

# Project Sierra

## A country broken by war

Sierra Leone celebrated its first year of peace in over a decade in 2003, following a painful and destructive war, in which 500,000 people were killed, raped, or injured. Over half the population was made homeless and thousands of children were orphaned or separated from their families.

Ranked as the poorest country in the world, Sierra Leone is still struggling to cope with the challenges of reconstruction, and its impoverished and traumatised people are trying to rebuild their lives, even though 74% of them live below the poverty line, surviving on less than £1 (\$2 USD) a day.

Women's life expectancy is just 42 years and nearly a third of all children die before their fifth birthday.

## Our Quadrennial Project

Project Sierra, the four year partnership between Soroptimist International and Hope and Homes for Children, is raising **over GBP £1million (USD\$ 2million)** to transform the lives of some of the most deprived women and children in the world. It is promoting stability in a post-conflict society, concentrating – in three primary areas – on the most vulnerable families in Sierra Leone. The project gives them the support they need to stay together as strong, caring families who are able to provide for themselves independently for the long term.

## Young Mother Support

During the conflict, girls and young women were trafficked into sex slavery, often resulting in pregnancy. Continuing poverty and exploitation have contributed to an increase in teenage pregnancy, alienating many young mothers from their families because of the



stigma of having a child outside marriage. Project Sierra is reconciling these vulnerable girls with their families, or empowering them to become independent members of their communities by providing education, vocational training and daycare for their children. Life skills and healthcare classes build their confidence, and give them a firm foundation for their future.

## Children Living Alone

Project Sierra is also working with children who live on the streets. Alone, vulnerable and at risk of exploitation, trafficking or a life of crime, these children are helped to return to a caring family environment. They are given individual counselling, access to healthcare and nutritious meals, and their families and communities are lending their support, helping to provide these children with stability, an education and a future.

## Integrated Child and Family Support

Project Sierra also focuses its support on the most fragile families; often headed by lone women or frail grandparents. Our aim is to strengthen their position and prevent the breakdown that can lead to a child leaving the family home to fend for themselves. Community leaders are helping to identify the most vulnerable families, and Project Sierra is providing each family with an individually tailored support package of healthcare, secure housing, counselling, education and access to income generation.

# A Family and A Future; Your Impact So Far

*"The project is worked out at eye level of the beneficiaries and according to their individual needs, which is important for a successful project. The work is sustainable, efficient and warm-hearted."*

Hanne Jensbo, International President, Soroptimist International (pictured right with Jeneba, a project graduate, now a vehicle engineer and driver in the army).



Hope and Homes for Children's model, *ACTIVE Family Support*, has been implemented throughout Project Sierra and is also being developed in the other African countries in which they operate. All that is being learnt from the development of the model in Sierra Leone will inform and support this wider work.

The three elements of Project Sierra will become replicable models of excellence in child protection and childcare, shared with other NGOs in Sierra Leone, ensuring Project Sierra will benefit generations to come.

**129 young mothers** are now caring and providing for their babies independently having completed their education or vocational training and many are also reconciled with their families and enjoy their care and support.

**200 families** have been helped to move from a situation of extreme fragility to one of stability. All their children have returned to school and are making good progress.

**75 families** are now able to provide for their needs independently, for the long term and are exiting the project.

**48 children** who were living alone on the streets of Freetown have now been reconciled with their families.

The children are all back in education or have instead completed vocational training and apprenticeships.

They have earned the understanding and respect of their teachers, families, carers, prospective employers and wider communities and the project has rekindled their hopes for a brighter future.



*"The change in the young mothers is incredible. By building up their self-esteem and helping them learn new skills, we give them the chance to set themselves up in life."* Lois Kamara, Regional Co-ordinator

## Rosemary's Story

Rosemary had a troubled relationship with her father and stepmother, which led to her leaving home at the age of 16. She then started a relationship and fell pregnant, but the father left her to cope alone. After giving birth, Rosemary became very ill and it was at this stage that she enrolled on the project.

With medical care and counselling, her health and self-esteem improved greatly and she decided to train in catering and hotel management.

Eventually, after careful mediation from staff, she was reconciled with her parents. They came a long way to see Rosemary graduate at our Young Mother's Centre in Bo. This was a very happy and emotional event that gave them the chance to talk through and resolve the difficulties they had had.

Rosemary now has a small catering business that makes enough money for her rent, food, clothing, medical bills and day care costs.

*"I am very grateful for the assistance rendered to me and my lovely child at a time when we were in great need.*

*The most important moment in my life was when my father and my stepmother accepted to witness my graduation ceremony. It was a very wonderful experience that I will never forget."*

Rosemary, a young mother helped by Project Sierra



## Future Plans

*Thank you all for the energy and compassion you have invested in Project Sierra so far. Your actions are having a profound effect upon the lives of women, girls and families who have faced (and are now overcoming) circumstances that are as hard as any of us could imagine. Your support has given them what they need to secure a brighter, independent future.*

*By summer 2009 Soroptimists worldwide had raised over GBP £355,000 to fund this vital work and I know more is now being raised or is on its way.*

*So thank you for all you have done, and critically, for all you are now planning to do in the next two years. With your support, I know we will raise GBP £1million and achieve what we set out to – to transform the lives of vulnerable women and children in Sierra Leone.*

**Alison Sutherland**  
**SI Quadrennial Project Liaison 2007–11**



## Future Gifts

One way you can help is by buying gifts for friends and family at [www.projectSierra.org/futuregifts](http://www.projectSierra.org/futuregifts). From schoolbooks for children to business start-up kits for young mothers, each gift is a vital part of the support Project Sierra is giving.



## For More Information

The involvement of every Soroptimist member worldwide, working together, will help us achieve our goals for Project Sierra: A Family and A Future.

For more information about how you can support this vital work contact your Federation Quadrennial Project Liaison email [project.liaison@soroptimistinternational.org](mailto:project.liaison@soroptimistinternational.org) or visit [www.projectSierra.org](http://www.projectSierra.org) for up to date reports, news, resources and ideas.

Soroptimist International



[www.soroptimistinternational.org](http://www.soroptimistinternational.org)



Hope & Homes for Children

[www.hopeandhomes.org](http://www.hopeandhomes.org)

*Together we can achieve something which none of us could achieve alone.*

Hope and Homes for Children is a registered charity no.1089490

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