



Laughter Africa's School Fees Project 2020/21



Global Giving

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Laughter Africa's School Fees Project—Proposal

A UK registered charity, Laughter Africa's objective is the relief of poverty for street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone through the provision of housing and the advancement of education. Our efforts are focussed on children aged up to 18 helping them to bring about positive change in their lives by encouraging and enabling them to leave the streets and supporting the child in his/her education.

The last major [national head count](#) for street children in Sierra Leone estimated that there were approximately 50,000 children living on the streets, and that 'the circumstances of [these] street children *violate almost every article in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*'. This includes, but is not limited to, the right to protection from violence and sexual exploitation, the right to health care and clean water, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to relaxation and play, and the right to an education. Since that report, Sierra Leone endured the Ebola crisis in 2014, which saw over [11,000 children](#) orphaned. The average age of the child losing their primary caregiver was just 9 years old.

In 2020, Sierra Leone remains one of the [poorest countries](#) in the world, with [52.2%](#) of the population living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day. The economic impact of the Covid-19 emergency, which has so far led to escalating food prices and shortages of basic items, has only exacerbated the desperate situation many of the country's poorest families, and especially children, find themselves in. It is already known that children living in poverty, and girls in particular, will be disproportionately affected by Covid-19. On the ground, we are acutely aware of the increased risk of FGM, teenage pregnancy and inadequate access to healthcare.

There are many factors that cause children to end up on the streets. Often it is due to violence or abuse at home, family breakdown, neglect, war, natural disasters, internal displacement, forced marriage, FGM, parental death, parental substance abuse, effects of HIV/AIDS, and child labour. Once on the streets, challenges and dangers faced by these children include violence and sexual abuse, child trafficking, child labour, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and homemade abortions, suicidal thoughts and low self-esteem, police brutality, discrimination and even death.

The cost of education is partly responsible for the high street child population. Although 'free education' was introduced by the government in Sierra Leone, schools still impose substantial charges per student. (The schools argue that the government covers a basic fee only, and not all of the extra costs). Moreover, such 'free' education does not include any of the associated costs of schooling (such as school uniform, a pair of shoes and socks, a schoolbag, books, stationary, examinations, transport and lunch costs). This means that the most poverty-stricken children in Sierra Leone are not able to access even a very basic education. This has a far-reaching negative impact for both these children and their communities.

The [UN CESCR](#) noted that 'education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities'. Without access to an education, these children are much more likely to remain trapped in a cycle of poverty. For this reason, the advancement of education for street children is therefore one of Laughter Africa's primary strategies.

Our activities are in four main areas, each part of our overall strategy to encourage and enable children to leave the streets:

Outreach Work: Our social workers (all local to Sierra Leone) meet the children living on the streets with the aim of dealing with their immediate needs. They may be hungry or ill. They may be lonely or grieving and just need a listening ear. They may have been raped or in trouble. Whatever they need, we are there to help them. Whilst we encourage the children to leave the streets, they are not forced to do so.

Interim Care Centre (ICC): This is a safe place where the street children can be children and learn to laugh again. Children can temporarily live here while attempts are made to find their families. Food, clothing, health care, education, counselling, support and other essentials are provided. Activities such as drama, music, sports, cultural dance, arts and crafts and cookery are also available.

Home-Tracing and Family Reunification: We trace the children's families in the hope that the parties can be reunited. Reunification with family is dependent on whether the family situation is safe and secure. If this is not the case, we seek an alternative, long-term home for the child.

School Fees: This is the most integral part of our approach, and one to which we attribute our high success rate of the children we have helped not returning to the streets. We pay the school fees/vocational fees for all the children who return home, up until they finish the WASSCE (the Sierra Leone equivalent of A Levels). We also cover all the additional costs of the child's education (uniform, bag, books, examination charges, extra lessons, transport costs, lunch money) and we continue to work closely with the child and child's family, offering practical and pastoral support. In the current Covid-19 emergency, our visits may also include basic food provision, such as packages of rice and garrie, for the most vulnerable families that we work with.

In recent years, we have increased our focus on supporting young girls in particular to leave the streets and enroll in education. In Sierra Leone, girls are disproportionately disadvantaged in education compared to boys, with income poverty, teenage pregnancy, forced/early marriage, sexual abuse, transactional sex and cultural attitudes towards gender found to be the [major obstacles](#) impacting on low enrolment and retention rates of girls in school.

On the ground, we witness first-hand the appalling circumstances in which girls living on the streets, sometimes as young as six and seven years old, are enduring on a daily basis. The majority of these girls have been raped and brutalised on the streets. Many have had no choice but to engage in commercial sex work in order to eat.

Mediana, aged 10, has lived on and off the streets since she was 8 years old. Her mother was a commercial sex worker, and after Mediana was raped by one of her mother's clients, she ran away from home. In order to survive, she became a commercial sex worker, sleeping with men for 2,000 Leones (about 20p). We reunified Mediana with her uncle and his family in a different area of Freetown in August 2018 and she has been living at home and in education since then. Education and family reunification give Mediana a chance to break the cycle of poverty and abuse.

The impact of our work is best told through the stories of the children that we work with. We invite you to visit our [Facebook](#) and [Online Book](#) for more information.

By the end of 2020 we want to help 450 children to attend school, but severely limited funding heavily restricts this ambition. We do not receive any institutional funding, and we rely purely on donations from individuals, churches, schools, trusts and foundations to carry out our work. Due to the Covid-19 emergency, with many individuals furloughed and churches and schools closed, we have seen income from donations significantly reduced in the recent past.

In the wake of the Covid-19 emergency, the Sierra Leone government has now confirmed that schools will be open in September 2020. In order to implement our School Fees Project 2020/2021, we require a total budget of £33,700 per annum.

A grant of £33,700 (\$47,000) would pay for the school fees and associated costs of schooling for 450 children for one year, and it would be allocated as follows:

No. of children	Item	Total Cost (£)
450	School Fees	9130.00
450	School Starter Kit	19657.00
450	Support Costs	4980.00
	Total	33767.00

School fees and enrolment charges vary from school to school (and from primary, junior or secondary school), but on average 250,000 SLL / £20.75 per child is required. A school starter kit includes uniform, vests, socks, ledgers, shoes, pens and school bags for each child. For some children, it may also include textbooks or other required items. One school starter kit costs 520,000 SLL / £43.20 on average. In addition, we allocate an amount for “extra support”, which will pay for examination costs, compulsory extra lesson charges or costs of school outings. Not every child will require this. For example, for 450 children, approximately 50 will need such extra support. Please see the attached budget for the full breakdown of costs.

All money received from supporters is spent directly on in-country operational costs and we are proud of the fact that the charity is managed entirely by volunteers at the central level, with no administration, fundraising or organizational support costs. If you would like more information on our work, please see our full history of annual reports and accounts [here](#).

Access to education would support these children in leaving and staying off the streets for good. It would have a broad and profound impact on their future and the possibilities that lie before them. It would have a positive impact on the communities that they live in and the society at large. Laughter Africa’s ultimate goal is to help these children fulfil their aspirations and to bring about positive change in their lives.

Thank you for your consideration.