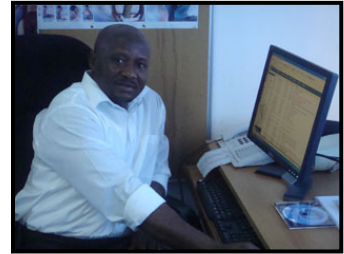


Taking the Sting Out of ICT Work!

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The common radio network system for UN agencies is now fully implemented in Liberia. But the process was not without its petty travails, like the incident in eastern Liberia which seems to be creeping its way into local telecommunications experience.

It occurred on a sultry tropical afternoon in mid July. A team of ICT specialists from WFP and UNHCR had just completed successful setup of the common radio network for UN agencies and NGOs in Zwedru in eastern Liberia and was heading for Saclepea in the north of the country to achieve a similar feat. En route, the UNHCR colleagues requested the team to make a stop in Toe Town, about 30 kilometres from Zwedru, to help them dismantle VHF antennas mounted there. The team gladly obliged.

Once on site, the team agreed that one technician each from UNHCR and WFP would mount the 35-meter tower while the rest of the team handled the ground job. Edwin Graye, the UNHCR colleague, was first to climb. Little did he know that there was a “welcome” party waiting.

Halfway up the tower, the most horrendous howl of pain bellowed from Edwin. All eyes beamed up at him with anxiety to see what was wrong. It did not take long to find out. He had been stung by a bee! A swarm of them now hovered and buzzed about his head, threatening further acts of violence.

From his sudden reflex response to the sting, Edwin’s eyeglasses -- which he cannot do without! -- flew off his face and came tumbling down to earth in free fall, while the team witnessed the fastest tower dismount of rigging history as Edwin himself ran down the tower at such lightning speed that he must have broken several Olympic records.

But Edwin was in no mood to enjoy his exploits when he came to ground. His was more a mood of relief as the team members sympathized with him on his ordeal. Meanwhile, the work still needed to be done. Unfortunately, the bees had been provoked and were now on the path of war. What could be done then?

After several minutes of consultation, looking for a work-around (either technologically or otherwise), a local villager gave the team a free lesson in the bee theory of “Attack, Retreat and Reinforce”. The theory held that after stinging, the particular breed of bee in question has to retreat into the hive for venom reinforcement before it can sting again. Destroying the hive renders the bees harmless.

After seeing what happened to Edwin and armed with the villager's bee theory, Jimmy Wewoe of WFP took the best courage of the day when he ventured up the tower with a stick and destroyed the beehive, earning himself the title of "WFP Beehive Terminator"!

The theory of the villager became fact when two technicians (one each from WFP and UNHCR) went up the tower in the company of a number of harmless bees and successfully dismantled the antennas. All this was done under the watchful eye of Edwin Graye who later gained the title of "Ground Commander" for overseeing the completion of the job from a bee-free zone on the ground!

Francis