



## **Project SIerra: A Family and A Future**

### **Quarterly Report: July – September 2009**

#### **Programme Overview: Young Mothers**

Locations: Bo and Makeni – working with up to 117 young mothers and 71 babies (direct beneficiaries) and 127 extended family members and wider community members (indirect beneficiaries).

This project targets vulnerable, single young mothers who are living alone. It helps to prevent them being separated from their babies by supporting them to learn essential parenting skills and independent living skills. It also aims to reintegrate them with their families and empower them to be independent, active members of their community.

#### **Programme Updates:**

##### **Bo**

During this quarter the Bo project enrolled 17 new young mothers and 11 babies, bringing the total number of direct beneficiaries to 162. On joining the project all new mothers and babies received medical screening, required treatment and medical advice from the project Nurse. Each mother was also given one-to-one counselling to start tailoring a development plan for her individual needs.

All the newly enrolled mothers are attending the Training Centre, where they will be offered tutoring in tailoring, gara-tie dying, catering, soap-making and hairdressing. As most of them dropped out of school when they became pregnant they have missed a lot of their education so they will also receive tutoring in basic numeracy, literacy, business studies and health education.

Counselling sessions, focusing on behaviour, were held regularly throughout the quarter which aimed to increase the levels of self-esteem amongst all beneficiaries. The staff wanted to encourage the women to 'hold themselves high' and be proud of themselves within their community. Sessions also provided valuable advice on child care and family planning.

The project's Drop-In Centre continues to be a central 'hub' for all beneficiaries, providing food and daycare for the babies, so that the young mothers can attend training classes during the day. The team also use it to facilitate valuable healthcare services. This quarter a total of 37 mothers and 46 babies were screened and treated by the Nurse for diseases, including malaria, typhoid, worms, anaemia, diarrhoea

and fevers. A total of 20 mothers were referred to the hospital for further treatment and the team were pleased to report that all were responding well.

An important part of the team's work this quarter was continuing to work with the wider community. Counselling sessions were held with key community stakeholders to increase awareness of the young mothers and further engage their support. The team successfully reunited 50 young mothers back into their communities, including all the new mothers, and so these counselling sessions help to ensure their acceptance. It has been a big achievement for the team.

## **Makeni**

There are currently 13 young mothers and their 13 babies enrolled on the project in Makeni.

It has been a busy quarter as the young mothers awaited their exam results and the start of the new academic year. The team paid visits to three schools and were able to check on the progress of all the young mothers. Of the 13 who were attending Junior Secondary School or Senior Secondary School eight passed their exams and were promoted to new classes. The remaining five are awaiting their results.

The Makeni team was so pleased that the young women had shown such commitment to their studies and to mark this achievement, a special ceremony was held at the Makeni City Hall. During this the team distributed educational materials including books, uniforms, shoes and bags, together with receipts for fully paid school fees to help the young women in their new year.

There was concern over young woman who had been awaiting results as they found she had left for Freetown and there were indications that she would not be returning, so the team are following up on her and will be trying to enrol her on the Freetown project.

There have been 12 follow-up visits to the homes of the beneficiaries to help mediate with their families. Relationships continue to strengthen and the families have found the project has been very helpful and positive in their lives. The team has tutored the young women on how to make themselves helpful in their homes and has also provided them with psychological support to build their self-esteem.

In the last quarter we reported that those living in Makeni were very relieved that the rainy season had ended but it had heightened the risk of disease and ten young mothers and their babies became sick during this quarter. The team helped provide healthcare and all these beneficiaries were successfully treated at the clinic.

## **Programme Overview: Young Mothers and Children Living Alone in Freetown**

Location: Freetown – working with up to 70 children and 37 parents/caregivers (direct beneficiaries) and 409 extended family members and wider community members (indirect beneficiaries).

The project targets vulnerable children and young mothers who are living alone in Freetown with the aim of reunifying them with their family, extended family or wider family. It aims to empower young mothers to be independent, active members of the community.

### **Programme Update:**

During this quarter there was a total 70 children enrolled on the project. There are currently no young mothers enrolled as the 46 young mothers from the previous quarter had been successfully reintegrated into their families and left the project. There are plans to enrol 30 new young mothers in the New Year.

The newly enrolled children all received immediate counselling and mediation. The mediation provided a great opportunity for less experienced staff to build their confidence with children who live alone and will help them deal with more challenging cases in the future.

The families of 40 children were traced and 37 of them have been successfully reunified with their families. The team are still mediating between the remaining children and their families to resolve issues that led to them being on the streets in the first place.

The team were pleased to enrol 37 of the children into primary and secondary school. The remaining 33, who are awaiting reconciliation, have been enrolled at the vocational Training Centre where they are able to learn marketable skills of their choice. Once the children have been reunified with their families they will have the choice to take up learning a skill on a permanent basis or enrol into formal education at school.

### **Programme Overview: Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS)**

Locations: Bo, Mattru, Makeni, Kamakwie, Tambakha – working with up to 800 children and parents/caregivers (direct beneficiaries) and up to 1000 extended family members and wider community members (indirect beneficiaries) at any one time.

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 the 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 is able to join.

### **Programme Updates:**

#### **Bo**

This quarter the team visited three secondary schools and two primary schools to assess the educational performance of all 148 the children currently enrolled. The team was very pleased to learn that 92% of the children were able to be promoted to new classes. There was no specific reason for the poorer performance of the remaining children but the school authorities and affected caregivers/parents were encouraged to pay special attention to these children and allow them time to study.

In September the team was able to distribute educational support to the beneficiaries including books, uniforms, shoes and payment of school fees at a special Ceremony attended by community elders.

The team continued to offer counselling sessions and to the families and to encourage the beneficiaries to use their extended family members for support if necessary.

### **Mattru**

There are currently 143 children and 40 caregivers/parents supported by the project in Mattru.

This quarter the team carried out educational progress reports on all children. They visited 15 primary schools and two secondary schools to collect report cards. The majority of children showed excellent progress and were promoted to new classes. The six who received vocational training have also all graduated. The families of the few children who showed poorer performance were visited by the team and encouraged to provide the children with more time to study. Teachers were also visited to see how special attention could be provided to give extra support to those who needed it. One Head teacher singled out our project as a great example of care and concern for beneficiaries. Other organisations were encouraged to follow this example.

The team distributed educational materials to prepare the children for the start of the new educational year. Their caregivers/parents expressed how happy they were to receive such support as they know how it is genuinely helping them to better their lives. They also provided start-up kits for graduates of the vocational Training Centre to help the beneficiaries put their skills to use. More of these start-up kits will be distributed in the coming months.

Through local community mobilisation the team were able to work with skilled members of the community to repair the damaged roofs of seven families' houses, in three different communities, and repair broken doors and windows to ensure security.

### **Makeni**

The team in Makeni was fully engaged in assessing the educational performance of all 126 beneficiaries this quarter. They visited four secondary and eight primary schools.

The school performance was satisfying, with 69% of children being promoted to new classes, but it was lower than previous years. The team met with various school authorities and were informed that the poor performance of 31% of the children was due to absenteeism. Social Workers found that the caregivers/parents of these children were finding it hard to send the children to school on an empty stomach.

The team responded in a number of ways: firstly by encouraging caregivers/parents to send their children to school and by helping them find alternative ways to provide something for them to eat. They also asked the school authorities to report cases of absenteeism to the project at an earlier stage so they can follow up sooner. Lastly, they have provided small business support for these families to help them be able to buy food or produce for their children.

As with many of the beneficiaries during this quarter, the Makeni children benefitted from the provision of books, uniforms, shoes and payment of school fees, distributed at a special Ceremony.

## **Kamakwie**

The team currently work with 147 children (77 boys and 70 girls) and 36 caregivers/parents in Kamakwie.

The Kamakwie team was busy collecting educational reports on all the children from the vocational Training Centre and primary and secondary schools this quarter. The overall performance of the children was very encouraging, with 98% of them being promoted to new classes. They too have received educational materials (included books, pens, uniforms and school bags) and the project has paid for their educational fees.

A sensitisation meeting for Community Heads and Local Authorities was held to show how the authorities can serve as a safety net for the vulnerable families in the local communities. Unfortunately only 15 Community Heads attended, which was a poor turnout, attributed to the heavy rains and the fact that many Community Heads were busy farming swamped areas of land. The Team decided that all future meetings will be arranged in the dry season to ensure maximum attendance.

The rainy season has led to an increase in sickness such as malaria and cholera. The team Nurse treated a total of 82 beneficiaries and referred five to hospital for treatment. The team Social Worker provided health talks to 25 families from three different communities where sickness had been highest.

The rains have also caused leaking in roofs of a number of houses and directly affected the health of the inhabiting beneficiaries. The team gathered the materials to repair the leaks when the rains end and this has encouraged the families.

## **Tambakha**

Tambakha is a rural and very remote area of the country and the team are currently working with families, comprising 37 adults and 122 children.

As in the other programmes the team carried out educational progress reports for all the beneficiaries in Tambakha and distributed educational materials. The support and materials the children received are particularly important in Tambakha because it is the most vulnerable and remote community in Sierra Leone and only 10% of children have access to basic education. This makes the efforts to provide education even more remarkable.

There were several house repairs to fix leaking roofs and secure broken doors and windows to improve security. The team was also very pleased to provide packages of second-hand clothing for the children and family members. As poverty is prevalent here the children receive clothes very rarely, and only on very special occasions, so the packages, which included dresses for the girls and shorts and t-shirts for the boys really helped self-esteem. The team also provided bed sheets to keep families warm at night and prevent colds and fevers, common during the rainy season.

Additionally, vital farm materials were distributed to 35 families who really needed these to help increase their productivity.

The team Social Worker/Nurse was very active in providing health talks to families and giving first aid treatment. In his twice weekly rounds he provided medical care for 153 direct beneficiaries and 75 indirect beneficiaries. This vital service is more

cost effective than referring patients to the Kamakwie Hospital. There were also 31 counselling sessions held to strengthen families, whose relationships were weakening. This all helps to keep families together.

## **Hope and Homes for Children January 2010**

### **Case Studies:**

#### **Hannah: Trained Tailor**

##### **Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS) Matru**

Hannah is a beneficiary of the ICFS Project in the rural location of Matru and was enrolled in the project in 2007 at the age of 15. Following the death of her parents, Hannah was fostered by her blind uncle and, as the oldest, she became the breadwinner, selling firewood to feed the family of six. The family was referred to the ICFS project by the local management committee, which is a collective of representatives from the community, local and chieftdom authorities.

Considering her age at the time of enrolment, Hannah opted for training in tailoring and in August 2007 she was admitted as a trainee at the SLOIC Training Centre in Tihun in the Sogbini Chieftdom. During her training, Hannah continued to help support her family by selling firewood and charcoal within her community. In June 2009, Hannah completed her training in tailoring. After her graduation she was provided with a standing sewing machine, two rolls of poplin materials, some assorted sewing threads and other tailoring equipment such as scissors and a tape measure. The tools were formally handed over at a ceremony attended by community elders, project staff and friends and family of those who were graduating.

Returning to her village, Hannah set up her tailoring business from of the family home. During her first month of business, Hannah had 15 commissions. She has plans to grow her business and she has decided she will continue to sell firewood and charcoal to supplement her family's income. She says her biggest plan is to save enough money to enable her uncle to have treatment at the hospital in the coming year.

### **Case Study:**

#### **The Family of Suzan Kamara**

##### **Integrated Child and Family Support Project, Tambakha**

The family of Suzan Kamara joined the ICFS project in the rural area of Tambakha in June 2007. The initial assessment of the family showed that Suzan, who is a widow, and her five children were living in a home that was dangerously close to collapse,

the roof leaked and there were no windows and doors. The household income was so low that the family were on the verge of starvation. The severe weather conditions in the rainy season resulted in the two younger children suffering serious health problems and they could not afford any medical help. There were no clothes for the children so none of them could attend school and the family were shunned by their community.

Upon joining our ICFS project, the family's short and long term needs were assessed. All of the family were given clothes and the three older children were supported so that they could return to school. The team arranged for the two younger ones to see a Nurse so that they could get the medical attention they needed.

Suzan undertook farming work which generated a very small income as she borrowed money for seeds which she had to pay back at an exorbitant rate of interest after the harvest. The team helped Suzan purchase groundnut seeds and palm oil seedlings. This helped the household income increase and as a result of this, Suzan was also able to send the two younger children to school once they were old enough.

Finally in May 2009, this family was supported by both the project and the local community to renovate the family home. The team provided zinc roofing sheets, assorted nails and board, which were well beyond the family's means, while the community provided the labour and the local materials. As a result of this input the family are now proud owners of a safe and secure four roomed house that is the same standard as others in the community. The family now has the confidence to be active members of their community. Where they had previously been ignored because of their lack of housing, they are now respected. Suzan is asked to participate in the community's decision-making sessions and her opinion is valued.

The children are now much healthier and can now invite friends to play with them in their home. In essence the social standing of the family has improved significantly and they are now fully accepted within their community.

As a result of the Project SIerra ICFS project in Tambakha, the life of the Kamara family has significantly improved. Their home is safe and secure, the children are healthy and in school, they are accepted and welcome in their community and they have a stable income. The Kamara family have now become independent and have exited our programme