

Hope and Homes for Children

Project Sierra Report January 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 of Africa and in 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

The Integrated Child and Family Support Programme was established in January 2007. Between January and April our team worked alongside Local Management Committees in Bo, Mattru, Makeni, Kamakwie and Tambakha to identify beneficiary families to join the programme. Many of the families identified were living in extreme circumstances and urgently in need of support.

Individual assessments were carried out with each family to assess their immediate needs and to create a tailored support package. Urgent support offered during this time included food parcels, house repairs, counselling, community visitation and the provision of healthcare services.

As the situation of many of these families began to stabilise we were able to move from providing emergency support to offering advice and counselling on planning for their future. For many families this included helping their children to return to education. We provided the fees, uniform and equipment to enable the children to return to school in September 2007. Social workers visited homes and schools of the children to monitor their academic progress and general well being.

In each of the project areas, all of the children enrolled on the programme have been registered and hold Birth Certificates. At present, a Children's and Gender Act is being put in place, which will, in time, allow all children to benefit from state facilities. This will only be possible if children have the documents, such as a Birth Certificate, to show they were born in-country and are therefore citizens of Sierra Leone.

Families progress through our programme at different speeds and for those who were ready we provided small business enterprise support and supplied groundnut seeds and palm oil seedlings, as part of the work of the Farm Resource Centre. Additionally, we assisted families in preparing their land for planting and offered advice and practical guidance where necessary. For families who do not have access to this facility (for geographical reasons) we facilitated other types of small business enterprise.

Various workshops have been held on a range of subjects including child rights and good parenting skills. Families on our programme and members of the community attended the workshop. We have also worked in partnership with various Government agencies and other NGOs to provide training for staff and beneficiaries in such areas as HIV awareness, healthcare, psychosocial training and handling issues of child abuse.

The Challenges

- Sporadic violence during the election period made it difficult for staff to move about freely
- The heavy rains during the rainy season severely damaged many roads. Again, this made it difficult for staff to travel around and has meant that it has been more difficult to visit certain families
- Families are more vulnerable during the rainy season as there is limited access to food and healthcare and we need to ensure that we are able to provide extra support during this period as this is the time when most illnesses occur
- Disease killed many pigs and goats at the Farm Resource Centre in Makeni and we need to rebuild these stocks

Case study: Integrated Child and Family Support

Miatta and her two daughters, Sombo (5) and Fatima (8) were enrolled in our Integrated Child and Family Support Programme following the death of her husband from malaria. Miatta's husband had been ill for some time and had been unable to work to provide for his family. Miatta was receiving a small income by weaving and selling raffia mats but as her husband became sicker she had to give up this work to care for him.

The family was assessed by one of our social workers who identified that there was an urgent need to provide the family with food parcels and to repair their home, as it was no longer habitable. As soon as these immediate needs had been addressed a social worker met with Miatta again to develop a detailed support plan to help the family to become self-sufficient over time.

The plan identified that Miatta and her daughters were a strong family unit and were generally in good health despite some signs of malnutrition. Their house had been repaired so they now have secure living conditions. The areas highlighted for intensive support were education, to enable Sombo and Fatima to return to school, and household economy, to enable Miatta to provide for her families basic needs.

We have assisted the family by paying school fees and providing the necessary equipment so that Sombo and Fatima can return to school. We have provided the family with seeds and tools so that they can grow vegetables on their land for food. Additionally, we have given Miatta small business support so that she can build up her weaving and mat production to provide a sustainable income.

Over the coming year we will continue to work with Miatta and her daughters providing advice and support that will enable them to live independently once again.

Future Plans

We will continue to work closely with the families on our programmes in Bo, Mattru, Makeni, Kamakwie and Tambakha. The families we are supporting have now been on the programme for nine months but as the needs and circumstances of no two families are the same, and often they are multiple and complex, each is at a different stage of their progress through the programme. Therefore, we need to continue to assess each family on an individual basis to ensure that their support plans are tailored to their specific needs.

Many families have now moved from a situation of extreme need to one where they are more stable but highly dependent on external support. It is during this period that we will focus on planning for their long-term future and to discuss options such as small business support, micro credit and skills training to enable them to be economically independent. We will also help families to maximise the potential of any assets that they have such as land, livestock or skills.

Our teams will continue to meet with the Local Management Committees in the five towns and regions where we are working to discuss the progress of the families in their area and how the community can best support them. The Committees will also make us aware of any other families that may be in need of support.

Additionally, we will be dispatching laptops to all of our teams, as this will enable them to keep support plans up to date and efficiently monitor the progress of families on the programme.

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 counselled, 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

The Children Living Alone programme was established in January 2007 to target one of the most 'at risk' groups of children in Sierra Leone. Between January and April the team worked with an external consultant to set the criteria for the programme and to complete an assessment of the number and ages of children living alone on the streets of Freetown. During this period the team embarked on an awareness campaign to raise the profile of the new service amongst local police, security services and members of the community such as market traders and shop keepers who were likely to come into contact with these children.

Beneficiaries started entering the programme from January as awareness of the service grew. Our team has also been working with GOAL, an international NGO who have a centre at the ferry terminal in Freetown, to identify vulnerable children as well as spending nights counselling children living alone on the streets to encourage them to join our project with the aim of reuniting them with their families where possible.

As each child joined the programme our team worked with them to create an individual support plan offering counselling, education or skills training, food, clothing and the provision of healthcare and medical support. This work also included an assessment of the child's background and relationship with their family or extended family to assess whether there was a possibility of reunification. Work to trace the families of the children on the project is ongoing and we are in the latter stages of reunifying some children with their parents or extended family. We have discovered that many of the children we are supporting are from rural areas and poverty has been the main reason for the breakdown in their family life.

As part of our broader strategic aim to engage communities in our work, we held a meeting to discuss the project's objectives. Both the children we support and members of the local community attended. The meeting has resulted in a common understanding about the activities of the project. Further workshops have also been conducted on child protection issues, which were supported by radio programmes that helped spread the message out to the wider public. We have also worked in partnership with International NGO Right to Play to run workshops with our beneficiaries in the areas of HIV/AIDS awareness, growth and development and life skills.

Additionally, we strengthen the capacity of our own team through training courses and workshops and the appointment of two additional members of staff.

Challenges

- The initial criteria for the programme were to support children under 12 who were new to living on the street as these are the most vulnerable. However, children who are living alone without parental care are often hidden as they are exploited for domestic and sexual purposes and it is very difficult to reach these children. This is especially true of girls and those who are below their early teens. Therefore we are still assessing the final shape and criteria of the programme
- Sporadic violence which broke out during the election period made it difficult for staff to move about freely and for beneficiaries to attend their training

Future Plans

We will continue to work with each child at our centre in Kissy on an individual basis. Now that many of the children have settled into the programme, and our team have gained their respect and trust, we are able to ask more sensitive questions about each child's family and past. Over the coming months much of the team's efforts will be focused on tracing parents and extended families and making provisional visits to assess their ability to care for their child.

For cases where reunification is possible our team will work with both the child and family to prepare for this and where necessary provide a support package to help with items like school fees, food or clothing in the short term. Additionally, a system for monitoring the family's progress will be put in place to ensure that the reunification has every chance of success and that the welfare of the child is protected.

As this is a rolling programme new children will be joining throughout 2008 and the cycle of immediate emergency support and planning for their long-term future will begin again.

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

The Young Mothers programme was established in 2007. The programme has developed from a very successful project which supported young women who became pregnant as a result of being taken as rebel wives during the war. An assessment of the original project highlighted that there is still a real need for this programme as there are a large number of young single mothers due to the high rates of sexual violence against women.

Throughout 2007 young women graduated from and joined our Young Mother programme in Bo, Makeni and Freetown. For the young women joining the programme individual support plans have been created. The support included counselling, skills training, day care for children, provision of food to all mothers and children visiting the centre, access to healthcare and medical support and life skills training. As part of the assessment for the support plans we discuss each young mothers background and family situation with them to assess whether there is a possibility of reconciling them with their family. If this was not going to be possible then support packages were put in place to enable them to live independently when they leave the project.

For the young women who were already on the programme ongoing education and skills training was provided. They also had access to day care, counselling, food and healthcare. Visits were made to programme participants who were on work experience or attending school to assess progress and deal with any issues. Additionally, their support plans were updated to reflect their changing needs as they progressed through the programme. We are delighted to report that our first group of young mothers graduated from our centre in Kissy, Freetown. Additionally, we have been able to reunite young mothers from each of our centres with their families.

Throughout the year workshops were held at each centre to educate the mothers on life skills such as protection against HIV/AIDS and nutritional requirements for healthy living. Seminars have been held for the mothers who are in contact with their families to help them rebuild or strengthen the relationship they have with their parents and relatives. As part of the wider strategic aim of helping to break down the stigma that single mothers face radio programmes have helped highlight the challenges that they face. Additionally, radio advocacy programmes and workshops have increased the wider understanding of child protection issues amongst families and community members.

We have worked in partnership with International NGO Right to Play to run further workshops and collaborated with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) on an advocacy campaign to enrol young women into education. Additionally, we have worked with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs to implement our new child protection policies.

Challenges

- Sporadic violence which broke out during the election period made it difficult for staff to move about freely and for beneficiaries to attend their training

Case Study: Young Mothers

Mariatu is an 18 year old mother of one. When she was eleven years old both of her parents were killed during the civil war and she went to live with her uncle. Mariatu was pressurised into marrying young, because her uncle was struggling to support his own family.

After three years of marriage, Mariatu fell pregnant but she was widowed before the child was born. Mariatu's uncle could not care for her so she went to live with an aunt and she enrolled on the Young Mother Support Programme soon after her child was born.

Social workers visited Mariatu and her aunt at their home to assess their needs and develop an individual care plan for the whole family. The family were identified as living in very basic conditions. The house was in good repair but all three of them lived together in a single room and with only one bed, Mariatu and her son slept on the floor.

Social workers reported that Mariatu and her aunt had a strong relationship, but Mariatu was conscious that she had no way to contribute to the household economy. Mariatu's aunt worked as a cook, which provided a small but regular income that could sustain the whole family.

From the social workers' assessment, two areas of necessary support were identified. Firstly, counselling was organised for Mariatu, as she was still coming to terms with the death of her husband. Then to help empower Mariatu, we invited her to attend the Kissy Centre. Mariatu has been attending parenting and healthcare classes while her son attends the on site crèche. Mariatu has also started a sewing course, so that she can gain skills that will allow her to contribute to the household economy. Mariatu will graduate from the programme later on this year.

Future Plans

Again, as this is a rolling programme young women will be joining and graduating from the project throughout 2008. Our team will be focusing their efforts on helping to reconcile young mothers with their family or community or empowering them to live independently.

A key area of work will also be to increase awareness of prevention and protections from HIV/AIDS and other STIs as we have discovered that this is a subject that needs particular attention.

We will continue to meet with local community leaders and representatives to assess the progress of the young women who have graduated from the programme and to identify vulnerable single young mothers in the community who would benefit from joining the programme.

3) Partnership Report August 2007 – January 2008

The Launch of Project Sierra

Project Sierra was launched formally at the XVIII Convention in Glasgow, on August 1st 2007 and was met with great warmth and interest from Soroptimists from all over the world.

Rick Foulsham CMG, Chief Executive of HHC, Dr Delia Pop, HHC's Director of Programmes and Alison Sutherland, the Project Liaison, addressed the delegates on the last afternoon of the Convention. Their speeches described the history of HHC's work in Sierra Leone and outlined the aims of Project Sierra and were followed by a Q&A session. This section was closed with the inaugural screening of the Project Sierra film.

The Project Sierra stand attracted great interest in the days leading up to the presentation and Soroptimists from all Federations were able to take copies of the DVD and leaflet to take back to show their members and buy notelets and pin badges. Alexandra Ginn and Jenny Marshall, Community Fundraisers from HHC, joined Soroptimists to be at the stand throughout the Conference and were able to talk in person to many Soroptimists from different countries around the world about the Project.

Resources for Project Sierra

In addition to the Project Sierra leaflet and the film, HHC also launched the project's website www.projectsierra.org. This will be updated on a quarterly basis, with detailed progress reports and case studies from Sierra Leone and with new resources and news to support and encourage Soroptimists in their advocacy and fundraising.

At the time of writing this report, the website has already been added to with new downloadable fundraising resources, including the following; publicity and event posters, badge manufacturing guidelines, bookmark artwork, international and UK sponsorship forms (for Soroptimist sponsored events) and donation forms. The website also holds the Soroptimist Club Protocol and other resources, in addition to clear information about the aims and structure of the work in Sierra Leone, accompanied by recent case studies.

A full list of resources produced and distributed so far appears below:

DVD of Project Sierra Film - in formats suitable for all countries.

Website – www.projectsierra.org

Leaflet

Notelets

Pin Badges

Bookmark

Large stands for conferences and talks

Publicity posters

Event template posters

Pin badge manufacturing guidelines

Bookmark artwork

Logos

International and UK sponsorship forms

Donation forms

Soroptimist Club Protocol

Conference speeches

Ambassadors guide

Public Relations

Soroptimist International have written several articles on the project and partnership in Soroptimist publications and the partnership has also been publicised in external press. Soroptimist Federations, Unions, regions and clubs in all Federations are promoting Project Sierra via their web-sites using information and materials provided by Hope and Homes for Children.

The following articles came about through Hope and Homes for Children's work with local press:

"£1 million target for Sierra Leone", *Salisbury Journal*, August 2007

"£1 million target for Sierra Leone", *The Forest Journal*, August 2007

Hope and Homes for Children also announced the partnership in our newsletter, Hope News.

"Project Sierra", *Hope News*, Issue 12, September 2007

Hope and Homes for Children's web-site includes information on the partnership with Soroptimist International, and a link to the Project Sierra website.

Advocacy and speaking engagements

There has been a great deal of activity within SI worldwide to raise awareness, through speaking engagements, and events organised by Soroptimists in all Federations. A summary of some early activity was prepared by SI Project Liaison for the Project Sierra website, and further summaries are in preparation.

In addition, the DVD has been used to great effect in many corners of the world and was widely distributed at the Glasgow launch and afterwards, via SI Headquarters to the Federations and their Regions.

In addition, the leaflet and website have also proved to be highly effective and inspiring communication tools and many clubs have already translated their content into other languages, including Japanese, Portuguese and Danish.

SI Project Liaison will be reporting on Soroptimist promotion, advocacy and involvement with the Project across the four Federations. Future quarterly reports will incorporate reports from SI Project Liaison on Soroptimist activity and achievements.

Fundraising

Soroptimist fundraising for Project Sierra started at the launch at the SI Convention in Glasgow, and Hope and Homes for Children has been delighted to learn of the support and variety of activities already arranged, and in progress. As at 1 January 2008, £13,160.61 had been received by Hope and Homes for Children from Soroptimist International and by direct donations for the Project. Hope and Homes for Children will continue to report to SI at the end of each quarter on the funds received direct from members for the Project. HHC will be including updates towards target on the web site so that members can be aware of their progress towards the Project targets.

Visit to the projects in Sierra Leone

Hope and Homes for Children invited the International President of SI, Margaret Lobo, to visit the projects in Spring 2008. In February, she will travel to Sierra Leone with Alison Sutherland, Joe Glackin, Regional Manager, Africa, HHC and Alexandra Ginn, Community Fundraiser, HHC. They will be met by Marjorie Hedd and other members of SI Freetown who have organised an in-country launch for Project Sierra at the British Council. There are plans for the First Lady of Sierra Leone, Mrs Sia Koroma, to give an address at the launch and to hold other meetings with the President and the Minister for Social Welfare, Gender and Children.

After the launch they will spend a week travelling very widely; from Freetown, to Bo then Makeni, then right up to Kamakwie and Tambakha in the north of the country, in order to learn as much as possible about Project Sierra in both rural and urban areas.

Directly after her visit, SI President Margaret will be going on to the UN Commission on the Status of Women meeting in New York and following that, she will be speaking to International Soroptimist Conventions in the following regions; the Americas, Asia and South Pacific.

Study Tours

Hope and Homes for Children is also facilitating two further study tours for Soroptimists. The first one is planned for early 2009.

Current and Forthcoming Activity

- HHC are currently producing a gallery of photographs of our work in Sierra Leone for Project Sierra. This gallery will be uploaded to the Project Sierra website so that Soroptimists can view them and then contact HHC directly if they want to use them in their advocacy and fundraising efforts. HHC will provide an online form so that requests for use of photographs can be responded to as quickly as possible.
- Hope and Homes for Children, SI's Project Liaison and Ambassadors are working together on a Frequently Asked Questions page for the website, that can be updated on an ongoing basis, in response to the kind of questions that people are asking about the Project. The SI response to Project Sierra has been very positive and interested and as a result, we feel this section could become a critical means of communicating with Soroptimists worldwide, in a thorough, considered and accurate way, and in such a way that significant developments can also be shared as quickly and widely as possible. Work is underway now to collate questions from the Project Liaison and Ambassadors.
- Hope and Homes for Children will be updating the website on a quarterly basis, including full and detailed progress reports of the work on the ground and case studies to help Soroptimists understand our approach.
- Hope and Homes for Children will also be producing more support materials for Soroptimists on the Project Sierra website including logo guidelines and information on tax effective giving in America in the next quarter. We have been adding new materials and tools on an ongoing basis, since the launch of Project Sierra. We will continue to work closely with the Project Liaison to respond positively to the great interest shown by Soroptimists and their support for Project Sierra.

Hope and Homes for Children.
31 January 2008.