



Soroptimist International Quadrennial Project 2007-11 a partnership with Hope and Homes for Children

Study Tour to Sierra Leone: 4 to 8 February 2009

The first SI Study Tour for Project Sierra: A Family And A Future visited Sierra Leone from 4 to 8 February 2009. Soroptimists representing SI and the four Federationsⁱ visited the programmes supported through the SI Project in Bo, Makeni and Kamakwie. They met staff of local implementing partner HANCI-SL, current programme beneficiaries, graduates of earlier Hope and Homes for Children / HANCI-SL funded programmes, community leaders.

The SI Study Tour group shared their 3 'best' or 'most memorable' moments from their visit to Sierra Leone and Project Sierra: A Family And A Future. In a week of so many powerful experiences, images, emotions – these are our most powerful!

- The overwhelming welcome from the Programme beneficiaries at Bo and Makeni. In each of these places a Young Mother came forward to express her thanks for how Project Sierra has changed their lives – I found this very moving.
- The wonderful welcome we received in Bo brought home that the Project is about real people. Meeting the girls, to walk in and know that they are “our girls”, brought reality to “our” project.
- Seeing the results of the young mothers' program, because it is clearly not just giving money, but is giving skills and the ability to learn a living for life. The resourcefulness of the women we met, and how very young some of the young mothers looked.
- The work of HANCI-SL (Hope and Homes for Children's partner in Sierra Leone) was really impressive. Especially that they don't come with pre-conceived solutions. The professionalism of the staff, their pride in their work and role. I wish we had more time to hear their stories.
- Sitting in a Barray Hut at 09.45 on Saturday morning in Kamakwie and hearing the Paramount Chief's words to us, “You are part of this community now” and “Your presence here gives us confidence” – what powerful words!
- Meeting one of the program graduates in Makeni, who had started her small business selling vegetables. She then moved into telecomms and now is employing a young man to work for her.

- The young mother in her store in Bo, and her pride that she had built the business up herself. Her ambition to make a garden and build a bar onto her store and apartment; how confident her child looked. That her current partner is her choice and he respects her.
- The two young mothers working together making batik – seeing them working in the yard and everyone around watching them. That they are also selling firewood and food items bought in the villages.
- Our meal in Bo (prepared by the young mothers' catering class) – this was the best food; cleanest and most hygienic – bowls of water and soap ready so we could wash our hands; a tablecloth covering the food to protect it.
- Seeing schoolgirls coming straight from school, walking into the centre in Makeni as schoolgirls and the immediate transformation to women and mothers as they picked up and breastfed their babies.
- The Project is worked out at eye level of the beneficiaries and according to their individual needs, which is very important for a successful project. The work is sustainable, efficient and warm-hearted. The staff has a good understanding how to improve the life-conditions of the poor and vulnerable people in their areas. We appreciate their hard work and the good cooperation with the chiefs and local authorities.
- The two families that I visited at Makeni – both living in abject poverty, in one case 15 people sharing two rooms. It is hard to imagine that we are able to help to change the lives of these families and I look forward to hearing of their progress in a year's time.
- That HANCI-SL is a household name and the Chief's statement that "When you leave, we will sustain the program."
- Having an audience with the Chiefs and knowing how grateful they are for the support we are giving – by helping them to help themselves.
- The Chief's recognition of the importance of women's role in development was very forward thinking. I was impressed by his commitment to the locality and the people. Men acknowledged that women have a valuable role in society, and are working towards supporting them. The Chief said, "I want to be involved in empowering women."
- Our visit to the village of Masankari (near Kamakwie), where the whole village came out to welcome us and the women had prepared a delicious meal which we shared with them. The gratitude of the people was genuine and amazing. Seeing how supportive the Chief and the community are. Witnessing the community's very genuine appreciation for what is being done and the help it is giving them.
- The women in Makeni who dressed in blue and danced with such enthusiasm for Soroptimism. As an extra result of the SI Quadrennial Project in Sierra Leone we hope to see two new Soroptimist clubs inaugurated in Bo and Makeni. We encourage the GBI extension to make the necessary procedures as fast as possible. The 'Soroptimist Sisters' in Bo and Makeni now have a lot of energy and enthusiasm, which should not be lost.

- The Health Clinic at Makeni – the equipment (or lack of) that the nurse and pharmacist work with and yet they remain cheerful and are making a difference to the lives of people in their community.
- People are working so hard to survive and feed their families. The lack of infrastructure and industry. The hardest thing was to say no when we have so much, and to realise how selfish our own society is.
- Experiencing the dust, colours and sounds of village life; seeing the water pumps, thatched houses and the way people live. The dawn drive to Kamakwie through villages and bushland; women watching over a cooking pot on small wood fires; walking to the stream for water, laundry and bathing, or to the farm with pans, utensils or bundles of wood carried on the head; babies secured to their mother's back with a cloth; meagre verandah market stalls, with a few cassava roots, pineapple or bottles of kerosene for sale; no vehicles for miles on the dust roads.
- The grace with which we were received everywhere. Nothing seemed too much trouble. Arrangements were adjusted, dates changed, yet wherever we went, people gave us their time, welcomed us with open arms into their homes and communities.

ⁱ The Study Tour group participants were: eight Soroptimists nominated by the Federations (two from each Federation): Sharon Fisher (SI The Langleys, Canada) and Bev Bucur (SI Illiana, USA) from SI of the Americas; Hanne Jensbo (SI Aarhus, Denmark and SI President-Elect) and Gerd Stenberg (SI Drammen, Norway) from SI Europe; Anne MacDonald OBE (SI Ellesmere Port and District, UK) and Hilary Ratcliffe (SI St. Albans, UK) from SI Great Britain and Ireland; and Sandra Mottram (SI Sydney, Australia) and Paula Siddle (SI North Shore, New Zealand) from SI South West Pacific. Plus, SI's Quadrennial Project Liaison, Alison Sutherland and Haja Fatmata Cole (SI Freetown, Sierra Leone), with Joe Glackin (Hope and Homes for Children) and John Momodu (HANJI-SL)