

MISSION REPORT

SIERRA LEONE

MAY 8-12, 2023



Swiss⁺ABILITY

A MEMORABLE MISSION!

One week: one exceptional international team; eleven trained orthopedic technicians; fourteen new prostheses created; another eight in production.

After three years experience of the team in the country, SwissABILITY embarks on its first mission to Sierra Leone with a triple impact: the training of local orthopedic technicians; the donation of prostheses to amputees in urgent need, and the planning of future projects.

The mission team consisted of the Executive Director, the Vice President, the Program Manager, a photographer and two orthopedic technician trainers: 11 orthopedic technicians participated in the training. Working with our local partners – the National Rehabilitation Center (NRC) and the Single Leg Amputee Sport Association (SLASA) – we delivered training focused on the development of orthopedic technologies appropriate to the African context. SLASA is a dynamic association with more than 350 members across the country and promotes the inclusion of amputees in society through football.

Despite the high number of victims of civil war, accidents, and illnesses requiring rehabilitation services, there are only five orthopedic centres in the country. There is a lack of materials for the production of prostheses and orthoses, and the staff employed lack the necessary qualifications. In fact, only one technician in the whole country has completed the full five-year training program. The other technicians have received a short training of one or three years or learned by watching their colleagues.



TRAINING THAT DELIVERS

The training took place at the National Rehabilitation Center in Freetown and was expertly conducted by the orthopedic technicians and trainers Claude Mushi and Nelson Mubiru.

This week of training resulted in restored mobility for 14 amputees. One of these had his current prosthesis repaired. Eight others were placed on a waiting list to receive a new leg with materials donated by SwissABILITY.



11 orthopedic technicians participated in the training. Nine of them are also students of the educational program with Human Study e.V. as part of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) K. Lisa Yang Center for Bionics program. It is a program which, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation of Sierra Leone, offers the opportunity to selected students to train to become orthopedic technicians. SwissABILITY has integrated its training into the program that began in March at the NRC. Trainee technicians can therefore learn new technologies and put them into practice, thanks both to the MIT program and to the theoretical lessons given by SwissABILITY trainers.

Participants in the training had the opportunity to learn, on both a theoretical and a practical level, how various types of femoral and tibial prostheses are produced, with an emphasis on the "Monolimb": an innovative low-cost prosthesis that offers advanced mobility with reduced manufacturing times. Other topics covered concerned the value of partnerships and patient diagnosis, as well as the various types of amputation and the importance of exchanging information between doctors and orthopedic technicians. This was possible thanks to the professional expertise of Dr. Julian Lair, orthopedic surgeon and Vice President of SwissABILITY.

At the end of the week there was a short exam, successfully taken and passed by all the participants, who were awarded SwissABILITY training completion certificates.



PARTICIPATING TECHNICIANS



Abdulrahman Dumbuya
NRC Freetown



James A. Fofanah
NRC Freetown



Nathaniel S. Kargbo
NRC and MIT student



Aimran Sesay
NRC and MIT student



Momoh Konneh
NRC and MIT student



Abdul J. Kamara
NRC and MIT student



Isata Lamin
MIT student



Adama C. Conteh
MIT student



Khalil Marrah
MIT student



Mohamed Komba
MIT student



Patrick Bangura
MIT student



Swiss⁺ABILITY



Ismaila Kebbie, General Manager of the National Rehabilitation Center also took part in awarding certificates to all participants.

His input was essential for the success of the mission and for the integration of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) program with SwissABILITY's orthopedic training in innovative technologies.

BENEFICIARIES



Fatmata Sesay

45 years old, transtibial amputee due to the collapse of her house on the leg



Mohamed Sheku Kamara

33 years old, transfemoral amputee due to a car accident



Kadiatu Yillah

28 years old, transfemoral amputee due to a car accident (the prosthesis is in production)



Sheku Turay

37 years old, transtibial amputee due to a car accident



Comfort J. Kamara

42 years old, transfemoral amputee due to a bicycle-taxi accident



Hawa Kamara

27 years old, transtibial amputee due to a car accident



Bashiru Sesay

8 years old, transfemoral amputee due to a congenital disease



Mohamed A. Turay

28 years old, transtibial amputee due to the shot of a bullet during the civil war



Kewullay Conteh

14 years old, transtibial amputee due to a road accident



Sorie Sesay

21 years old, transtibial amputee due to a car accident



Sahr Joseph

42 years old, transtibial amputee due to a motorcycle accident



Aruna Abdullah

33 years old, transfemoral amputee due to the shot of a bullet during the civil war



Alpha Kamara

25 years old, transfemoral amputee due to a bicycle accident (the prosthesis is in production)



Thomas Browne

60 years old, transfemoral amputee due to a car accident



COMFORT: A SURVIVOR WHO LOST A LEG, BUT NOT THE JOY OF LIVING

Comfort lost her leg in 2019 in a tragic accident while she was the passenger in a bicycle taxi that was in collision with a car. The taxi driver died instantly. Comfort survived, but her leg was completely shattered and could not be saved. From that moment on, her life changed dramatically: she thought she would never again be able to walk, work, and take care of her three children. She was depressed and was sure she could never be happy again. Fortunately, her family stood by her every step of the way. Her sister looked after her throughout her time in the hospital and her husband took care of the children and encouraged her through every stage of her recovery. "I have a wonderful husband!" she tells us, with shining eyes and a bright smile.





BASHIRU'S FIRST STEPS

Bashiru is 8 years old and lives in Bo with his family. We met him last year but couldn't give him a leg due to a tumor on his stump that had to be removed first. After the operation, we were finally able to manufacture a beautiful prosthesis for Bashiru. He had never had one before and was never able to walk on his own due to being born with a congenital disease. Now, with his new leg, Bashiru is able to take his very first steps.

He is the youngest soccer player on Bo's SLASA team and he dreams of becoming a doctor to help people in need.



ARUNA: SURVIVING THE REBELS, AMPUTEE SINCE HIS CHILDHOOD, BUT WINNING AT LIFE



Aruna was only six years old when the rebels arrived in his village during the civil war. While he was running away, he was shot in the leg and he witnessed his father's death from a gunshot to the heart. Aruna spent a week hiding in the jungle before going to the hospital. Doctors tried to heal the wound but there was nothing they could do except amputate the leg below the knee. After his surgery, he lived for five years in a child protection program promoted by Caritas, away from his mother and brothers and sisters, who were lost during the escape. Aruna's older sister is deaf and mute and was sexually abused by the rebels during the war. He searched for, and was overjoyed to be reunited with her and the rest of his family some years later. A subsequent diagnosis of bone cancer resulted in a second amputation of his leg, this time above the knee. Despite this, and thanks to Caritas, Aruna was able to continue his studies after leaving the program. He became a teacher and then a school principal. Aruna is now proud to be president of SLASA for the third consecutive term.



OUR MISSION TEAM



ROBERTO AGOSTA
Executive Director

"Seeing little Bashiru finally with his new prosthesis and delighted to take his first steps is a joy that cannot be forgotten. In Sierra Leone I met people with the most terrible stories, but also with a courageous spirit of resilience. These are life lessons for me."

JULIAN LAIR
Vice President

"This mission marked my fourth consecutive year in Sierra Leone. Seeing more and more SLASA members able to walk, work and perform their daily tasks again is an immense joy."



ALESSANDRA ARIES
Program Manager

"Comfort's story touched me deeply. It's not just about giving amputees the ability to walk again, it's about restoring hope and happiness when all seems lost!"

BEATRICE MOGNI
Volunteer and photographer

"With SwissABILITY I have seen the beneficiaries waiting, their trepidation to have a new leg and then I have seen them walk without crutches and finally be independent."



CLAUDE MUSHI
Orthopedic technician and Manager at MPOW in Mwanza, Tanzania

"After a successful week of changing lives, I am glad to have put smiles on such different faces. Needless to say, I am so grateful that we can offer such change in people's lives."

NELSON MUBIRU

Orthopedic technician and Manager at CoRSU in Kisubi, Uganda

"The training was so perfect, with all technicians working within teams and sharing knowledge, skills and abilities. All patients who attended received a limb that will change their lives forever."



THANK YOU SO MUCH

to all donors and supporters who have made
this mission possible and have contributed to restoring hope to the beneficiaries of orthopedic training