



Project Sierra: A Family and A Future
Soroptimist International Quadrennial Project
Annual Report from Hope and Homes for Children to Soroptimist
International
August 2007 – End July 2008

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Executive Summary

Through *Project Sierra: A Family and a Future*, Soroptimist International and Hope and Homes for Children are working in partnership for four years to transform the lives of vulnerable children, women and families in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

During the first year of our partnership, we have given intensive support to three groups of people in Sierra Leone, who are amongst the poorest and most vulnerable in the country. Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world and is ranked as the second lowest in the World Development Index. This year we have supported:

- 150 young mothers and their babies, in Makeni, Bo and Freetown.
- 50 children living alone on the streets of Freetown.
- 200 families in Bo, Makeni, Tambakha, Kamakwie and Mattru

Soroptimist International and Project Sierra's first year

Engagement with the Project started during its launch in Glasgow in August 2009 and continues to increase as project materials have cascaded through SI, Federations, Federation Liaisons, ambassadors, supporters and direct to members through the partnership website www.projectsierra.org

SI has promoted the project internationally through each of its four Federations. Clubs from all Federations, in many of the 125 countries where SI are active, have supported the Project in its first year.

Support to date has involved:

- Raising awareness of the Project and its relevance to SI Programme Goals and the Soroptimists International's mission to create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls.
- Generating funds for the implementation of Project Sierra.

Photos and information on Soroptimist activity appear on the website, with regular reports from Sierra Leone, downloadable resources and a photo library.

Soroptimists had raised £106,851 for Project Sierra by July 2008 making the fundraising for its first year the most successful a SI Quadrennial Project. More initiatives are underway for the coming year and the Project Liaison and Hope and Homes for Children continue to work together closely, particularly to find exciting, effective ways to deepen engagement and develop the promise shown in Project Sierra's first year.



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The first year of Project Sierra – Impact and Progress

This section summarises the progress made in the first year of Project Sierra, broken down into the three project areas:

- Young mothers
- Children living alone
- Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS)

1) Young Mothers and babies

- We supported 150 lone mothers (and their babies), giving practical and emotional support at a difficult and critical time when both are extremely vulnerable. We helped to reconcile them with their families, or where this has not been possible, we have worked with the mother to help her become self-sufficient and able to provide for and take care of her baby by herself.
- We worked with each mother to create a support plan that was built around her needs and resources. The support we gave included counselling, education, vocational training, small business support, day care for their children, provision of nutritious food to both mother and child, life-skills/parenting/health training, healthcare, mediation of a social worker between mothers and their families to work towards reconciliation.
- 83 young mothers are now either reconciled with their families or are able to provide for and care for their fledgling families independently. They celebrated this milestone at their graduation ceremonies, which were happily attended by friends and family. Our team will continue to stay in contact with these young women and will be on hand to offer guidance and support through this important transition.
- For those women still in the project, we continue to work closely with them to help them to reach this stage as well.

2) Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS)

- We worked with 200 families (within that number are approximately 1000 family members; mostly children). Our aim is to strengthen the position of the family for the long-term, helping them to stay together and prevent breakdown that can lead to children leaving the family home to fend for themselves.
- Individual assessments were carried out with each family creating their own care plan, taking into account their needs and resources.
- In the first instance, urgent support was given to families, including food, clothing, house repairs, counselling, community visitation and healthcare.
- We provided the fees, uniform and equipment to enable all the children of school age to go back to education. We visited all the schools and families, giving additional support to those with learning difficulties that had been holding them back from attending school.



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- The majority of families have moved from a situation of crisis and extreme fragility to stability. Their children are healthier and are attending school and doing well. Urgent repairs have been made to their homes and families who were once isolated and under extreme pressure are now treated as part of the community, and are being supported by neighbours and local leaders.
- As the situation of each family has begun to stabilise, we have been able to move beyond emergency support to planning for their future, working with the head of the family to build a sustainable source of income that will make the family self-sufficient in the long term.

3) Children Living Alone

- We worked with 50 children living alone on the streets of Freetown. Our aim is to reconcile them with their family, extended family or wider community. This requires sensitive and committed mediation and support.
- We worked with each child on an individual basis to create their care plan; offering counselling, education and/or vocational skills training, food, clothing and healthcare.
- This included a detailed assessment of the child's background and relationship with their family to find out if there was a possibility of reconciliation. Then work began on tracing those families.
- By June 2008, 24 children were able to move back to their family home and the team saw significant improvements in the relationships between children and their families. We are giving ongoing support and monitoring to those who have found integration more difficult and to those who have not yet been reunified with their families. All of the children continue to have access to healthcare, food, education or vocational training and counselling.
- Eleven older children are currently on internships in tailoring, carpentry and welding. In the autumn 19 more are due to attend internships.



The Wider Impact of the Project Sierra Partnership

Hope and Homes for Children have been working in Sierra Leone since 1996, when we responded to a clear emergency situation created by the war. Our work focused on two groups: children who were alone, having lost or been separated from their parents by the war; and young women and girls who had been abducted and raped by soldiers, had become pregnant and found themselves bringing up a baby with no support from either the fathers or their wider families.

Project Sierra has come at a pivotal time in the development of our work there, coinciding with and supporting the start of an important change in our approach. The impetus for this change was partly the changing situation in Sierra Leone and a comprehensive review of our work that was conducted back in 2006. But it was also informed by the lessons Hope and Homes for Children has learnt from our work in other countries in Africa and Central and Eastern Europe over the last 14 years.

So, in the last year, we have been able to implement our ACTIVE Family Support model throughout our projects in Sierra Leone. This way of working (that we also use in all of our country programmes in Africa) allows us to target the children in most need, to tailor our support to them as individuals, to work with them so that they are able to experience a fulfilling family life and feel part of their local communities. It also allows us to better measure and evaluate our actions, so that we can be sure we are using our resources in the most effective way possible.

Through Project Sierra we are continuing our work with children living alone and with young mothers, as there is still a very great need for these projects. But Project Sierra has also significantly strengthened our capacity to start work with another group; extremely vulnerable families; those who are at risk of breaking down, due to poverty, illness or the death of a parent.

In this way, our approach now has a stronger emphasis on prevention and long-term sustainability – in particular, strengthening the situation of the most fragile families, where there is a very real risk that a crisis can lead a child to feel they have no alternative but to leave their family and fend for themselves.

The development of Help a Needy Child in Sierra Leone, our partner in Sierra Leone

Help a Needy Child in Sierra Leone (HANCI-SL) are the Sierra Leonean NGO that Hope and Homes for Children have been working in partnership with since 1996. Their staff often come from the same or similar communities as the people we work with, and so they understand the pressures and the challenges they face. They also have an instinctive grasp of the way communities operate and the best ways to influence peoples' attitudes and behaviour. In a country where central government plays a relatively minor role this knowledge is vital in making our work accurate and sustainable. This year we built HANCI-SL's capacity through regional and national training and ongoing monitoring and



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support of their work, and they have been able to implement the ACTIVE Family Support model throughout. In turn, their skills and experience have helped us to refine the model so that it works better within Sierra Leonean culture.

This has made a huge difference to their confidence using the model. By combining it with their own experience and understanding they have been able to address the seemingly impossible challenges presented by poverty, lack of basic services, sickness and community conflict.



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Challenges in the first year of Project Sierra

- Heavy rains in the rainy season damaged roads, making it harder to make necessary visits to families in their homes. This is a particularly vulnerable time because there is less access to food and healthcare, and so more illness. Because we work in very remote areas, the combined effect can have a really detrimental effect upon the people we work with.
- There was a dramatic rise in the cost of food this year. This presented a constant challenge, as providing food is a vital part of the package of support we give. The increase also put extra pressure on all the adults we support, making it harder for them to generate income and harder for them to provide for themselves independently.

Further highlights and progress this year

This section goes into more detail about progress made possible by Project Sierra this year. It is by no means exhaustive, but we hope Soroptimists will be interested to learn more and be glad of all they have done to help.

Some of these examples show the impact of your support upon the wellbeing of families and children that we are working with already. Other examples relate to our involvement in local communities. The work we do with local leaders, community members, media and government are an integral part of our work with families, precisely because we know that their understanding and active support will make our work far more powerful and sustainable in the long-term.

Improvements in health

- The Young Mothers project gives healthcare and workshops on health issues, from nutrition and family planning, to minimising water-borne diseases. In Freetown, the improvement in mothers health has started to have a positive effect on their children, with the number of children needing medical attention dropping by over 65%.
- In Bo, there was a significant improvement in the general health situation of the families in the summer of 2008. The number of children treated for illnesses like malaria, diarrhoea, typhoid and tropical ulcers dropped considerably.
- We have medical staff at all our projects, but where further medical help is needed, we have been able to arrange it and fund it if necessary. One young boy had surgery on his nose and another who developed epilepsy is being successfully treated at the Makeni Government Hospital. Later in the year, a young girl contracted a very serious bout of malaria, and our team took her to a health centre for immediate attention. Her mother believes that without this intervention she would have died.



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Improved school performance

- All of the children of school age on the Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS) project are now attending school. Previously, most had had to drop out as their families could not afford the fees and equipment. This obviously has a huge effect on the children themselves, but it also makes a difference to the family's overall wellbeing, enabling caregivers to preserve energy that they can then focus on other needs, such as regaining their strength and building a source of income.
- Several children had special commendations from the schools. In Bo, recent reports from schools indicated that of the 130 children who we are supporting there, 70% have above-average grades and only 10% needed remedial support.

Improved community understanding of child rights and the difficulties faced by vulnerable women, girls and families

- We held an awareness-raising campaign for the Children Living Alone project to raise the profile of the service amongst the local police, security services and community members, like market traders, shopkeepers, those likely to come into contact with these children. The response was very positive, and they were made aware of what we are trying to achieve and how, and also ways in which they could help.
- We raised awareness of the challenges faced by lone mothers, through radio programmes and workshops, as part of the wider strategic aim to undo stigma and encourage support for them and their children. We know that some of these played a key part in the eventual reconciliation of young mothers with their wider families.
- A reconciliation workshop was held in May 2008 for the children living alone and for their families or caregivers. Many said what a positive experience it had been and they contributed their ideas as to how the programme could be developed in the future, suggesting it should be expanded to meet the needs of more children and young people.
- We work closely with local leaders to identify the families most at risk and we continue to involve them once we discover the family's needs and their standing within the community. The support of neighbours and leaders can make a huge difference to a family's wellbeing, and as we have addressed their needs the local community has started to offer their help – gathering natural resources for building, offering their labour for free, trading with the families, looking out for them and making sure the family is included in community events.



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Working with other NGO's and relevant government authorities

- We collaborated with GOAL, an international NGO, who have a centre for street children at the ferry terminal in Freetown, to identify vulnerable children. This gave us the chance to counsel those who were spending the night at the centre, to establish a rapport with them with the aim of eventually being able to reconcile them safely with their family.
- We partnered with international NGO Right to Play, running workshops for children living alone on HIV/AIDs awareness and development of life skills.
- We worked with Right to Play and the Forum for African Women Educationalists on an advocacy campaign to enrol young women into education.
- We worked with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs to implement our child protection policies.

Thank you

Soroptimist International's support through Project Sierra has already changed the lives of many children and families.

In the hardest possible circumstances, you have given children, mothers and families what they need to stay together as a strong family unit at a time of real crisis. Your commitment has also helped many of them secure a brighter future and the ability to provide for their family's needs for the long-term. This is an extraordinary achievement and we hope you all feel proud of your part in it.

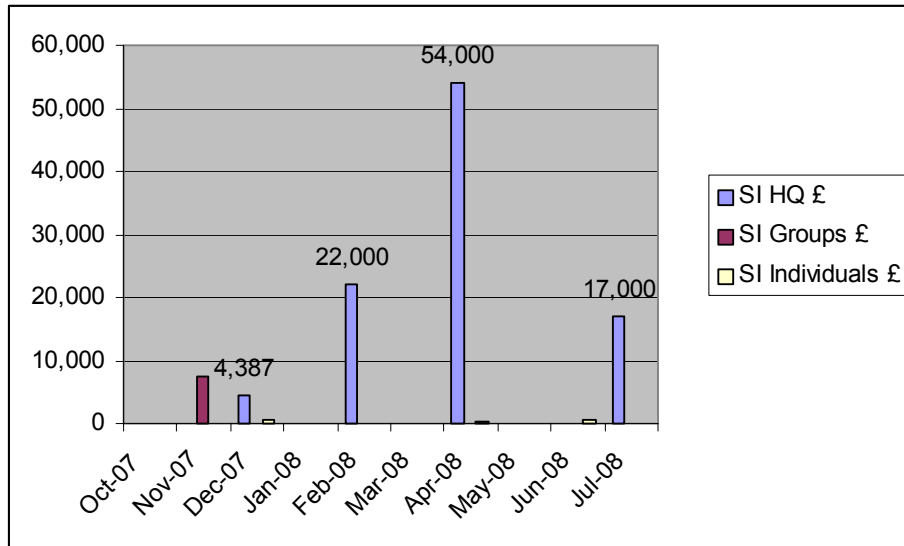
On behalf of everyone at Hope and Homes for Children and on behalf of all the children, women and families that we have been working with this year, thank you for your compassion and for all you have done to help them at such an important time in their lives.

Hope and Homes for Children, November 2008.



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INCOME DONATIONS TO PROJECT SIERRA: August 2007 – July 2008

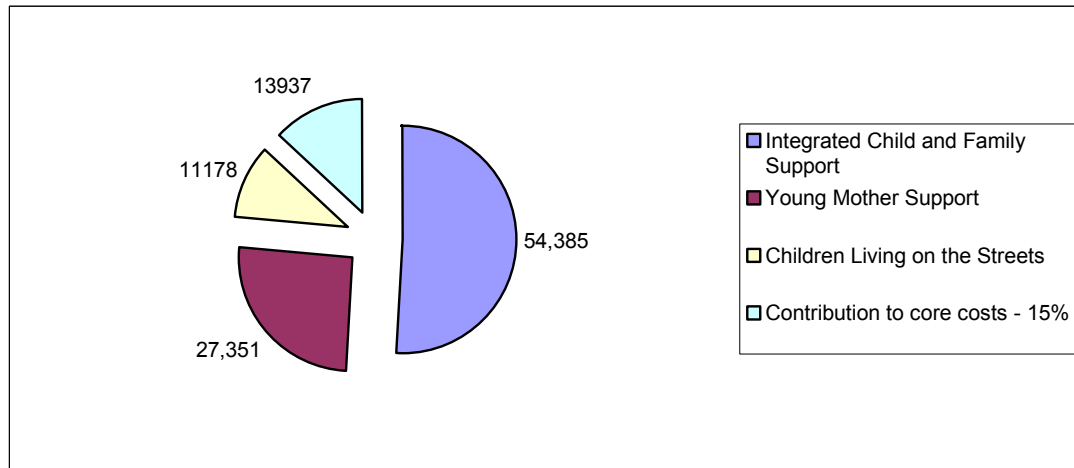


Totals:

SI Headquarters	£97,387
SI Groups	£7,939
SI Individuals	£1,526

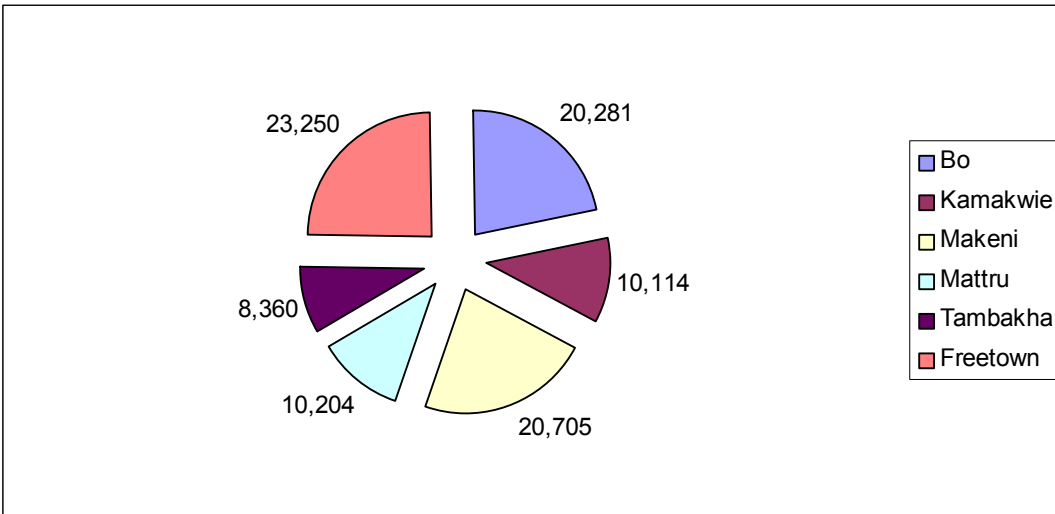
EXPENDITURE: August 2007 – July 2008

Table A: Expenditure by project area



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Table B: Expenditure by geographical area



Project Sierra: A Family And A Future is a four-year partnership between Soroptimist International (SI) and Hope and Homes for Children (HHC). During the term of this Quadrennial Project, SI aims to raise GBP £1million to fund the following projects in Sierra Leone:

- Young Mothers – based in Bo, Makeni and Freetown
- Children Living Alone – based in Freetown
- Integrated Child and Family Support – based in Bo, Matru, Makeni, Kamakwie, Tambakha

£1million represents approximately 50% of the total income that Hope and Homes for Children plans to spend on these projects during the span of our partnership together. (The remaining 50% is funded by a wide variety of different voluntary sources. Hope and Homes for Children has worked in Sierra Leone since 1996 and will continue to do so when the Quadrennial Partnership has come to an end.)

The information in this report and in our quarterly reports to SI describe all the work undertaken by Hope and Homes for Children in these project areas, including both the work funded directly by Project Sierra and by other voluntary sources.

SI are a principal partner in Hope and Homes for Children's work in Sierra Leone for four years. This level of commitment means that SI are having a significant impact upon Hope and Homes for Children's ability to develop and refine Hope and Homes for Children's ways of working in the short and long-term, not only in Sierra Leone but in other countries in Africa and Central and Eastern Europe.

In addition, SI's makes a critical contribution to our shared mission through their advocacy and awareness raising efforts, at all levels; local, national and international.



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