

Hope and Homes for Children

Project SIerra Report - April – June 2008

1) Overview

Project Summary: Through *Project SIerra: A Family And A Future*, Soroptimist International (SI) will support vulnerable children in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

Project SIerra will enable vulnerable families to become self sufficient, and children to grow up in a safe family environment. It will improve the life chances of young women, and improve their ability to care for their own children and other children in their care, helping to prevent child abandonment. SI's international partner, Hope and Homes for Children, has worked in Sierra Leone since 1996, and in other countries in Africa and Central and Eastern Europe.

Project SIerra is made up of three programme elements: Integrated Child and Family Support, Children Living Alone and Young Mothers. Together these give a full package of support for the most vulnerable children, mothers and carers in one of the world's poorest countries.

While the focus of the project is on Sierra Leone, its overall impact will be much greater as it will provide a best practice model that can be replicated in other countries with similar problems.

Project SIerra: A Family And A Future will:

- Improve the health and life chances of thousands of women and children living in extreme poverty
- Promote stability and self-reliance in post-conflict society by integrating the most vulnerable children and young women into a stable family and community life
- Provide education, training and small business support to enable families to become self-sufficient and face their futures with confidence
- Build the capacity of local childcare professionals and create models of excellence

SI Programme Focus

The Quadrennial Project directly contributes to SI's recent and current Programme Focus Goals in all programme areas, and to SI's contribution towards the Millennium Development Goals.

2) Programme Reports

Programme Overview: Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS)

Locations: Bo, Mattru, Makeni, Kamakwie, Tambakha - 200 families, approximately 1,000 beneficiaries. (Bo and Mattru: 80 families. Makeni, Tambakha and Kamakwie: 120 families.)

This project targets the most vulnerable children and their families within individual communities. The aim is to strengthen families that are at risk of breakdown due to extreme poverty, illness or death of a parent. Beneficiaries are identified by working with local community leaders and organisations. The support for each family is individually tailored to that family's needs. The overall aim of this project is to work with an individual family to enable them to become self-sufficient. As one family leaves the programme a new family will join.

Update: Integrated Child and Family Support

Bo

There are currently 40 families enrolled on the programme, comprising 40 parents and 148 children. During this quarter the HANCI-SL team embarked on the following activities:

- **Community visits**

HANCI-SL staff undertook community visits in collaboration with existing Community Child Monitoring Groups. During this period visits were made to five communities. In all locations community leaders expressed their satisfaction and appreciation of how well beneficiary families were progressing. All community leaders pledged their full support to the families on the programme. Additionally, community meetings were held discussing issues such as child rights and the rights of poorer members of the community.

- **Family and school visits**

Visits were made to all beneficiary families during this period and to the schools attended by the children and young people on the programme. The team reported on the progress of one female head of household who has a physical disability. She is now engaged in petty trading in the central market at Bo and is determined to grow her business so that she can support her family. She commented to the staff that she is determined that her disability will not stop her doing things that other people do. The staff are delighted by her progress.

At the schools, social workers met with teachers to discuss punctuality, conduct, progress and behaviour. The general response was that most children and young people have made great progress during the term.

- **Medical support**

There has been a great improvement in the general health situation of the families enrolled on the project. The number of children who are treated for illnesses like malaria, diarrhoea, typhoid and tropical ulcers has dropped considerably. HIV/AIDS awareness workshops were also held in five communities in the Bo area.

Makeni

There are currently 40 families enrolled on the programme, comprising 60 adults and 127 children. During this quarter HANCI-SL staff in Makeni visited all beneficiary families and other activities included:

- **Provision of building materials**

A number of families on the project were still living in very poor accommodation. Two properties were completely renovated during this period with new roofs, windows and doors installed.

- **Land acquisition**

Two families, who were living in a former displaced persons camp in the Fullah Town community, were given notice to leave their properties as the land had been sold to a developer. Both families were extremely concerned that they would end up living on the streets. HANCI-SL staff intervened and have acquired a piece of land for both families.

Ownership of the land is currently being transferred to them and official documents are being drawn up to protect the land use for them in the future.

- **Education**

The majority of children on the programme have taken their promotional examinations. During school visits HANCI-SL staff discovered that several child beneficiaries had not been attending school. F was not attending school as her grandmother sent her out to sell agricultural produce at the market. Social workers discussed the situation with F's grandmother. They explained why F needed to go to school and helped to find an alternative way for the grandmother to sell her produce.

M is one of ten teenage mothers on Makeni's Integrated Child and Family Support project. Staff discovered that she has not been attending school as her caregiver was making her do domestic work instead. Due to this situation and other problems with her caregiver M left home and moved into a friend's house with her child. Staff have visited M's new home and have discovered that she is settled and happy. M is also now back at school and her teacher has reported that she is catching up with her classmates. In a further development with the support of a social worker, M has now been reconciled with her parents who she fell out with when she first became pregnant.

- **Small business support**

Twenty-one families received seeds and seedlings in May. HANCI-SL farm attendants have reported that all seedlings have been successfully planted and they have begun to sprout well. They feel positive that each family will have a good harvest. Unfortunately, progress with other small business ventures have not been so positive. The rising cost of food has greatly affected the small catering businesses. Moreover, all the families receiving business support reported that these increases have swallowed all of the profits they are making and there is none left over to reinvest.

- **Clothing support**

All children and young people on the programme received second hand shoes and clothing.

Tambakha and Kamakwie

There are currently 40 families enrolled on the programme in Tambakha comprising 40 adults and 120 children. In Kamakwie, there are a further 40 families totalling 131 beneficiaries.

- **Housing support**

Social workers visited families who had recently received housing support to see how things had changed for them. The Nmadama family expressed how happy they are that they no longer live in fear of their walls collapsing. The grandmother also said that she is now happy that when she dies the family will have a house where they can live safely together. The Salifu family are now living in a zinc-roofed house that doesn't leak or have damp floors. They are pleased that they have a house which is the same standard as the rest of the community. The family now feel particularly proud as they were driven out of the area during the conflict and when they eventually came back they had nothing but now feel fully integrated in their community.

In Kamakwie, the Mabinty family are delighted to be living in their own home and feel, safe and protected. Perhaps most importantly they feel that their status in the village has increased and before they felt like "non entities." Ya Mabinty commented "If any person is interested in me for

a wife he will have to move to my own family house. My children will always have a house in their native village when they grow up.”

- **Distribution of farm tools and palm oil seedlings**

In April, 22 families in Kamakwie and 23 families in Tambakha were given basic hand tools as part of the livelihood support package for farming families. Many were given cutlasses and hoes which will greatly increase their productivity. Before this distribution many families had to borrow tools from their neighbours in order to work their farms. The Yealie family were excited to receive three hoes and a cutlass. The eldest son was quick to choose one of the hoes as his own personal tool to work on their rice farm in the evenings and at the weekend. The eldest son of the Kamara family was delighted with the hoes as his younger siblings would be able to work side by side with him and he said that the cutlass would prove to be very useful when he was hunting in the bush. In Tambakha, the Mansaray family said that the gift of the tools came as a big relief as they were worried about how they were going to work on their farm.

In June, families in the Tambakha project received palm oil seedlings. It was the first time that families in this area benefited from such support as the palm oil nursery was only established a year ago. HANCI-SL staff reported that it was a remarkable occasion as families sang and danced in appreciation of the support they received. Twenty-five acres worth of palm oil seedlings were distributed to 16 families. Over the coming weeks many of the families will be erecting wire mesh around their crops to protect them from the grass cutter pest.

- **Dry Food Support**

Five families in the Kamakwie project benefited from dry food support. They each received 50 kilograms of white rice. The rice came as a surprise to many families and the gift was met with much dancing and celebration, one commented, “that it was like a wild dream come true.” The support came at a very crucial time for many families who had used up the food they harvested the previous season.

- **Home visits**

During the home visits, social workers were able assess the families’ progress and assisted families with the following issues and problems:

A young girl from Tambakha contracted a severe bout of malaria. Social workers were able to take her to a health centre in a nearby village where she received immediate medical attention. Her mother believes that without HANCI-SL’s intervention her daughter would have died.

Also in Tambakha, a young boy was bitten by a snake on the way to his rice farm. His quick thinking elder brother immediately took him to the health centre. HANCI-SL paid for his anti-venom treatment and he has now been discharged from hospital.

In Kamakwie, a four year old girl died from one of the families on the programme. The family is currently recovering from this traumatic event with the support and counselling of HANCI-SL social workers.

- **School meetings**

Social workers also attended end of year school meetings to take part in any discussions that might affect the welfare of beneficiaries on the programme. Issues that were covered included the Government’s decision to stop paying subsidies to primary schools, the idea of introducing feeding programmes which pupils will need to contribute to, and the challenges community schools were facing in paying stipends to volunteer teachers.

Matru

There are currently 40 families enrolled on the programme comprising 40 adults and 144 children. Ongoing monitoring visits have been made to all families this quarter assessing the following areas:

- **Education**

All of the children and young people attending primary and secondary school have completed the term and taken their examinations. HANCI-SL social workers pleaded the cases of two young people who missed their examinations, one due to sudden illness and the other because of a heavy storm which prevented her walking the long distance to school. Both schools agreed to let the pupils sit their examinations another time. Additionally, the five young people attending vocational training in carpentry and tailoring are progressing well and have almost completed their training. They will be graduating shortly and receiving their start-up kits.

- **Small business support**

The progress of families receiving small business support has been assessed and additional advice and materials have been provided where necessary. Families taking part in farming activities have received additional seeds and seedlings.

- **Health**

There has been a great improvement in the general health of all beneficiary families. The project nurse dealt with cases of malaria, typhoid, tropical ulcers and other minor ailments. Additionally, a number of more serious illnesses were reported including snake bite, appendicitis and a dog bite. Staff found it very difficult to locate anti-rabies drugs locally and have had to request assistance from a nearby town.

Sadly, the caregiver of one of the beneficiary families died unexpectedly. An alternative placement has been found for the children who are receiving additional support and counselling to help them at this difficult time.

Programme Overview: Children Living Alone

Location: Freetown - the project will work with up to 50 children at any one time.

The project targets the most vulnerable children who are living on the streets of Freetown. Support focuses on children between the ages of six and 12, with the aim of reunifying them with their family, extended family or wider community.

The project will help these children return home. However, reintegration into family and community life can be difficult and requires ongoing guidance and support. When they join the project the children are counseled, given access to healthcare and provided with nutritious meals. Emergency placements are available when deemed necessary. Meanwhile, the project will work with the family and community to mediate the child's safe return and assess whether the family requires extra support. Once the reunification has taken place, social workers monitor each child's progress and care.

Update: Children Living Alone

This programme operates in Wellington and Kissy in the east end of Freetown. These areas are densely populated and receive little attention from the Government or other non-governmental organizations.

There are currently 50 beneficiaries attending the centre at Kissy and they are all at different stages of the programme according to their personal circumstances; 19 beneficiaries are still living on the streets, 24 are now living back with their families and six are living with friends or in foster placements. For some of the beneficiaries living on the streets their families have been traced and staff are working through the reunification process with them. For several of the beneficiaries it has been impossible to trace their parents or extended families as we are currently arranging alternative placements.

Over the past three months much effort has been placed on improving relationships between beneficiaries and their families or caregivers through workshops, counselling and family meetings. Our team has seen significant improvements in the relationships of some beneficiaries and their caregivers. However, there are some beneficiaries who have found it more challenging to settle back into family life and these cases are receiving extra attention from HANCI-SL social workers.

The educational performance of the majority of the beneficiaries has been above average this quarter. Three beneficiaries' performance is below average and they are currently receiving extra support. Fifteen beneficiaries are enrolled in either primary or secondary school and 30 are attending skills training. Five beneficiaries have dropped out of their courses due to personal reasons and HANCI-SL social workers are working with them individually to enable them to return to school or skills training.

As part of the training programme beneficiaries take part in internships in local businesses to gain practical experience before they graduate. Eleven beneficiaries are currently on internships in tailoring, carpentry and welding. In September or October 19 more beneficiaries will be attending intern placements.

During this quarter beneficiaries reported to our health clinic 35 times for illnesses such as malaria, common colds, toothache, diarrhoea and vomiting and asthma. This is less than half the number of cases reported in the previous quarter as the medical staff at Kissy have put a lot of effort into improving the general health of the beneficiaries. The number of cases will decrease further as more beneficiaries are reunified with their families over the coming months. All of the illnesses were able to be treated by the nurse at the centre except the cases involving asthma and toothache which needed to be referred for specialist care.

At the end of May, HANCI-SL social workers organised a radio programme at Radio Citizen 103 to discuss how to reduce the number of children and young people living on the streets. The aims of the initiative were to:

- Raise public awareness of the growing numbers of children and young people living on the streets
- Challenge the negative perceptions that people have towards this vulnerable group
- Encourage the general public to help promote and protect the rights of street children
- Encourage stakeholders including parents, social workers, religious and traditional leaders, teachers, police and NGOs to find strategies to reduce the growing numbers of street children.

A reconciliation workshop was also held at the end of May which was attended by the majority of beneficiaries on the programme and their families or caregivers. At the end of the workshop many participants expressed that they found it a very positive experience and that they had learnt new things. Additionally, participants all gave feedback on how they believed the Children Living Alone Programme could be developed. These included:

- Expanding the programme to cater for more children and young people
- Providing start-up kits for the beneficiaries after graduation
- Facilitating permanent job placements for beneficiaries once they have completed their courses

The workshop ended with a meal which provided an opportunity for parents, caregivers, beneficiaries and HANCI-SL staff to socialise together and share experiences.

Programme Overview: Young Mothers

Locations: Bo, Makeni and Freetown – working with 150 young mothers approximately 300 beneficiaries at any one time.

This project targets vulnerable single young mothers who are living alone. The scheme aims to reintegrate these young mothers with their families or to empower them to be independent, active members of their community.

Update: Young Mothers

Makeni

There are currently 51 beneficiaries on the programme. Forty-eight of these young women will be graduating from the programme at the start of the next quarter. Some of these girls were attending school and have completed their education and sat the West African Senior School Certificate exam. A number of these girls have gone on to enrol in Teacher Training Colleges. A couple of beneficiaries will continue their schooling once they have graduated from the programme and their families have been given small business grants to ensure that they are able to continue to pay their fees.

All of the girls who were attending vocational training have completed their courses and have been given start-up kits to enable them to put the skills they have learnt into action. Each of the 48 girls graduating from the programme have been reunified with their parents or caregivers or able to live independently in their community. Once these beneficiaries have exited the programme their progress will be monitored by HANCI-SL staff and given support or counselling when necessary.

Three girls will remain on the Young Mothers Programme in Makeni, as they are not yet ready to be reunified with their families. Recruitment of new beneficiaries is underway and ten girls have already been enrolled and will be joining the programme in the next quarter.

Bo

There are currently 65 beneficiaries on the Programme. Forty-six are receiving vocational training whilst a further 19 are on internships in the local community. A further twenty girls are in the gara-tie, dyeing and soap making class, 17 in tailoring and nine in catering and hotel management. The latter tends to have the fewer trainees, as the girls need to be able to write and speak English. Staff noted that all trainees on the tailoring course are able to cut and sew garments and that rising food costs have meant that the catering department is making less profit from the dishes produced by the trainees.

For most of this reporting period there were 15 children using the daycare facilities whilst their mothers attended school or training. Three new babies joined the facility in June. Both the mothers and their babies benefited from the distribution of clothing and footwear in May.

June also saw the resumption of medical care at the centre in Bo. Previously, the centre nurse had been on extended leave and staff had no alternative but to refer all cases to the Sierra Leone Red Cross and Bo Government Hospital. Beneficiaries were screened and treated for fevers, coughs, colds, vomiting, malaria and other minor ailments. Health talks were held on the second Saturday of every month during this period. Talks covered hygiene and disease prevention, HIV awareness, caring for babies and the use of contraceptives.

Counselling and mediation has been ongoing for beneficiaries who are experiencing relationship difficulties with their parents, caregivers and the local community. Several problems have been successfully resolved.

Family, home, school and training visits were also completed. Four catering students were visited at their placement at the Sir Milton Hotel where the manager commented on how impressed he was with their performance. Additionally, a visit was made to the BKPS Canteen where two girls were on their placement.

Home visits were made to every beneficiary on the programme during the last quarter. Several girls had not been attending the Centre because they were ill. During the home visits staff were able to refer the girls to the HANCI-SL clinic. At another home visit HANCI-SL staff spoke to the caregiver about the unacceptable behaviour of one of the girls enrolled on the programme. Her behaviour has since improved. Visits were also made to former beneficiaries to check on their progress. These included four young women who are now running their own small enterprises and each of them is doing very well. (Two of them are highlighted in the case studies in this report.)

A reconciliation workshop was held in June. Mr John Koroma, coordinator of the Human Rights Office in Bo, was invited to chair the session. The topics covered during the workshop included:

- The need for family reconciliation
- The role of leaders, in the home and community, in facilitating reconciliation
- The role of NGOs in family reconciliation

The Centre at Bo also provided emergency care for two vulnerable children during this period. On 18 June a six-year-old boy was brought to the Centre after he was found wandering the streets. He had lost his way as he headed home during a very heavy storm the night before. From the information he was able to tell the staff about his home his family were traced and he was reunified with them. In addition, a baby boy was brought to the Centre after he was found abandoned. His mother was eventually traced and following counselling he was reunited with her. Their case is being carefully monitored.

Freetown

There are currently 50 beneficiaries on the programme.

Family and home placement visits have been ongoing during this period. During one visit staff discovered that relations between one beneficiary, H and her caregiver had broken down. H had been staying out very late and often arrived home with expensive items such as handbags and jewellery. When questioned by her caregiver H was unable to explain where these goods had come from. Following a counselling session with a HANCI-SL social worker, H confided that the items had been given to her by one of her male teachers. The social worker approached the Principal of the school about the situation which he was able to resolve. Both H and her caregiver received counselling to strengthen their relationship and H was given further counselling to help her understand why the action of her teacher was wrong.

Another family visit highlighted that one beneficiary, F, had been asked to leave her family home. F had been living with her grandmother and following her death she moved in with her father and stepmother. Relations between F and her stepmother became extremely tense and after one serious confrontation he asked her to leave. F was living with a friend when HANCI-SL staff stepped in to mediate the situation. Following several weeks of counselling and mediation F has returned home and has a much-improved relationship with her stepmother.

The project continues to provide healthcare for the young mothers and their children. On average, 90 cases involving young mothers are treated at the Centre every month and the health status of the beneficiaries is gradually improving. The improving health situation of the mothers is impacting positively on their children and cases have dropped by over 65% since the last quarter. The nurse at the Centre also gave talks on different health issues including minimizing water-borne diseases.

Some of the families of the beneficiaries supported on the Programme are extremely vulnerable because of poverty. Small business support is offered to these families to enable them to generate funds to care and provide for the young mother and her child. During this period five families received this support and are engaged in activities ranging from selling palm oil, rice, cassava and fruit to running a small telecomms centre. All of these businesses have been visited and each is progressing well.

Seven girls are attending formal education; the majority in secondary school but one is still in primary school. Two girls are attending gara-tie and dyeing while two more are enrolled on the catering course. Seventeen beneficiaries who have completed their vocational training were selected to attend internships in local businesses for a six-week period. This was a new initiative for the Centre and the staff worked extremely hard to implement it from establishing terms of reference, sourcing local businesses willing to take interns to devising an assessment questionnaire which could be easily understood and completed by business owners. The initiative was very successful with all 17 girls completing their internships and all receiving above average assessments.

Our team took part in a radio discussion programme entitled 'Helping girls to become well integrated into family and community life'. The programme was broadcast on 21 May on Citizen Radio 103.7. The objectives of the programme were to:

- Increase public awareness of the welfare of young mothers
- Reduce the incidents of girl and teenage pregnancies
- Help families and communities to accept young mothers and understand how to support them.

Case Study: Mardea's Story

Mardea is from Bo. She grew up in a very happy family with her parents and four younger siblings. Sadly, after the death of her father, Mardea's family situation deteriorated. Mardea's mother remarried and unfortunately Mardea's relationship with her stepfather and his children was extremely tense. Over time the situation got worse and her stepfather eventually asked her to leave the family home, despite her mother's attempts to reconcile the situation.

With no one else to turn to, Mardea found herself living and working on the streets as a sex worker. During this time she discovered that she was pregnant. Throughout the early months of her pregnancy Mardea was very sick; she became withdrawn and elder members of the community became very worried about her situation. Several of them visited her mother and stepfather to alert them to Mardea's plight and they agreed that she would be able to return home.

After the birth of her daughter Mardea returned to working on the streets in order to provide for herself and her child. Worried for both Mardea and her baby, senior members of the community reported this situation to the Community Chief who referred Mardea's case to the HANCI-SL team in Bo.

Mardea was registered on the Young Mothers Programme where she chose to train in gara-tie and dyeing. In addition to this training, she also received counselling, healthcare and clothing and food for herself and her baby. Mardea spent 18 months on the programme and when she graduated she received a start-up kit to enable her to begin her own small business enterprise.

Before her graduation, HANCI-SL Social workers facilitated family mediation sessions between Mardea and her parents. Her parents also attended training sessions and workshops which focussed on the relationships between parents and their children. The social worker also made follow up meetings to offer Mardea's parents individual counselling. As a result of this intervention the situation between Mardea and her family greatly improved. Despite this, Mardea felt that it was time to become independent and asked her parents to allow her to rent a property with a young woman who she had met whilst on the Young Mothers Programme.

With the permission of their parents, Mardea and her friend now live in a one-room property with their young children. They are also working together to produce gara and batik pieces which they sell in their local community and to other organisations. They earn enough money to pay for their rent, food, clothing and daycare costs for their children. Both young women now have the support of their parents and their community. HANCI-SL continues to make follow-up visits to Mardea and are delighted by her progress. Below is a statement from Mardea which was taken during a recent monitoring meeting.

"As you can see, we live in this tiny room but we are very happy here. We are doing well in our business and we are capable of taking care of our problems without depending on anyone. Our community thinks highly of us. Many consider us as role models in our community. The community respects us because we are committed to our business. Even though we do not have husbands now, no man can play the fool with us any longer because we are capable of earning our own livelihoods. In addition, we can send our children to school and at the same time assist our parents in whatever little way we can. Our lives have permanently changed for the better, thanks to HANCI-SL's intervention."

*Name changed to protect identities

Case Study: Rosemary's story

Rosemary is 19 years old and was brought up in Freetown. When Rosemary was in secondary school her parents' relationship began to breakdown and eventually they agreed to divorce. Rosemary lived with her father who later remarried. However, Rosemary and her stepmother did not get on and she was often mistreated. Her stepmother also persuaded Rosemary's father to stop paying her school fees and Rosemary had to drop out of school. Rosemary was determined to continue her education but found it difficult to find any employment so she could pay for herself. Sadly, Rosemary soon found herself working as a sex worker.

Her situation at home continued to deteriorate and Rosemary decided that she had no alternative but to leave home and together with a friend she ran away to Bo. Shortly after arriving in Bo she started a relationship with a young man and became pregnant. When he discovered this he told her than he wanted nothing more to do with her. Six months later her friend from Freetown decided that she wanted to return home, leaving Rosemary completely alone.

Rosemary found it difficult to cope. She had no money for antenatal care and just managed to pay for her food and rent. Fortunately, a community nurse offered to deliver Rosemary's baby for free. After the birth Rosemary became ill and was unable to feed her baby. A community member intervened on her behalf and bought her case to the attention of HANCI-SL. A social worker visited Rosemary to assess her situation. She was immediately enrolled on the Young Mothers Programme and referred to the project nurse. After a week of medical care Rosemary's health improved and she was able to begin the programme. Her daughter was still unwell and continued to receive medical care at the daycare centre.

Rosemary decided to train in catering and hotel management. Within weeks her daughter's health improved and following counselling sessions Rosemary's self-esteem began to increase. As part of her training Rosemary undertook work experience at a local hotel where she gained valuable practical experience in catering.

Social workers also visited Rosemary's family in Freetown to assess whether she would be able to be reunified with them. Her parents were invited to attend workshops on the rights of teenage mothers and the role and responsibilities of parents. During individual counselling sessions, Rosemary's father and stepmother acknowledged that their behaviour towards Rosemary had been wrong and that they were pleased to see how well she was doing on the Young Mothers Programme. A social worker continued to visit Rosemary's family and they agreed to attend her graduation ceremony.

During a very colourful celebration Rosemary received a Certificate of Merit in Catering and Hotel Management. Her father and stepmother were there to witness her achievement and then after the ceremony there was an emotional reunion with her family who she hadn't seen her since she left Freetown two years earlier. After the ceremony, HANCI-SL social workers arranged a reconciliation meeting between Rosemary and her parents where they were able to talk through the issues of the previous few years. The meeting was extremely successful and Rosemary's parents gave their permission for her to stay and continue her life in Bo but made it clear that they wanted to be part of it.

Rosemary has now established a small business with the start-up kit she received after she graduated. She makes cakes and other sweet food items which she sells in her community and she sometimes does catering for her friends. She makes enough money to pay for the room in which she lives with her daughter as well as her food, clothing, medical bills and daycare costs. Additionally, she has also been able to save enough money to establish a small roadside shop. Rosemary is now an active and respected member of her community. She has a growing business and a very positive outlook about her future. Below is a statement from Rosemary which was taken during a recent monitoring meeting.

"I am very grateful for the assistance that HANCI-SL rendered to me and my lovely child at the time when we were in greatest need of help. I tell you, had it not been for your timely intervention, I would still be in the streets today and I might not even be talking about a daughter. The community would still be mocking me today, calling me all sorts of names; heaven knows what they thought about me then. However, I tell you, the story today is completely different; my community respects and supports me. They know that I can earn my livelihood through my own sweat and they respect me for that. But let me tell you in retrospect that the most important moment in my life was when my father and my stepmother accepted to witness my graduation ceremony in Bo. I did not believe it was actually happening to me when I received word from your social worker that my parents have consented to travel up to Bo to support me at my graduation. It was like a dream come true when my father and my stepmother embraced me in the full view of the public. It was a very, very wonderful experience that I will never forget."