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## **MEA Association**

### **Masanga Education Assistance**

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#### **Winter 2006–2007**

Last winter my husband, Michael had to pass some exams in Switzerland. Subsequently, I left for Sierra Leone by myself for three months.

Actually, I was not alone all the time because I had three sponsor women by my side for three weeks.

They were delighted to meet their godchildren and their families, to see the village and to experience the program first hand.

There have been a few deeply emotional moments on both sides.

On our arrival, all the children and their teacher were waiting for us, forming a double line on each side of the road from the Muslim school all the way to the village for more than 500 meters. They were singing and playing traditional instruments. I was so moved that tears were running. I will never get used to it. These kids who know how to laugh and to get one's kicks on any occasion are just too beautiful.

The girls performed their dances for us, surrounded by all the villagers. An unforgettable show!

To thank us we received live chickens and plenty of fruit. It was the season for coconuts, grapefruit and bananas. We found a few tangerines and a typical fruit from the land.

We slept in the hospital's guest house situated on a shadowy hill. It was quite nice because it was cooler there and very calm which we appreciated after having been submerged in the crowd.

We spent the last days on the seashore taking four children with us. They had never seen the town, the multi story houses, a bath room, so many cars and the infinite sea with its tides. It became a real expedition in which we had to teach them everything.

The sponsor women went to the airport with a helicopter and once there, it was so difficult for the children to see them fly away. All four were crying. It lasted up to the moment when they were in a hotel climbing up the stairs. It seemed never ending to them and their good mood came back.

Back in the village I had more time to walk around, meet people, learn a few words of Temene, the local language and to get information about their traditions.

While I was gathering information about excision, one of the girls thought that excision is prescribed in the Koran. I stated the opposite proposing that she should read and find the chapter about this subject. One of the imams put his daughter in our program which means that excision has nothing to do with Islamic religion.

The older one is completely against it and worries about what will happen when she will give birth to girls. Her mother nearly died giving birth. She didn't want to excise her but had to yield to the other women's pressure. She is very happy that I created this program. She asked me to bring her books and as much information as possible on the theme.

Later, I gathered again with them including the high school boys. I explained that they are as much a part of this issue as the women. I also mentioned the consequences.

I stated that to be with a physically as well as psychologically healthy wife who feels pleasure is so much nicer in a couple's life. Also, the risk of becoming a widower with a baby to take care of was smaller, and that all of them together can and will have an influence on this old tradition.

After a small talk with two female students, I had a little private gathering with the twelve girls in high school. It was great to watch how, all at once, alone with me, they could open up, ask questions and give their opinion on the subject. Only one of them is not excised. She is very happy about it in spite of the judgments. It is said here that non-excised girls are prostitutes.

I could tell them that there are a lot of prostitutes in town and that they are certainly all excised.

Some people looked interested, others remained silent. What is important is to talk about it, to explain, and above all, to respect them. No one is forced, no one is judged, I just offer the possibility for another alternative.

One day a local woman living in Denmark came to the village. She was excised by force as she was visiting her native village. This remarkable woman made a wonderful movie about her story, questioning a woman performing excisions, an imam, and people passing by. We will try to show it in the village.

I also visited Mabumina. It's a charming little village of about ten houses with thatched roofs. It is in fact the cause of Masanga.

One day, the Adventists came to propose building a leprosarium in Mabumina. The villagers offered a vast stretch of land on the other side of the river. People came from the whole country for cures and some of them stayed. They built their homes and a village grew; Masanga: which means 'on the other side of the river'.

Masanga is now much more important than Mabumina which nobody remembers. The children go to school in Masanga and I enrolled a few of them in the program, including two little girls saved from excision.

I can explain the situation wide and broad, tell you all these people's stories, but it is completely different to live it on the spot. I invite you to join me to live through the adventure!