



PROJECT SIERRA: A FAMILY AND A FUTURE STUDY TOUR – JANUARY 2010

Here are the full reports that were posted on SI's Programme Blog by Soroptimists who took part in the 2nd Study Tour to Sierra Leone
(see also www.siprogrammeblog.blogspot.com)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2010

Project Sierra- More stories from the January Study Tour

I have been on a life changing Study Tour to Sierra Leone and since I returned I want to share some experiences and thoughts with those who log on! Project Sierra is an excellent partnership project- you can be assured of that! We are making a big difference to the lives of many women and girls through our contributions raised in so many innovative ways around the world.

We met 2 young women working in hotels we stayed at in Bo and Makeni- they had been in the 'Teenage Mothers' programme. They had completed their schooling, trained in catering and obtained these positions. They were now independent- had places to live and care for their children. They were full of praise for HANCI (Help a Needy Child in Sierra Leone) the NGO through which Hope and Homes for Children works in Sierra Leone. What mattered to them was that HANCI keeps on supporting them- making sure that they are coping and are happily settled in their careers.

We were welcomed everywhere we went in exuberant fashion with acrobatics, dancing and singing followed by speeches and more dancing and singing and often roleplay. How humble I felt when they could not thank us enough for all we had done for them- they have nothing compared with us and I knew that we need to give more!!



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In each community we were graciously welcomed and given food beautifully prepared and served as well as 2 goats from one community! Exporting them could have been a problem so they went to one of the other projects!

There are many pictures I could paint of our Study Tour January 2010 but do read the new e-TIS in March and also visit the SI website where there will be a longer account of our visit. It was well planned by Hope and Homes for Children and Jo and Kirsty, who accompanied us, made the whole experience special. HANCI staff were thrilled that we were there and I feel that I must emphasise again what amazing work they are doing in such poverty stricken circumstances. In one village we visited we were told of the respect the community has for HANCI-they are they only NGO working there (it was a long journey to get there). They say that not only do they come and talk with the community about what is needed- they then start work and stay and develop the work- they do not leave. A very heart felt tribute in a country where many NGO's come and go.

The memories I carry with me are precious! Speaking with the First Lady- she invited us to meet with her, meetings with the media in Bo, Makeni and Freetown (the latter becoming front page news!!!), talking with the benefactors of the projects, dancing with the welcomers as we were received rapturously, meeting a group of ladies in Makeni who are so keen to be Soroptimists, shaking many, many people by the hand using the African handshake, driving on 'interesting roads' and seeing how Christians and Muslims live side by side and respect each other.

Alison, our SI Project Liaison, helped in every way she could to make our stay enable us to understand Sierra Leone and the difficulties the country faces. I have left a little of my heart in that country!

Margaret Cook International Assistant Programme Director



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Think Global – Gina- Study Tour participant from SISWP

In Sierra Leone, the signs of an increasingly globalised world were all around. We drove past signs for a German bank, drank water with labels written in French and Arabic, were greeted at the airport with a sign for Coca-Cola and every day saw NGOs from the USA, Netherlands, UK, Denmark, China and countless others. Nestle's reputation for exploiting coffee farmers in West Africa, little sachets of their coffee showed up at our breakfast table every morning. Sierra Leone is also rich in natural resources, exporting bauxite, rutile, coffee, cocoa and fish on top of their most famous export, diamonds.

It occurred to me during my trip to Sierra Leone that this country was one of many. In just about any country in the world you can find global influences, good and bad. Which is why it makes no sense to dismiss the problems of developing nations as being someone else's responsibility when you live in a wealthy, developed country. If wealthy nations want to get rich off the resources of poor nations and sell their products in developing country markets, then to me it's not a great leap in logic that there is something missing in the equation. The world is ever-interdependent, and the problems of the world's poor are problems for us all.

Gina Olivieri

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2010

Last Posting from Project Sierra Study Tour 2010

This is the last of 3 posts from the Project Sierra Study Tour team in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The last few days have been a whirlwind of visits, meetings, and inspirations. Yesterday we visited the HANCI project in Kissy providing services to street children (the majority of whom are girls). We met some amazing young



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girls who are trying to rebuild their lives and move off the streets, with the help of HANCI and our support.

Then we had a meeting with Mrs. Sia Koroma, the first lady of Sierra Leone. She graciously welcomed our team and commended us for our support of the people of her country. Like us, she is interested in helping vulnerable girls, and empowering the women here. The visit was recorded for national television, and the First Lady said she would be issuing a press statement about our visit.

Media attention for our visit has been amazing. Margaret Cook, Alice Wells and Chris Knight participated in a radio interview from Bo, Margaret did another radio interview in Makeni, and we had a print media journalist travel with us to Kamakwei and Tambakha. This morning we held a press conference at HANCI's headquarters in Freetown. 4 newspaper reporters, 1 radio, and 1 TV reporter attended, peppering us with questions about the visit and our impressions.

Everyone expressed their gratitude for the work being done by our partners, the stellar results the projects are achieving, and the level of community support wherever HANCI and HHC are operating. "Other NGOs can learn something from HANCI," SI President Elect Alice said.

After lunch, some of us said our farewells for the long journey home. The rest are staying behind for 2 more days, to visit the members of SI Freetown and some of their projects.

We are all so impressed and amazed at the resiliency of women and girls in Sierra Leone, and the staff of HANCI making a difference in their lives. We will have more to share through the Project Sierra website very soon.

Love, Members of the January 2010 Project Sierra Study Tour
Cathy Standiford



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THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2010

Project Sierra - More notes from the field

Greetings from Sierra Leone--somewhere between Makeni and Freetown. Network coverage has been inconsistent over the past two days, while we travelled to the northern part of the country.

After leaving Bo we went to Makeni, where HHC and their partner HANCI have a project. We were greeted with another festive welcome, and participated in a community assembly. The level of community support for the work our partners is doing is incredible--and is one of the reasons Project Sierra has been so successful here. Our contributions have provided a more stable source of funding, allowing our partners to expand their capacity to serve women and girls in need. We visited some of the beneficiaries of the program--stories about them to follow.

Yesterday we took a very long (and very bumpy!) road to Kamakwie and a community called Tambakha. This village is so remote, the people have been largely ignored by the national government. And HANCI is the only NGO providing services there. The other NGO's have come and gone, unable to deal with the magnitude of challenges.

The people in Tambakha live in abject poverty. HANCI and HHC, with our support, have rebuilt homes damaged in the war, created schools and an orphanage (there is a high number of orphans in this community), constructed a stable water supply system, and have helped the community plant a palm oil plantation.

The community has rallied, inspired by what they can become as a result of our support. More than 50 percent of the children are now in school, and education has become an important community value.

This community is so poor, but we were treated like royalty, with a big community celebration--with the paramount chief and all of the town elders in attendance. As tokens of appreciation we were given kola nuts (which most of our group took



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small bites from), and two live goats! These are riches to this community, so the gifts show the depth of their gratitude for our help.

Everyone on the tour was moved deeply by the transformations in this community--as a result of Project Sierra. But this day's visit also shows how significant the needs of women and girls are in Sierra Leone, and why supporting Project Sierra is so vitally important.

The January 2010 Project Sierra Study Tour Team

Cathy Standiford

2009-2010 President

Soroptimist International of the Americas

www.soroptimist.org

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2010

Sierra Leone- Project Sierra - notes from Alison - the leader

Notes from the "field"- Alison Sutherland- Quadrennial Project Liaison

I joined the Study Tour group in Makeni (Tuesday) where they received a joyous welcome – after a 3 hour drive on dusty roads from Bo, Soroptimists danced the last 200m into the HANCI-SL centre with children and young mums who are Project Sierra beneficiaries. The hall was crowded with staff, families and community representatives, including local NGO partners and women representing the local authorities. Introductions, speeches of welcome and a skit performed by young mums all gave warm appreciation to Soroptimist International for the continued support that is giving opportunities to so many women and children in the community. The children are eager to learn and women are encouraged by the support of other women around the world. We



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also met lovely baby Hannah, born just after the 2009 Study Tour visit and named after President Hanne!

A tour of the centre, where the Soroptimists were as magnets to the crowds of young children eager to hold hands with the new visitors, then lunch of local delicacies (groundnut soup, cassava leaf stew, fresh fruits) were followed by a courtesy call on the Paramount Chief of the chieftom, receiving a gracious welcome from elders of the chieftom in the Chief's barray (meeting place). Their appreciation of the work of HANCI-SL echoed that expressed earlier by the women community leaders who spoke of the respect local authorities have for HANCI-SL's work and commitment. Visits were made to families and young mums who had graduated from the programme - one works in the hotel where we stayed and

In the evening a dozen women from the prospective Soroptimist club of Makeni joined us at the hotel for a drink and meeting – their enthusiasm was great to see, they meet regularly and have started income generation activity to support education for girls in surrounding rural areas. The challenge was given to work towards an early chartering of a new Soroptimist club.

Travelling in four vehicles, ten Soroptimist 'best sisters' from all Federations getting to know each other better and sharing experiences with staff from our partner Hope and Homes for Children and local partner HANCI-SL is a big part of the Study Tour experience (including a couple of breakdowns and some deft timetable juggling and last minute hotel changes!).

I write this having just waved the group off, in the dark after a 6am breakfast, on their trip up to the remote villages of Tambakha chieftom to meet families supported through Project Sierra I'm eagerly awaiting their stories!



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TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2010

Project Sierra- Study Tour- Note from Pres. Cathy

Greetings from Sierra Leone! The Study Tour group arrived safe and sound. We have been joined by Cleo Jarrett from SI Freetown on the tour.

We were given a very warm welcome in Bo yesterday with lovely songs sung by the girls in the teen mother program. We were able to watch them learn different skills such as sewing, tie-dyeing, batik, and hairdressing. Girls learning catering and hotel management prepared a wonderful lunch for us. Delicious!

After touring the centre in Bo, we split into groups and visited some of the beneficiaries of the teen mother. These young women were amazing--and incredibly grateful for the opportunities they now have as a result of this project Soroptimists are funding!

And, this morning we discovered that the baby on the front of the Project Sierra leaflet is the daughter of Mary, a graduate of the teen mother program. (Mary's face is gracing the upper right hand corner of the leaflet!)

Mary now works at the New Sahara Hotel where we stayed last night. Mary proudly showed us a recent photo of her daughter, Mary Anna, who is now 3 and attending preschool. What a joy to meet this wonderful woman and hear her success story!! We will upload photos of Mary holding the "then and now" photos of Mary Anna as soon as we can--but it may not be until next week.

Today we head for Makeni and another Hope and Homes for Children/HANCI project.

More to come later.... the January 2010 Study Tour.



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