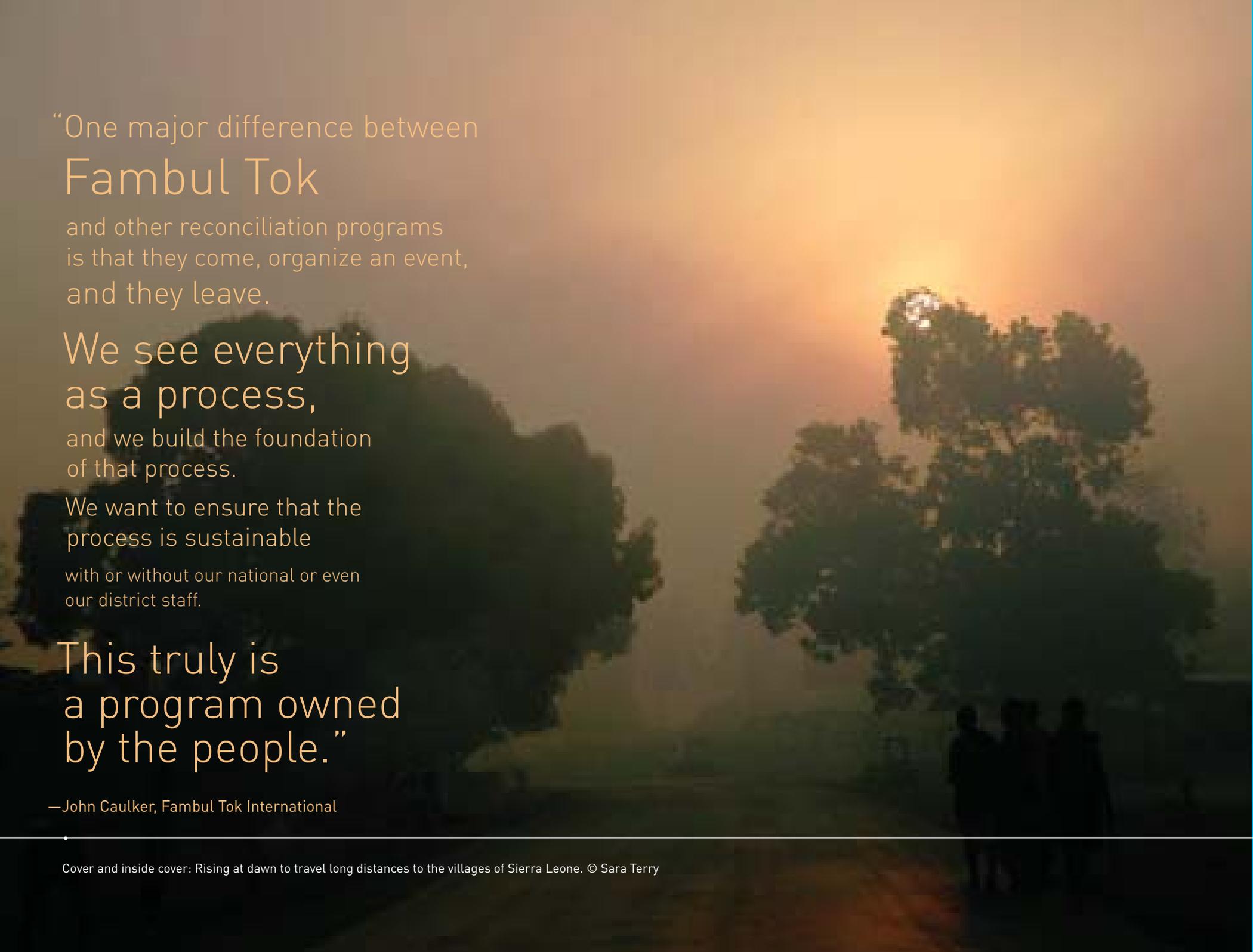


# Fambul Tok International

Community Healing in Sierra Leone and The World

OUR SECOND YEAR

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“One major difference between  
Fambul Tok

and other reconciliation programs  
is that they come, organize an event,  
and they leave.

We see everything  
as a process,

and we build the foundation  
of that process.

We want to ensure that the  
process is sustainable

with or without our national or even  
our district staff.

This truly is  
a program owned  
by the people.”

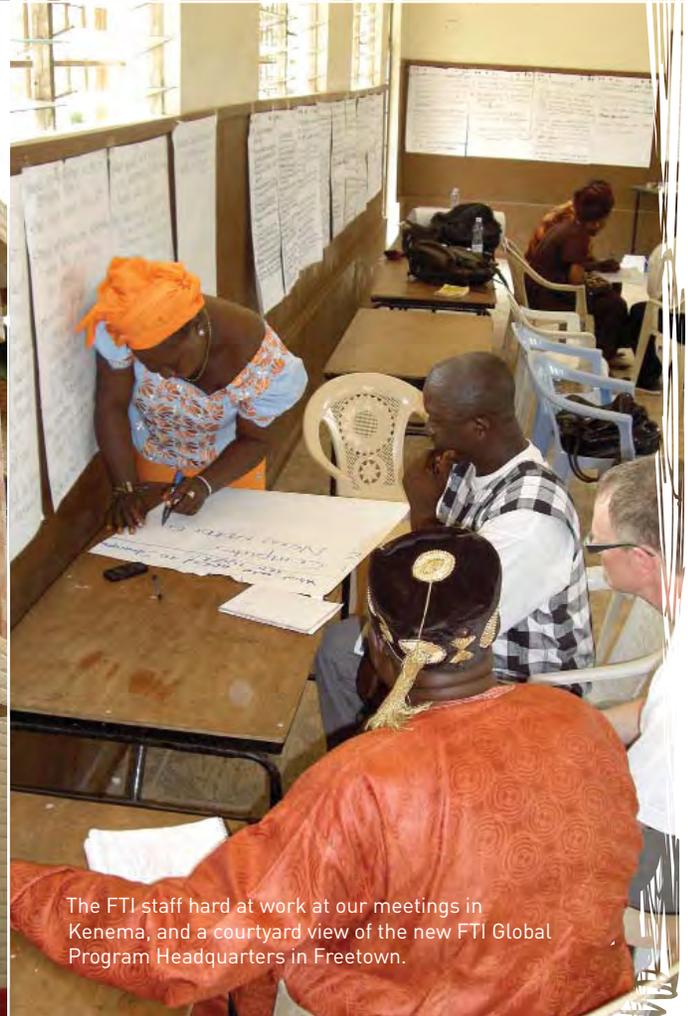
—John Caulker, Fambul Tok International



## An Introduction

For Fambul Tok, January 1, 2010, signaled more than just a new year. It signaled the deepening and broadening of our vision, as well as the expansion of the platform we're building to be able to manifest that vision. We now have a new home—and it's our own. **Fambul Tok International (FTI)** was officially incorporated as a US-registered public charity on October 5, 2009, and we began operating fully under those auspices as of January 2010.

The FTI global staff at inaugural meeting in Kenema. Front row, l to r: Joseph Vandi, Mohamed A. Jalloh, Robert Roche, Mustapha Rogers, Sheku Koroma. 2nd row: Solomon Yarjoh, Isatu Masu Sesay, Peter Mboyawa, Tamba Myamba. Reverend Emanuel Sesay, Libby Hoffman. 3rd row: Tammy Mazza, Abubakkarr Foday, Manteneh Kargbo, Tamba Bockarie, Paramount Chief Alfred Ndomawa Banya. Back row: Jon Lunn, Mohamed Feika, Michaela Ashwood, A. Tejan Kamara, Chief Maada Alpha Ndolleh, John Caulker, Tamba Kamanda, Joseph Benjie



The FTI staff hard at work at our meetings in Kenema, and a courtyard view of the new FTI Global Program Headquarters in Freetown.

## new beginnings



In January, the global staff gathered for our inaugural staff meeting in Kenema, Sierra Leone. We reflected back on the incredible progress Fambul Tok has made in its two short years, noting and celebrating our accomplishments and harvesting the lessons learned along the way. The walls of the Pastoral Center (our meeting venue) were soon covered with flip chart paper. Always conscious of how much more we want to do, this was a welcome reminder of how far we've already come.

Fambul Tok's approach to program planning (which we have called "emergent design"; see page 31) is grounded in an ongoing commitment to listening, whether it's at the local, national, or even the global level. What we heard in so many ways in this, our second, year was that there were many others around Africa and the world wanting to learn from the stories, approach, and practices of Fambul Tok. We knew we needed to rise to that challenge and opportunity. Looking at the walls

covered with the remarkable lessons from the work across Sierra Leone confirmed that we had a great deal to draw from and build upon in doing so.

We also knew we would need the full wisdom from the communities in Sierra Leone to be able to ground and guide us as we expanded our reach. Looking back on all that we had learned, we pondered the question, "*What do we want the world to learn from Fambul Tok?*"

The district staff of Sierra Leone, those most on the frontlines of the Fambul Tok work, shared what they considered to be some of Fambul Tok's most important lessons:

- ❖ People have the answers to their own problems.
- ❖ Even in the most difficult circumstances, there is always hope for reconciliation.
- ❖ Reconciliation involves ownership and full participation of the communities.
- ❖ Resources should be focused first on reconciliation before development. Community-level reconciliation is necessary so that development can take root.
- ❖ Confession, forgiveness and reconciliation can reduce trauma and stress.

- ❖ You have to have both internal and external change in order to have peace. You have to be willing to change yourself in order to help change your community.
- ❖ Without forgiveness there will be no peace.
- ❖ People can lead the reconciliation process themselves when a space is created to do that, and the process should be driven from within (individuals, communities, and country) not from the outside.
- ❖ It is critical to be nonpolitical and nonpartisan.
- ❖ Fambul Tok is Sierra Leone's gift to the world.

Honoring this wisdom is the foundation for our growth.

This Annual Report represents one step we are taking to better share some of those lessons.

Enjoy.

**John Caulker**  
Executive Director

**Libby Hoffman**  
President



## strong partnerships

Reflecting the unusual cross-continental partnership that gave birth to the Fambul Tok program, our new international nongovernmental organization will represent the same commitment to healthy African-Western partnerships in structure as well as in practice. FTI's Corporate Headquarters are in Portland, Maine (USA), and our Global Program Headquarters are in Freetown, Sierra Leone. John Caulker, who directed Fambul Tok from his former base as Executive Director of the Sierra Leonean nongovernmental human rights organization Forum of Conscience, continues to lead Fambul Tok as Executive Director of FTI. Libby Hoffman, who partnered with John from her position as President of the US foundation Catalyst for Peace, will continue her leadership role as President of FTI.

FTI President Libby Hoffman and Executive Director John Caulker, visiting a community farm in Kailahun District.



## Our Second Year in Review

Fambul Tok (Krio for “family talk”) emerged in Sierra Leone as a face-to-face community-owned program that brings together perpetrators and victims of the violence from Sierra Leone’s eleven-year civil war. They meet through ceremonies rooted in the traditions of the villages that were affected by this violence. At evening bonfire ceremonies, victims give voice to their memories and perpetrators confess. Often, they forgive one another, preparing the way for individuals and communities to forge a new future—together.

Testifiers at a Fambul Tok truth-telling bonfire in Gbekedu, Kailahun District.

“We say peace is here. But there are some people who are still at each others’ throats for what happened during the war. Now Fambul Tok is in Koinadugu District to help us reconcile, and we are ready to cooperate.”

—Amadu Conteh, Section Chief, Yagala Section, Koinadugu District

## overview

Fambul Tok is built upon Sierra Leone’s “family talk” tradition of discussing and resolving issues within the security of the family circle. The ceremonies provide people with an opportunity to come to terms with what happened during the war, to dialogue, to experience healing, and to move forward together. After hosting a ceremony, communities engage in a series of follow-up activities to deepen and build upon the reconciliation process and strengthen the community.

## highlights

Since Fambul Tok began in Sierra Leone in 2008, there have been more than 60 reconciliation ceremonies in communities across the country. 30 community farms have been established as a part of their follow-up activities.

Our work began where the war did, in the eastern province of Kailahun, and it has spread steadily out from there. At the end of 2008, we introduced Fambul Tok in Moyamba District in the south and Kono District in the east. In 2009, we expanded and strengthened our programs in these new districts and

introduced it in Koinadugu in the north. We conducted close to 40 ceremonies in our second year, including 10 in Kono District and 14 in Moyamba District. In addition, we expanded operations in Kailahun, where local Fambul Tok leaders took over more and more responsibility for the program from the national support staff. By spring 2009, Kailahun District had established its own Fambul Tok community-based organization (CBO), which already has in place a plan to support, logistically and financially, both its own work and the roll-out of Fambul Tok in other districts in Sierra Leone over the next three years.

Across Sierra Leone’s 14 districts, people have been saying, “We’ve heard about Fambul Tok. How can we bring it here?” We anticipate rolling it out in two additional districts in 2010, and hope to be covering the entire country by 2012.

“Many people have talked about reconciliation by mere words without action, but Fambul Tok’s process is real. It brings people together.”

—Pastor Emanuel Sesay, Chairman, Koinadugu District Executive



Women welcoming Fambul Tok for a community meeting, Kenewa village, Kailahun District.



Walking to the community farm in Motonkoh village, Moyamba District.

## the journey toward reconciliation

### a process, not an event

Though the bonfires and cleansing ceremonies are the focal points of Fambul Tok's engagement with communities in Sierra Leone, the Fambul Tok approach—its community-building methodology—is as crucial to its success and sustainability as the bonfires themselves. We work to reweave the social fabric of communities by mobilizing community members to design and run their own healing processes. This approach takes much more time than typical host-an-event-and-leave approaches. In the end, the impact is much deeper, more widespread, and the process becomes sustainable for the communities themselves.

Though the focus is on long-term results, even in the newest Fambul Tok villages there is already evidence of real change. Reconciliation unites people not just at a single bonfire, but in the joys and even the banalities of ordinary, daily life. Talking about the war opens paths to cooperation, fellowship, and renewed bonds between villagers. Reconciliation makes possible more than peace; it lays a foundation for development, as envisioned and enacted by the communities themselves.

We see this especially in the 30 "peace farms" Fambul Tok communities have planted across the country. To

strengthen their renewed relationships (and also to provide an avenue for perpetrators of the violence to engage in a measure of reparations for the people and places they harmed), villagers have decided to share the work and rewards of a community farm. They clear brush, plant seeds, pull weeds, and even scare birds away together. They harvest together, and together they decide how to invest the earnings from their peace farm. In Kenewa village in Kailahun, they bought a roof for their community barrie, a public meeting space. In Bandasuma village in Kono, they put some of the income toward building a covered market to protect the women who sell the town's produce from sun and rain. In Madina village, also in Kailahun District, they are buying cement to build a barrie.

Each of these villages, and hundreds of others, is doing more than earning extra income. With every decision they make as a community, every project they implement, they are imagining a shared future. Empowered by Fambul Tok to take control of their community's needs, villages are setting new agendas. From buying a rice machine to sending more children to school, they are articulating their needs and desires—in their own time and on their terms—and they are making their vision a reality.

“In my village, before Fambul Tok, they had many associations, and these associations were far apart. I even found it difficult to bring them on board to work for the community. But when Fambul Tok entered and did their ceremonies and encouraged them to make a community farm, most of these associations were dissolved into one body. They made a big farm. This situation which I failed to handle, Fambul Tok did it for me!”

—Chief Alfred Ndomawa Banya, Paramount Chief of Kongbora Chiefdom and District Chairman of Fambul Tok, Moyamba District



Community members gather at their community farm in Motonkoh village, Moyamba District.



## Rebuilding Communities

Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war scarred people and communities. When the violence finally ended in 2002, tens of thousands of people had been killed; tens of thousands of women raped; and villages across the country had been burned to the ground, displacing over two million people—one third of the country's total population. As weary refugees returned to their homes, they quickly learned that little had survived—not their farms, not their houses, and often not their family members.

Ruins from the war in Koindu town, a once thriving market center in Kailahun District, near the borders of Guinea and Liberia.

## ravaged communities ...

Perpetrators of violence, too, went back. With amnesty from the new government, they went unpunished, returning often to the very villages they had terrorized. Soon, victims and perpetrators were living side by side in mutual suspicion.

With memories of violence dividing village after village, Sierra Leone became a land of broken communities. Neighbors did not help one another on their farms; youth quarreled with elders; villagers ignored their town chiefs. The very structure of grassroots social and political life was eroded by the anger, fear, and trauma the war had left behind.

Today, that's beginning to change.

## ... becoming whole again

Across Sierra Leone, Fambul Tok villages are building and rebuilding communities. Individual villages rebuild relationships that existed before the war—restoring trust between neighbors and former friends, even between those who committed violence against each other. With trust restored, villagers are once more embracing community life. Before Fambul Tok, most

“Before Fambul Tok, there was constant animosity between us. We feared one another. We were not even allowing the people to get near us. If the person is coming your way, you change direction. If you have malaria, or if you have a naming ceremony—nothing, he doesn't even go there. The perpetrator would not allow his own children or family to mix with mine. If he drinks from a cup, and it's passed to me, I will not drink from it. If he comes to the counter while I am at the shop, I prefer to change shops than to buy next to him. That would have continued for so long, without the Fambul Tok approach.”

—George Sambayo, Bandasuma village, Fiama chiefdom, Kono District

people would not come to community meetings; mistrust made it impossible for people to meet or even to greet one another on the road. Today, chiefs across the country say that people come when a meeting is called.

These are the first steps toward building a shared future.

Many new relationships are also being built among communities with the help of Fambul Tok. In Sierra Leone, people are organized into sections, administrative units made up of roughly a dozen or more villages. Fambul Tok works to build cooperation at the sectional level, linking villages with one another for ceremonies and follow-up activities. Whether restored or newly built, these relationships are always forged in ways that are community owned and locally

driven. This is a welcome new development notes Chief Sahr Abu Ngauja of Bandasuma village in Kono:

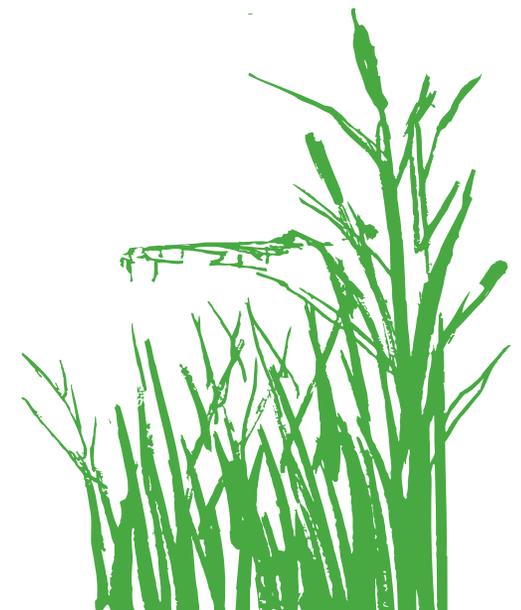
“Before the war, there was cooperation, but not to such an extent as now. Maybe two villages would come together and brush the roads. Now, after our bonfire here, the whole section comes together. We built a community market—16 villages were involved in that work. Now it is far better than before the war.”

There are multiple incentives for renewing good relations. In peaceful villages neighbors can work together, as many have, on community farms known as Fambul Tok farms or peace farms. But they can also dance together, laugh together, and grow together. As Kailahun town Chief Maada Alpha

Ndolleh, who also chairs the Fambul Tok District Executive in Kailahun District, puts it: “They can travel in the night without any harassment or crime. They are free to go anywhere. They can dance. That alone can help them forgive each other.”

“When we work individually, what we do will be very small. When we are many, we can do something great.”

—Bockarie Swarray, Town Chief, Kenewa village, Luawa Chiefdom, Kailahun District



## Madina Village

Malema Chiefdom, Kailahun District

Forgiveness is literally visible in Madina, a small community in rural Kailahun District. Here, villagers have used the renewed trust in one another and the spirit of cooperation that followed their ceremony to make improvements in their village. Following the Fambul Tok consultation model, they debated how best to symbolize their communal peace. They decided to build a four-room guest house with a zinc metal roof—a palace by the standards of rural Sierra Leone—to show strangers that they are united in hospitality, an important cultural virtue. The guest house fills every villager in Madina with pride.



Building the guest house in Madina.

“I was not happy. Thanks to Fambul Tok, I told my story and now I feel relieved.

The pain has less in my heart. In fact, this is not my own village. I lost my husband during the war. I stay with his family here. Since Fambul Tok, I'm gradually relieved of the pain of the memory of my husband. And because of togetherness and the peace here, I have decided to come back and reside in this place, even though it is not my home.”

—Gbessay Sheku, Kenewa village, Luawa chiefdom, Kailahun District



## Kenewa Village

Luawa Chiefdom, Kailahun District

This community's next project is the barrie or gathering place. After agreeing on the project, they brainstormed about how to fund it. They decided to divide themselves into small work groups. Following a full day of hard work on their own farms, the work groups visited other villages, plowing and weeding and harvesting until their collective earnings were large enough to purchase the most important part of any barrie: a corrugated metal roof

made of zinc. One season of hard work allowed them to buy nine bundles of the expensive roofing, a purchase that symbolized their community's sacrifice for peace. “We have come together as a community to start this development ourselves,” says villager Lamin Swaray. “If you want to believe it, go see the rice we harvested. Go see the zinc.”

Kenewa illustrates peace in small ways, too. When a man injured himself

with his cutlass while brushing the community peace farm, the villagers came together and took him several kilometers to the hospital. They even donated funds to pay for his medical expenses, affirming that because he was injured while working for the community, the community wanted to unite in support for him.

Above: Villagers gather in Kenewa.



“Unless perpetrators and victims meet, the culture of suspicion will keep on going, and some will be nursing a grudge. They will surprise us by committing a crime against each other without us even having a forewarning. Some have still the grudge in their hearts and are looking for a way to revenge. So we are not comfortable leaving them on their own. That’s why we need to come together.”

—Chief Alfred Ndomawa Banya, Paramount Chief of Kongbora Chiefdom and District Chairman of Fambul Tok, Moyamba District

Above: Two families from Motonkoh, reunited after participating in Fambul Tok. Brothers, they hadn’t spoken since one took over the other’s house at machete-point during the war.

## Motonkoh Village

Ribbi Chiefdom, Moyamba District

Motonkoh village has proudly marked the Fambul Tok community farm with a sign. Since their bonfire in spring 2009, they’ve been working hand in hand with their neighboring villages to grow rice—a deceptively simple-sounding cooperation that signals the roots of a deeper peace. “Before the war, we never came together in the section to work,” says villager Santigie Kamara. “It was Fambul Tok that brought us together.” Today they have turned acres and acres of undeveloped swampland into a rice farm, and already have plans to expand the farm further next year. Mr. Kamara explains how the section banded together:

“After our bonfire, we held a meeting. All ten villages came together, and we took the decision to brush a field. Then we said, ‘We are supposed to help ourselves, to make a personal contribution.’ So all ten villages made a financial contribution to the farm, for the food we would eat while we worked. After working, both women and men ate together. Then the women did the clearing; the men did the plowing. After plowing, all the villages in the sections came together, and we asked, ‘What do we want to plant?’ We decided on rice.

We made the contribution again, we cooked again, and again both men and women worked and ate.”

Every step in this decision-making process represents a communal spirit of cooperation and a willingness to sacrifice for the village. A peace farm enlists additional resources across the board—time and energy for labor, food, and tools—that few impoverished villages have in abundance. Yet over and over again, villages like Motonkoh have overcome these challenges and chosen to make strides on their own behalf.

Today the Motonkoh farm is harvesting from six bushels of planted rice, every grain grown in an untouched swamp that people from across the community made productive, together, in the name of peace.





The community farm in Motonkoh.



## Restoring the Land

The reconciliation process seems to be having a direct physical impact on the land as well. In Fambul Tok communities across Sierra Leone, villagers are surprised by the same thing: Since their ceremonies, their harvests are more bountiful.

Some villages have even doubled their rice harvests.

**For the first time since before the war, Fambul Tok communities in Kailahun describe not having to buy imported rice.**

## an unexpected harvest

They believe that confessing to each other, engaging in cleansing rituals, reconnecting with the ancestors, and working to rebuild the community have improved their relationships not only with one another, but with the land as well.

The same acts of war that left scarred bodies and scarred hearts, also left behind scarred land. Whether villages were burned, homes destroyed, or fertile fields turned into mass graves, the land suffered directly from the ravages of the war. The cleansing ceremonies (the second day of the two-day Fambul Tok reconciliation ceremony) represent the first step communities are taking in repairing their relationship with their land. With acknowledgment of and apology for the atrocities having paved the way, community members describe the cleansing rituals as helping to lift off the burden of war from the land itself.

Communities today are ready to move forward in new ways with proactively restoring the land. For many villages, the first step in that restoration is a community farm, often affectionately nicknamed a “peace farm.” Fambul

“Here, we have no other means. We have to use manual labor.

So if we want to farm, we need each other.”

--George Saboya, Bandasuma village, Fiamia chiefdom, Kono District

Tok’s peace farms are truly collaborative efforts: On land one family donates to the village, men and women and even children join together to do their part. They are supported by Fambul Tok national staff and local volunteers, who offer guidance as requested. Fambul Tok International has also donated the seeds to the 30 communities that have taken the first steps toward building their community farms.

Those steps are time- and labor-intensive. Villagers brush, plow, and plant the land. They tend the crops, pulling weeds and scaring off birds. They squeeze in all of this extra work after tending their own farms or by sacrificing their Saturdays for the group.

This is no small victory. Farming is for survival in rural Sierra Leone. Every family can use a pair of extra hands and especially those that lost spouses or children during the war. “Here, we have no other means. We have to use manual labor. So if we want to farm, we need each other,” explains George Saboya of Bandasuma village in Kono District.

Tough as that work may be, there is real joy in a harvest. Women prepare food for everyone who heads to the fields, and together they pluck rice or unearth cassava root. And no village does this without a song. In fact, in Kunduma village in Kono District, they’ve adapted a musical prayer. As they harvested their record quantities of rice on their peace farm, voices rose in a soft chorus singing, “Fambul Tok, Fambul Tok, we thank thee.”

If the people of Kunduma sing thanks for the unity their Fambul Tok ceremony helped to bring, they also share a pride in the progress they have made for themselves. Even those who couldn’t work on the farm had a role. Ajah Markor Elbie can’t use his legs, and so he has to move around the village on his hands. But as the blacksmith of Kunduma village, he played a vital role in the peace farm. “Though I cannot work on the farm, I thought that I, as a blacksmith, am also part of this community. I should join them. If they don’t have cutlasses and they don’t have hoes, how can they work? So I also became part of the group, and I am very happy for that.”

“After the sacrifices, the ancestors, the dead spirits, have supported us.

And even our yields from the farms have doubled.”

--Sahr Abu Ngauja, Town Chief of Bandasuma village, Fiamia chiefdom, Kono District



Ajah Markor Elbie, the blacksmith of Kunduma village, Kono District.

## Kailahun District: extra of everything

Small booths of thatched fresh palms lined a football field near central Kailahun. Inside one of them a man displayed his woodworking wares. In another a woman sold bananas and yams. The scene repeated, as bountiful harvests from more than 40 villages in three chiefdoms (Penguia, Yawei, and Peje West) stretched across the sidelines and between the goal posts.

As soon as the rains ended, villagers from around Kailahun district gathered here, for the first annual Peace and Reconciliation Agricultural Show, conceived and planned by the district Fambul Tok Community-Based Organization. After making amends with the ancestors and one another, unified Fambul Tok villages found themselves with a surplus of not just their staple food, rice, but of almost everything they grow. “Cassava yams, cocoa yams, potatoes, bananas, pepper, pumpkins—we have extra of everything,” says

“Gradually, development is coming on. People are really coming to terms with each other now. You see victims and perpetrators coming together and forming groups, going into communities, making farms. These people were far apart. They were pointing fingers: ‘It’s you who did this. It’s you who did that.’ ‘You burned my house. You killed my father.’ But now they are preaching development. They want roads to be made. ‘We want a community center, we want jobs!’ They are not talking about ‘We want you to incriminate these guys!’ They’re talking about coming together and rebuilding their communities and the district as a whole. This shows there is light at the end of the tunnel.”

—James Fallah, journalist, Kailahun District

Musu Swarray, treasurer of the show’s organizing committee.

The show was both sale and celebration. Village devils danced across the field, bells ringing and drums pounding. Women choreographed dances, making grand musical entrances village by village during the opening ceremonies. And the youth celebrated their role

in agriculture, growing a special new kind of cassava nicknamed UPOCA, an acronym for “Unleashing the Power of Cassava in Africa.” The improved root grows longer and plumper than before, making it possible to feed even more people with each tuber.

Every vegetable for sale at the Kailahun Agricultural Festival symbol-

izes Fambul Tok. Simply hearing the truth about the war has opened new pathways to cooperation and with it, prosperity. “Knowing the stories helps people work in unity. Instead of holding grudges, we can work together for development,” believes Hawa Wurie, chairlady of the organizing committee.

“All of the villages have enough food now. When you go to these communities you refuse. They will give you food as if you are twenty people!”

—Chief Maada Alpha Ndolleh, Town Chief of Kailahun and District Chairman of Fambul Tok, K



s, you can eat until

Kailahun District



A 'bush devil' in a traditional welcome dance at the reconciliation ceremony in Bulowma village in Kailahun District.



## Renewing Tradition

It would be impossible to run Fambul Tok without incorporating culture. In Sierra Leone, the importance of culture for reconciliation is simply a given. In consultations community leaders immediately suggest the use of cultural resources—bonfires, singing, dancing, and communing with the ancestors—to take the first steps toward reconciliation.

**Indeed, some of the most telling symbols of reconciliation are cultural.**

Pouring libations to the ancestors at the cleansing ceremony in Kongonanie village, Kailahun District.



Pouring libations and preparing the gift to the ancestors in Ndaabu, in Kailahun.

“The ancestors were very angry with us. They were neglected. Now they’re happy because we paid them some respect. With Fambul Tok, we learned the value of the ancestors.”

—Backarie Swarray, Town Chief, Kenewa village, Luawa chiefdom, Kailahun District

### a rich cultural heritage

In Sierra Leone, a guest house is more than a place for a stranger to stay. It is a community’s gesture of welcome, a sign that shows the village is at peace, the stranger there safe and cared for.

Even something so simple as a greeting carries heavy importance here. To pass a person without greeting them suggests mistrust and discomfort, and that unease can spread across the entire village. When victims and offenders say that they now greet each other on the street, they are explaining the restoration of a deeply important, if ordinary, ritual that symbolizes peacefulness within their community.

Fambul Tok believes that this rich cultural heritage is a resource Sierra Leoneans can use to foster a secure peace. This is a marked departure from the experiences of many villagers who have watched for generations as outsiders offer to “improve” their culture with new influences. Fambul Tok works from the inside out, revealing the power communities have within themselves and restoring their rightful pride in their traditions.

One of those traditions has been dormant since the war. Many Sierra Leoneans believe the dead live in the land—in the river banks or rocks or forests across the country. For hundreds of years they courted their ancestors’ support and approval with visits and offerings. The war ruptured that relationship, and for years the ancestors lay unnoticed. The ceremony that often follows a Fambul Tok bonfire reconnects villagers to their ancestors and to the heritage these rituals represent.

Reconciliation cannot be accomplished in a single evening. Following the Fambul Tok ceremonies, villages maintain reconciliation committees. These committees mediate the kinds of small disputes—sometimes referred to colloquially as “palavas”—that come up among neighbors anywhere in the world. Often disputes are settled beneath a peace tree—some communities call it their Fambul Tok tree. The unhappy parties meet with the reconciliation committee in the open air, speaking freely to overcome their grievances.

“In America, you don’t have such a tradition. It’s very strange to you, to talk to your ancestors or to talk to the dead. Here, it’s part of our values. After the harvest, we cook and give an offering to the ancestors. We tell them, ‘We have harvested, we have some rice, and we’re well. We give you this food to give us more food and take care of our children.’ It’s part of our own tradition. And after such sacrifices, sometimes some of our ancestors reveal themselves to us in dreams. They tell us, ‘We have received what you have given us and we appreciate it.’”

—George Sanboya, Kenewa village, Luawa chiefdom, Kailahun District

These reconciliation committees mark a welcome adaptation of tradition. Before the war resolving grievances required money. An angry party went to the chief, accused his wrongdoer, and asked the chief to resolve the dispute. He paid the chief a small sum, and the accused was summoned. If the chief found the accused to be in the wrong, he fined him, often for an amount far more than he could afford. The accused, shamed, would be forced to leave his community.

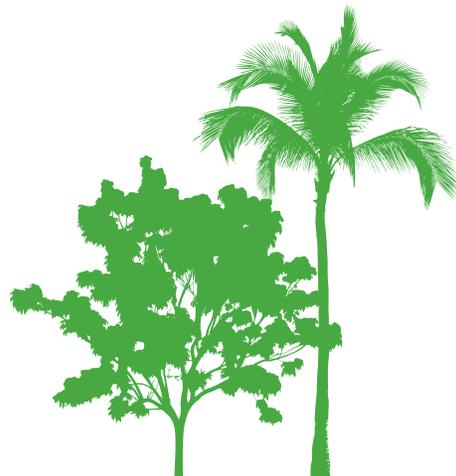
Eventually, this system of fines felt to many like extortion. When the war brought an opportunity for angry young men who had fled fines to join a rebel group, many took up weapons and fought their way back home. As FTI Executive Director John Caulker explains, "This is why the first attack on a village was often an attack on the chief. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified this as one of the root causes of the conflict."

When the reconciliation committee tackles a dispute, no money changes hands as a rule. That's allowed these committees to resolve petty grievances before they turn into life-long grudges. It's a method that emerged as Fambul Tok listened closely to the communities where it works.

"We have some palavas, we went to Kailahun town, but now we resolve it here in our community. We ask the chief so that we can come together and resolve this palava for ourselves.

That alone is a very big thing!"

—Joseph Cowan, Kenewa village, Luawa chiefdom, Kailahun District



Dancers begin a Fambul Tok ceremony in Kongonanie, Kailahun District.



## Core Elements

Highlights of some of the core elements of the Fambul Tok process, including:

**Our values**—these underlie everything we do.

**Our community building process**—the nuts and bolts of how it works.

**Leadership**—what it takes to lead in community-owned reconciliation.

**Emergent Design**—how we allow our program design to respond to what we're learning, and how this has helped us specifically to better meet **women's unique needs**.

Documentation Manager Sheku Koroma facilitates a community consultation in Koinadugu.



Stakeholders from across Koinadugu District meet for their district consultation.

core elements:  
our values

**Fambul Tok is committed to:**

**Being nonpolitical and nonpartisan**

**Meeting people in their communities to listen and learn**

**Walking with communities to find their own answers**

**Respect for and revival of traditions and culture**

**Total community participation and ownership**

**Transparency and accountability in relationship and activities**

**Honesty and respect for all people**

**Sharing experiences, stories and lessons learned**

**Restoration of dignity and the right to truth**

## the nuts and bolts of how it works

“It takes a lot of skill to get people together. You don’t go in and make yourself a boss. You cannot do it in a harsh way. You want to know their likes and dislikes, to get to know them, to make yourself very simple, and then you will be accepted. The moment they accept you, they will talk freely. And whether it takes two or three days, Fambul Tok will be there to make sure somebody starts talking.”

—Alfred Ndomawa Banya, Paramount Chief, Kongbora chiefdom, and District Chairman, Fambul Tok, Moyamba District

The first step of any Fambul Tok process is a **consultation**. Sierra Leone has 14 districts, similar to states or provinces, around which Fambul Tok organizes its work. The Fambul Tok national staff gathers stakeholders (male and female) from each chiefdom in the district to discuss whether communities are ready to reconcile and if so, how they want to go about it.

When ready to go forward, the stakeholders elect a **District Executive (DE)**, an all-volunteer group drawn from across the district that will oversee the Fambul Tok program. A **District Coordinator (DC) and two assistants** are recruited as staff to serve as the engine for the process, working in close partnership with the District Executive. These two groups receive extensive training in the Fambul Tok values and

process, as well as in reconciliation, mediation, and trauma healing.

They begin working immediately at the grassroots “sectional” level. A section is a collection of usually 5 to 10 villages. A series of initial sectional meetings leads to identifying the communities most ready to engage in Fambul Tok.

Once a section is identified, the DC and DE work with them to identify **Outreach Committee (OC)** members from their section: local youth and other community members who can serve as the chief community educators about Fambul Tok. **Reconciliation Committee (RC)** members are also identified at the sectional level, representing a cross section of community leaders, including imams, priests, Mommy Queens (women leaders), and youth leaders,

etc. The RC can help mediate conflicts that might arise throughout the process, or provide special support and guidance to their community members as they work through the unhealed wounds of the war.

Both OC and RC members receive training, and then they begin the work of sensitizing the villages in the section and assisting them in preparing for the bonfire and cleansing ceremonies.

After the ceremonies, national and district staff meet with the communities to determine the **follow-up activities** they want to pursue, including establishing peace trees as a gathering spot and a space for addressing conflicts and challenges as they arise in the future; forming radio listening clubs to continue to share stories of reconciliation; holding football “peace matches”; establishing women’s support groups; and planting community farms.

Throughout these follow-up activities, district and national support staff continue to visit the communities to check in with how the reconciliation process is going and provide support as needed.

The cycle is repeated in each new section, and the overall model is repeated in each new district.



## core elements: strong leadership

Good leadership is critical to the success of any program, but being a leader in Fambul Tok is altogether different.

Across Sierra Leone, there is a powerful notion of the “big man.” A big man is someone who is important, often because of his title or his wealth, and who is accorded respect based almost solely on his status in society. In Fambul Tok, men—and women—become “big” through their deeds. Fambul Tok leaders earn the respect of their communities because of their willingness to serve those communities, not because their social position or their riches attract attention. Village by village, Fambul Tok is redefining what it means to be “big.”

Earning the respect of communities requires spending time with them. From paramount chiefs to section volunteers, the men and women who make Fambul Tok happen make difficult, lengthy journeys to reach the most inaccessible locations—and then spend hours listening to villagers’ plans and visions for peace. Traditionally, being a leader has meant the people come to you. In Fambul Tok, being a leader means you are constantly going out, seeking ways to help others.

## a portrait in leadership: Chief Ndolleh

“Even though they talk, and even though they confess, the people say, ‘Chief, we are going to forgive, but we are not going to forget.’ They cannot forget. When they see something on television, or a particular date comes, they will remember. They will think about what happened. But they won’t act; they won’t take revenge. Because now they want peace.” —Chief Ndolleh

Maada Alpha Ndolleh is the town chief of Kailahun town (the capital city of Kailahun District). He is also the District Chairman for Fambul Tok in Kailahun, elected by his district to head the all-volunteer District Executive that oversees Fambul Tok there. In village after village, he has opened honest conversations about the war and helped people to reconcile. He has traveled thousands of miles and devoted hundreds of hours to helping Fambul Tok succeed in his district, where the war began and ended.

Chief Ndolleh’s early support for the program helped Fambul Tok overcome the early and natural concerns some Sierra Leoneans felt about speaking so openly about the war. “At the beginning it was not easy,” he remembers. “Some were afraid. They wouldn’t confess. They were thinking about the Special Court, thinking about a witch hunt,” he said, referring to the most common misconception that Fambul Tok faced

in its early work in Kailahun. People feared that testifying as a part of the Fambul Tok process might lead to prosecution by the Special Court. “I realized no one would be brave enough to talk unless we involved the chiefs,” he added.

That’s because the chiefs represent an older, more traditional leadership system that, in spite of the ways it was misused leading up to and during the war, villagers know and trust. The chiefs’ approval is crucial for initiatives, especially those that come from outside the village. Because Kailahun was so affected by the war, only someone with Chief Ndolleh’s stature

could have opened the way for a process like Fambul Tok to move forward. “Eighty percent of the people here are ex-combatants, including most of the youth. Most of these ex-combatants elected me. So the ex-combatants, I can preach to them,” he says. “I can tell them to confess to the victims, ask them for forgiveness, and then development will come.”

But it took even more than an explanation. Some people in Kailahun wanted a promise from the Chief: “They asked, ‘If we confess tomorrow, what will be our fate?’ I said, ‘If anything happens to you people, you say the chief was the cause.’ And they started confessing. If they see me now, they get brave enough to talk.”

Chief Ndolleh has led as much by deed as by words. Perhaps it was in his own village, Ndaabu, where his lessons became real. Before the bonfire, one fearful woman asked him if she really could and should testify. She said she wanted to accuse someone powerful of committing a wrong against her. As he had told so many others, he said to her, “Talk about what happened to you

“Talk about what happened to you during the war. If you don’t explain, whenever you are passing a perpetrator, you will get that fear in your mind. If you explain, you will feel free.”

—Chief Ndolleh

during the war. If you don't explain, whenever you are passing a perpetrator you will get that fear in your mind. If you explain, you will feel free."

So she did—and she accused Chief Ndolleh himself of stealing meat from her family during the early days of the war and of beating her husband. "I was surprised!" he remembers about when she testified. "I thought that because I was the chief, she would be afraid to talk about that." And for good reason. In day-to-day life in Sierra Leone, it's illegal for a woman to publicly accuse a chief of something. But Fambul Tok opened a space that let the two reconcile, and Chief Ndolleh became a model for the rest of his country. "It was a really good example," he says. "Now anywhere people will talk about what their chiefs did during the war."



Chief Ndolleh, District Chairman for Fambul Tok in Kailahun.



**Fambul Tok**  
COMMUNITY  
Reconciliation



Women at the district consultation in Koinadugu District.

## meeting women's unique needs

Among the most recent poignant lessons from our emergent design process has been around the importance of creating a safe space—and ongoing support—specifically for women who want to participate in the reconciliation process.

Given our value of “Total community participation and ownership,” we have structured women’s participation in every aspect of design and implementation, and in every community structure we help put in place. The transformation of social space that this has enabled is significant—yet still, as we have learned, not enough.

Thousands of women were raped or abused during the war, and they have largely born their burden in silence. Rape is a taboo subject in Sierra Leone, and many rape survivors are shunned. Yet at virtually all of the Fambul Tok bonfires, women come forward and tell the story of their sexual abuse and accuse their perpetrator, in public.

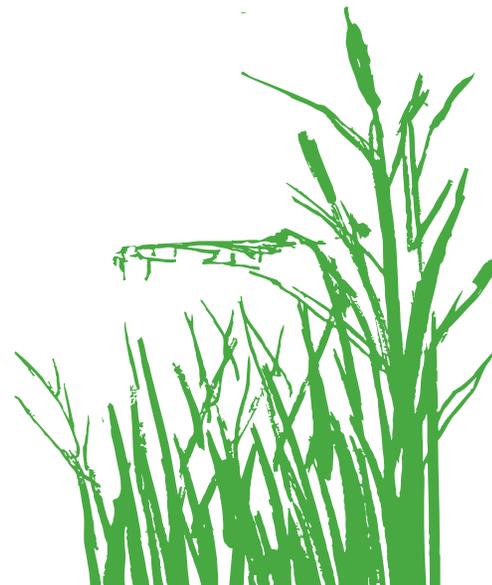
That takes an extraordinary amount of bravery. Yet in village after village, we have seen bonfires transform social space. Hierarchies disappear, and every person—from the poorest farmer

We have seen bonfires transform social space. Hierarchies disappear, and every person—from the poorest farmer to the paramount chief—is equal to the man or woman next to him. That makes it possible for women to share all kinds of unexpected stories.

to the paramount chief—is equal to the man or woman next to him. That makes it possible for women to share all kinds of unexpected stories—including, even, stories that accuse their leaders. In another context, a woman who calls out a chief in public, much less accuses him of a crime, can be thrown in jail. But Fambul Tok’s approach to reconciliation transcends even this social rule, opening space for truly honest conversation. (See Portrait in Leadership, previous page, for an example of how a woman successfully challenged a Chief.)

We have also seen that these conversations can take a toll on women. And so among villagers and members of Fambul Tok sectional and district committees, we have talked about how best to provide women with ongoing support, especially those who acknowledge they were raped or abused.

To address this issue, Fambul Tok has again put emergent design into practice. After a series of conversations with local Fambul Tok leaders, we began formal consultations with women in villages. They said that they want to start support groups, organized loosely as women’s groups rather than as rape survivors’ groups to avoid stigmatizing or discouraging members. Fambul Tok will walk with the women setting up these structures starting this year.



The willingness to learn and grow—including our own willingness—has yielded remarkable fruit.

## core elements: emergent design

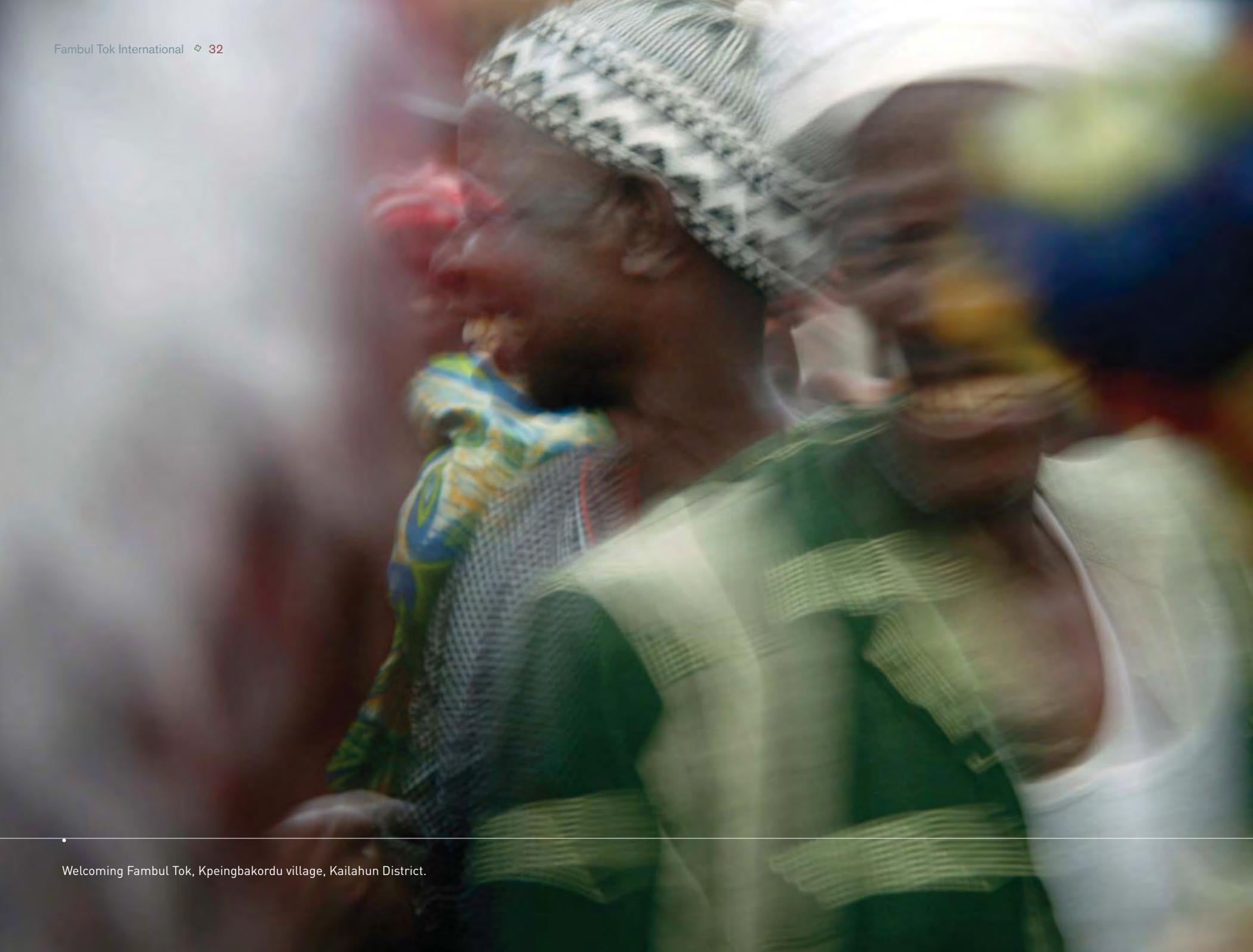
### Consultation is the heart of Fambul Tok.

From inception to implementation, Fambul Tok is organized by community leaders at local levels. Volunteers in villages do much of the heavy lifting; Fambul Tok district and national leadership advise and consult with them, helping move the program from idea to action. Along the way, Fambul Tok creates sustainable community structures that will live on past the reconciliation ceremonies. In village after village, these structures have become pillars of peace.

During the implementation phases, we place a high value on listening to community members’ perceptions about how the program is going, and if it is meeting their needs and living out its intended goals and values. Based on what we hear and see, we adapt our program and our way of working so that it better accomplishes those goals.

We call this “emergent design.”

Emergent design can make for a longer process. But we have found that allowing the program design to emerge organically in this way is key to its success and sustainability. The willingness to learn and grow—including our own willingness—has yielded remarkable fruit.



Welcoming Fambul Tok, Kpeingbakordu village, Kailahun District.

## looking ahead

We have learned so much in these first two years. That learning will continue in the coming year as our conversations become both deeper and wider. Fambul Tok has recently been called to contribute to reconciliation conversations outside of Sierra Leone, with interest and requests for consultation coming from neighboring Liberia and Guinea to countries as far away as Zimbabwe, Uganda, Cambodia, and the Philippines.

In the coming year, we will build on that interest and take the lessons of Fambul Tok to other communities. But we will also maintain our deep and sustained commitment to the reconciliation process in Sierra Leone. In 2010, we hope to begin operating in Bombali District in the north and in Pujehun District in the south. We will also work to strengthen the leadership capacity of our national and local teams so that we have the time and energy to answer the growing global call for guidance on community-based reconciliation. As we build relationships with civil soci-

Fambul Tok believes that community-led reconciliation must be the top priority for post-conflict countries. We believe this because we have seen that with reconciliation, anything is possible.

ety leaders in other countries, we will remain mindful of the same principle that makes Fambul Tok a success in Sierra Leone: walking alongside communities as they discover the manner in which they want to move reconciliation forward.

We also hope women's involvement will bloom more in the coming year. Women have told us that they want their own support groups as the way they can best speak to and support one another on any number of issues, from reconciliation to education to community health.

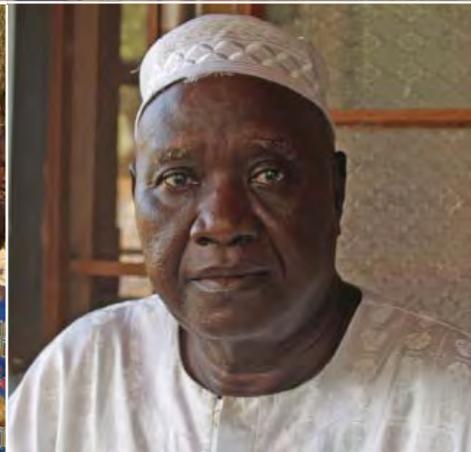
Fambul Tok believes that community-led reconciliation must be the top priority for post-conflict countries. We believe this because we have seen that with reconciliation, anything is pos-

sible. Development comes. Communities participate in civic and social life again. And creative initiatives spring up among villages as Sierra Leoneans take their future into their hands.

Together we have learned that reconciliation is the first of many steps forward. We look forward to taking more of those steps, walking with communities inside and outside Sierra Leone this year.

In the coming year, we will build on the interest and take the lessons of Fambul Tok to other communities. But we will also maintain our deep and sustained commitment to the reconciliation process in Sierra Leone.





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Clockwise from upper left: two community farms in Kono District; community consultation in Koinadugu District; welcoming Fambul Tok in Koinadugu village, Koinadugu District; winnowing rice in Kono; community consultation in Koinadugu; Paramount Chief Alfred Ndomawa Banya, District Chairman of Fambul Tok, Moyamba; children in Bomaru, Kailahun, on the one-year commemoration of the beginning of Fambul Tok; villagers in Rogboya Village in Moyamba District.

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