

Humanitarian Work in Sierra Leone

By K. Jemael Mohamed

Gloomy and demoralized faces of women and children trying to re-settle after 12 years of civil war that ravaged their country torched a lady to delve in her purse to provide help.

Mrs. Josephine Smits has embarked on the construction of a primary school in the Village of Dia, Kissi Kama District, and Kailahun Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. She sees the initiatives as a beginning of a humanitarian challenge to improve the lives of a deprived population in the rural areas of Sierra Leone.

In the summer of 2002, Josephine Smits was in Sierra Leone on holidays. While in the countryside, she was greeted with howls of agitated and frustrated Sierra Leoneans that barely receive relief assistance. Upon return to the Netherlands, she salvaged from her meagre resources to start something for the people in Dia Village under a support group called 'Stichting Wanda' meaning 'the people' in Kissi - one of the vernaculars spoken in Sierra Leone.

A full-time employee and a profes-

sional mechanic, she does not want to create the impression of someone able to solve the problems of rural Sierra Leone. "I'm just a poor lady who wants to see the lives of her people improved" Mrs. Smits pointed out.

A married mother of one, she is deeply infused with a sense of community. She is determined to work with innovated community in the rural parts of Sierra Leone on socio-economic programmes. Mrs. Smits' biggest challenge is finding support for her initiated projects. "We have been making contacts for help, but nothing seems

to be forth coming, but we are not discouraged to move on" she lamented.

Her support group plans to embark on public hygiene improvement, vocational training for women and healthcare projects. Mrs. Smits, the Founder and General Chairperson of Wanda Foundation came in the Netherlands 11 years ago from Sierra Leone. She has contributed to several support group projects intended for Sierra Leone and other troubled spots in Africa.

Stichting Wanda has a staff of three in the Netherlands operating from

Valkenswaard, nine kilometres outside Eindhoven. The foundation is also represented in Sierra Leone by a country coordinator, Mr. Sahr Nganyanga.



• Children in class