (a root that forms part of a staple diet for many West Africans), fruit and palm oil (oil from palm trees which is used in almost everything – cooking, cosmetics and machinery). Land purchased can also be used to grow trees for fire wood and to graze livestock on.
  - **Processing facilities.** Many of the raw products which are grown in rural communities need refining to increase their value or facilitate preservation and storage. Many communities invest micro-credit money into machinery and tools like rice millers and cassava graters. There are also examples of communities buying larger agricultural tools like tractors.
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- **Capacity Building.** MMYDA is a small community-based organisation. Their ability to deliver programmes and develop their work is reliant on their capacity to function as an organised group. Village Aid supports MMYDA by providing them with the following capacity building initiatives:
    - **Bicycles and Motorbikes.** MMYDA’s literacy workshop facilitators’ operate in very harsh environments. During the rainy season roads can often be washed away and given that MMYDA operate in very rural areas with limited transport networks this presents unique challenges. Village Aid has provided MMYDA with 20 bicycles and 1 motorbike so that facilitators can gain access to even the most isolated communities.



- **Infrastructure.** Like any other organisation, MMYDA require resources to carry out their work. They currently operate from a small office which is rented from a member of the community. This office is equipped with basic stationary and one working computer. This enables MMYDA to keep records of their work and develop strategies for further community engagement.
- **Training and developing skills.** To be an effective organisation MMYDA were given extensive training in management systems and particularly in skills allowing them to deliver the REFLECT literacy training. This training was given to many of MMYDA's facilitators by Village through funding from DFID (Department for International Development).

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## Conclusion

In 2011 Village Aid's focus on working with MMYDA directly will enable them to further grow their capacity.

With funding from the Touchstone property group based in Bath we aim to build a new office for MMYDA which will increase their capacity and scope for future growth.

This is real, grassroots development work, undertaken and led by the communities themselves. Village Aid are proud to support such organisations and the work they do to tackle the injustice of poverty and aim of making their world a better place.



*Osman O Sesay and MMYDA literacy facilitators pose under their old, damaged community centre*