



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Sonie's Story 1

for New Readers



The Life of a Young Liberian Girl

**USAID'S CORE EDUCATION SKILLS
FOR LIBERIAN YOUTH PROJECT**
August 2011

Foreword

The following story has been developed through the support of USAID's Core Education Skills for Liberian Youth (CESLY) program. The USAID/CESLY project seeks to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for Liberian youth and young adults. USAID/CESLY increases access to education among Liberian youth through alternative basic education, enhances the overall quality of teaching, and collaborates with government and community organizations toward long-term sustainability of education for youth in Liberia. The project helps Liberian young people develop the skills and attitudes necessary to progress in the conventional academic system, transition into skills training or livelihoods, maintain healthy lifestyles and participate in their communities.

One of the key focus areas of the USAID/CESLY project is the promotion a culture of reading among youth in Liberia. When reading skills are strengthened, performance in all content areas are likely to improve.

Currently, a great scarcity of locally produced materials in schools leading to a high level of over dependency on educational materials used by

learners that are externally produced and lack local orientation and context. These are therefore difficult for facilitators and learners to understand and practicalize. Or more commonly, there is little to read-- so most often, people don't read. In occasional cases, where reading is done, learners memorize the same book and recite it over and over again. This does not develop their ability to comprehend, analyze and think critically. In response to this need, the mini-series on the life of Sonie was commissioned by the USAID/CESLY project.

The author of the following story is Saah Millimono. Saah is a youth who is physically challenged, in that he is not able to speak or to hear, but he expresses his ideas through creative writing. This clearly manifests that disability does not mean inability. He serves as an example for other Liberian youth benefit from role models who inspire them to overcome challenges. His ideas have resulted in a mini-series of chapters about the life of Sonie, a young Liberian girl who is faced with many challenges in life but takes the courage to confront and rise above each of these challenges in a positive way to transform her life and community.

The themes highlighted in this book center around themes covered in the life skills and work readiness components of the alternative basic education

curriculum. Some issues include: HIV/AIDS, community service, hygiene and sanitation, preserving the natural environment, combating malaria, preventing teen pregnancy, gender equality, peaceful resolution of conflict, acquisition of work readiness skills, pursuit of education and many more topics.

This story is intended to be used in conjunction with the Alternative Basic Education Curriculum. The story can be used to support in-class work or reading outside the classroom. The story can also be used to generate project ideas and service learning activities so that what learners acquired in the classroom can be put into practice to help improve their community. The adaptation of this current story is specifically designed for use in a classroom with learners who are just becoming literate.

Those who use this story in the classroom may also choose to use it to practice the basic components of reading (such as phonemic awareness, decoding and word recognition, vocabulary, oral reading fluency, comprehension, analysis and critical thinking).

The register of English spoken in Liberia differs quite substantially from the register of English used in standard written documents. Learners have often found it very challenging to understand or correctly employ the phonetics, grammar and vocabulary

found in documents in standard English register. The stories can be used with speakers of the Liberian variant of English to explore, differentiate and learn to employ the different spoken and written registers of English in use in Liberia. The stories are intended to provide content that will allow one to hear simple English used in a standard written format.

The story can also be used to stimulate critical thinking, produce generative themes, and raise issues that make students want to turn the page. After reading a story, a facilitator may want to discuss with learners, “Why did the story end this way? What happened next? What led to this outcome? What would you have done if you were in the story? Could things have turned out another way?” Critical thinking around the themes in the story can be developed either in oral discussion or in written follow up.

Equally important to the creation of a culture of reading is a culture of writing. Writing cannot be separated from the act of reading. Indeed, writing is what helps new readers practice and internalize new skills. In order to promote a culture of writing, learners may be encouraged to write new conclusions or following chapters to the story contained in this publication. Facilitators can also develop questions that learners respond to in writing. Learners can express their thoughts through

simple sketch, drawing, song, role play or any creative way. This story should inspire teachers and educators to work with students and encourage students to create their own original stories.

This story has been adapted from Saah Millimono's original Sonie Story 1, into a simplified version, specifically for using with newly literate learners. The adaptation of this story was completed by Marilyn Gillespie.

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Sonie's Story 1

For New Readers

1

Sonie lives in a village
in Voinjama.

She is 16.

She lives with her Mama and her Papa.

She has a brother.

His name is Sarkor.

Sonie works with her Mama and Papa.

She grows rice and yam.

She lives in a hut.

One day Mama says,

“The chief wants to marry you.”

Sonie's Papa and Mama want her
to marry the chief.

They say she will have a good life with the chief.

Sonie is sad.

She does not want to
marry
the chief.

He is 65 and Sonie is 16.

And he has two wives.

So Sonie runs away.
She goes to Monrovia.

Think about it

- 1. Why do Sonie's Mama and Papa say she will have a good life with the chief?*
- 2. Should a Mama and Papa say who their girl marries?*
- 3. What would you do if you were Sonie?*



2

Sonie goes to Monrovia.
Monrovia is a big city.
She lives with her aunt Deddeh.
Sonie's aunt wants her
to go to school.
But Sonie has no money.

Sonie gets a job.
She sells small things
in the market.

One day Sonie's aunt
gives her money
to buy a small thing in the market.
Sonie buys it.
She gives the man the money.
But the man gives her back too little change.
Sonie's aunt is mad.
She says Sonie needs to learn math
so people will not cheat her.

Think about it

- 1. Why did Sonie get cheated?*
- 2. Do you know people who get cheated?*
- 3. Many people who work in the market did not go to school.
How do they learn about money?*
- 4. What can be done so people do not cheat in the market?*



3

One day Deddeh goes to the hospital.
Sonie goes to the market.
She has Deddeh's money.
She has \$3000.00
in a bag.
She goes to sleep at the market
and a man takes the bag.

Sonie's aunt comes back.
She is mad at Sonie.
She says Sonie took the money.
She says Sonie
can not live in her house.

Sonie is sad.
She sleeps on the street.
Many girls and boys sleep in the street.
She meets two girls.

The girls sleep with men.
They tell her she can get money
if she sleeps with a man.
She is alone.
No one is there
telling her the truth.

No one tells her
what can happen later.

Finally one older lady
walks by.

She tells her that
if you sleep
with a man,
you can get sick.

Sonie's friend sleeps with a man.

Her friend gets HIV.

Sonie is afraid.

She does not want to get HIV.

She says goodbye to the girls.

Think about it

- 1. Should Deddeh make Sonie go away?*
- 2. Do you see girls and boys who sleep on the street?
Why do they sleep on the street?*
- 3. How can we help boys and girls who sleep on the street?*
- 4. How can we help them not get HIV?*



4

Sonie gets a job.
She gets a house.
But her street is dirty.
Her neighbors do not clean up the street.

So Sonie cleans the street.
Sonie talks to her neighbors.
She says,
“Help me clean the street.”
One man says no.
It is not my job to clean the street.

But Sonie says all neighbors should help.
Soon people like what Sonie does.
They help Sonie.
The streets are now clean.

Think about it

- 1. Sonie was on the street. Then she got a job and a house. Tell or write a story about how she got her job and her house.*
- 2. Why is Sonie a good neighbor?*
- 3. Do you know men and women who want to help their neighbors? What do they do to help?*
- 4. What can you do to be a good neighbor?*



5

Sonie meets a man.
His name is Johnson.
Sonie lives with Mr. Johnson.
She is happy.
Johnson promises to pay for Sonie's school.

In two weeks Sonie asks,
"Can I go to school now?"
Johnson says,
"I don't have any money now."
In two months Sonie asks,
"Can I go to school now?"
But Johnson says no.
He does not keep his promise.
So Sonie goes home.

Sonie's friend also dates Mr. Johnson.

One day Sonie finds out
that her friend is pregnant.
The other girl goes to Mr. Johnson.

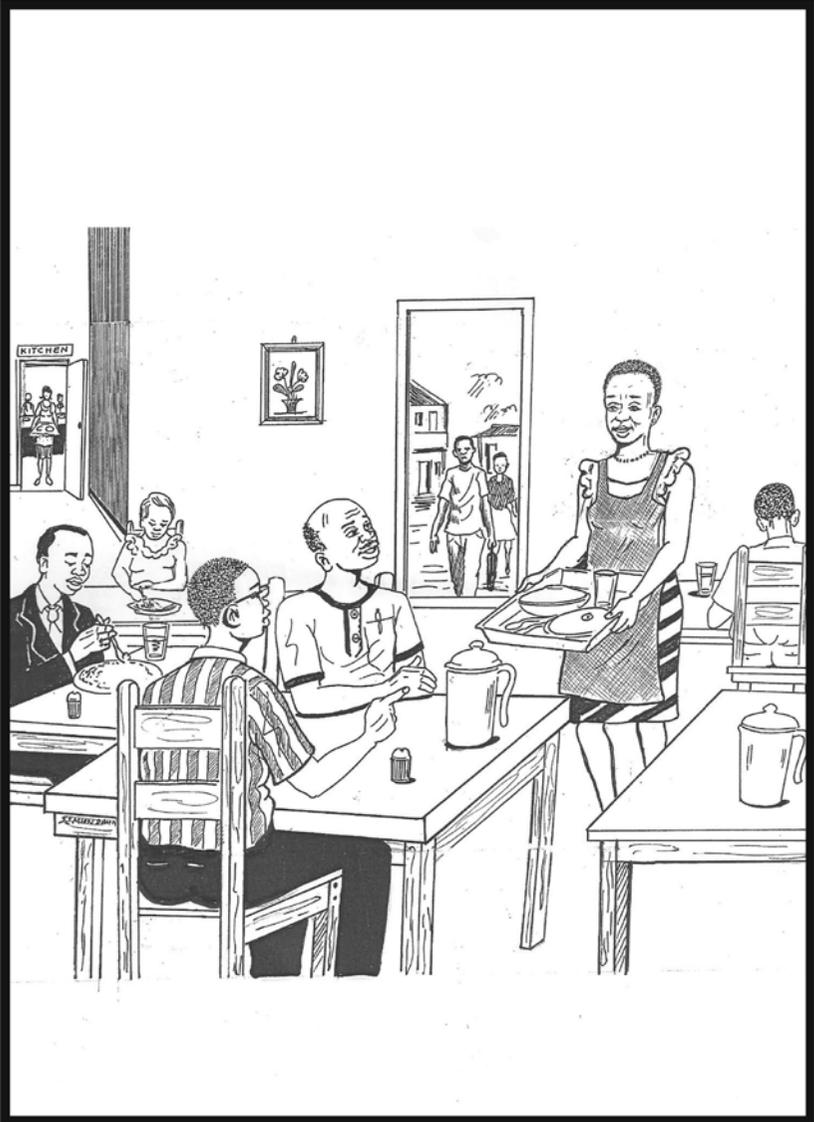
But Mr. Johnson says,
"You are a foolish girl. Go away."
She is sad.

Johnson does not come back.
Sonie is sad.
Sonie's friend is sad.
Both regret believing Mr. Johnson
and his promises.

She remembers Aunt Deddeh.
Aunt Deddeh always says
"Don't go with strange men."
The words ring
in Sonie's ears.
She is sad
She did not listen to Aunt Deddeh's words.

Think about it

- 1. Why did Johnson promise to pay for Sonie's school?*
- 2. Do you know people like Johnson who do not keep their promises?*
- 3. Should men take care of women when they get pregnant?*
- 4. What happens when people do not keep their promises?*



6

Sonie needs a job.
Sonie gets a job as a cook
in a big restaurant.
But her pay is small.

She works hard.
She helps her coworkers.
She helps people who eat in the restaurant.
She comes to work on time.
She does other extra work.
She gets the water. She does the dishes.

One day the boss gives her a raise.
She gets to be chief cook.
“Thank you,” says Sonie.
She is very happy.

Think about it

1. *What does Sonie need money for? Why?*
2. *What does Sonie do to get a raise?*
3. *Do you know a man or woman who got a raise?
What did he or she do?*
4. *What can you do to get a raise?*



7

Sonie sees her aunt every day in the market.
Sonie's aunt sees Sonie every day.
But they do not say hello.
One day Sonie decides to say hello.
"I am happy to see you," Sonie's aunt says.

Sonie asks her Aunt Deddeh to go to her house.
Sonie has a good house.
She has a video.
She has many clothes.
Sonie's aunt is proud of Sonie!

"I did not take your money.
A man took your money,"
Sonie says.
Sonie's aunt says, "I hear you."
She is sorry too.
"A family stick bends but does not break,"
she says.
"Let us make peace."
They hug.
They make peace.

Think about it

1. *What does Sonie do to make peace?*
2. *Deddeh says, "A family stick bends but does not break." What do you think? Is this true?*
3. *Did you ever get mad in your family? Did you make peace? How?*
4. *How can people make peace?*

