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**AMERICAN AMBASSADOR VISITS U.S.-FUNDED PROJECTS,
TOURS OUTAMBA-KILIMI NATIONAL PARK**

From January 30 – February 1, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone Michael S. Owen visited the people of Tambaka Chiefdom and project sites of the USAID-funded Sustainable and Thriving Environments for West African Regional Development (STEWARD) Program in Northern Province. Ambassador Owen was accompanied by USAID staff and members of the Sierra Leone Biodiversity Conservation Project (SLBCP), as well as representatives from the Government of Sierra Leone.

The visit underscored the Ambassador's desire to promote STEWARD's goal of combining sustainable employment with natural resource conservation. Tambaka Chiefdom, as one of STEWARD's trans-boundary program areas in West Africa, has taken part in the program for two years to improve socio-economic conditions and management of natural resources adjacent to Outamba-Kilimi National Park. Ambassador Owen emphasized the need for communities to work with STEWARD and other projects that aim to create jobs, encourage conservation and management of natural resources, and develop local communities.

During meetings and field visits at Fintonia and Sumata, local representatives shared their accomplishments in developing community forests and managing fires, as well as introducing bee keeping and improved banana propagation. They also outlined the challenges they faced and expressed an interest in deepening their partnership with STEWARD.

Ambassador Owen advised local residents to build on their successes so far: “I am convinced that many of your problems can be addressed through STEWARD ... Your participation could help to make Outamba-Kilimi National Park known and respected all over the world, while developing your own communities.”

While visiting the area, the Ambassador and his wife spent a night in Outamba-Kilimi National Park, where they viewed wild game during a boat excursion . Ambassador and Mrs. Owen also visited the sites of two U.S. Peace Corps volunteers teaching in local schools. Since his arrival in Sierra Leone in September 2010, the Ambassador has visited virtually every region of the country – emphasizing the strong and lasting bond between the U.S. and the people of Sierra Leone.

For more information on STEWARD, please see <http://www.fs.fed.us/global/globe/africa/steward.htm>.