

# Building a future: improving standards of education for poor communities in Liberia

Liberia **direct** funding target: £100,000

Fourteen years of civil war have devastated Liberia's education system. Teacher training programmes have collapsed, and there is a lack of equipment. However, class sizes have increased dramatically after the introduction of free education in 2006. As a result, schools have been forced to employ badly trained teachers, worsening already poor standards – almost half of high school graduates cannot read or write proficiently.



*Winston Kerbay, Library Manager and Reading Teacher, teaches a young student.*

## The Project

This project extends activities undertaken during 2007 in three poor areas - Montserrado, Margibi and Bong. The activities, developed alongside pupils, parents, teachers and district education officers, will focus on 17 state schools.

The aim is to improve the quality of teaching, to provide more educational materials, and ensure the more effective use of library resources. The project will encourage parents to get involved in running their community's schools, and give girls that have dropped out an opportunity to return to education. It will also empower people to lobby authorities for increased education budgets.

### Project aims

The overall aim is to raise the quality of education by:

- improving teachers' skills through in-service training, and training unskilled teachers in modern teaching methods, class management, counselling, and social studies
- providing more resources for teachers and students, including school-based libraries
- training a number of teachers in how to conduct reading lessons
- encouraging older girls that have dropped out because of poverty, early marriage or lack of family/community support, to re-enrol in school by offering evening classes, so they can complete elementary



*Miadda Sumo, 19, and her baby, at a night school for 'over-aged' students.*

education whilst supporting their families

- increasing parents' involvement in the running of their children's schools through Parent Teacher Associations (PTA)
- promoting activities that will influence key education decision-makers.

Supporters, communities, local partners and Oxfam – working together to change lives

## Background



*Janka Kollie, Yawerlee School PTA  
- "school attendance has increased  
since the PTA began."*

Liberia is one of the world's poorest countries - almost 85 per cent of people live below the poverty line. Its civil war from

1989 to 2003 devastated public sector services. Schools were damaged or looted, teacher-training collapsed, educators left the profession, motivation fell amongst teachers and students – some of whom were previously child soldiers. Despite free primary education, poverty makes attendance intermittent, because parents still cannot afford uniforms and books.

Recent wage increases have not attracted enough teachers back, so schools have employed unskilled people just to keep going. It is estimated that 62 per cent of teachers have no

formal training, and many schools are now run by untrained staff. As a result standards are plummeting.

The Ministry of Education has sought to involve parents in the running of schools through groups such as PTAs. In addition to providing teacher training, Oxfam is helping to give parents the skills and the support to monitor and manage their local schools, to generate additional income, and encourage children to attend class.

## The Plan

### Activities:

- provide in-service teacher training workshops for 130 teachers, undertake three annual supervision visits for at least 60 per cent of them
- provide additional training in classroom-based, teacher assessment methods initially for 12 school supervisors, then for all new appointments
- train at least 30 teachers in conducting reading lessons and using library resources more effectively
- establish and equip three new school libraries and continue to improve the service and resources available in 12 existing libraries
- train 15 librarians in supporting teachers and students
- hold quarterly reading competitions for the project schools
- train local volunteers to run meetings, workshops, and events to inform communities about the value of education
- encourage parents in nine additional schools to form PTAs with the support of county education officers
- conduct three, quarterly general meetings for school community members, to discuss teaching standards, helping children learn, encouraging school attendance, and protecting children from abuse
- organise two PTA training workshops per school, and monthly follow-up visits
- conduct twice-yearly co-ordination meetings for all PTAs
- support the setting up of 10 school garden pilot projects to supplement schools' incomes
- organise evening classes in basic education in 10 schools to enable 800 older girls to re-enrol
- cover the cost of organising media coverage, activities, meetings, campaign materials etc. to lobby authorities for increased support for education.



*An MCSS in-service teaching training session, Monrovia.*

## The Impact

During the previous year, we trained 84 teachers, 10 school supervisors, 12 librarians and set up libraries in nine schools. We also trained 84 members of 12 PTAs.

The project will ensure that more than 8,000 poor children and young people have a good quality education.

At least 130 teachers will benefit from improved training, including some who will be trained to teach reading skills. Teachers will also have new or enhanced school library facilities.

Parents will have more influence over the management and educational standards of community schools through PTAs. They will also be able to help protect children from abuses, and establish school

gardens to generate income to offset fee increases.

There will also be support to enable people to lobby public bodies to respond to poor communities' education needs.

### Who will benefit?

Across 17 schools in the three counties, 7,500 elementary and junior school children, 130 teachers and 800 older girls will benefit directly from improved teaching and learning.

The teacher-training element of the project will prioritise female teachers, and provide all teachers with the skills to meet the learning needs of girls. Parents, and others in the community, will also be encouraged to support girls' education.

### Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring plan - designed by Oxfam's Education Programme Manager and our partners - is supported by Oxfam educational staff and community representatives, who will have key supervision roles. There will be monthly co-ordination meetings, where feedback from monitoring reports will be discussed.

### Sustainability

The activities of this project are in line with the Liberian Government's commitment to improving the quality of education. The management skills passed on through these activities - to partners, educational officers, and PTAs - will enable communities to manage their own education projects in the future.

## The People



### As long as I have life, I want to learn

"I have learnt to read, write and do maths since coming to evening classes. I have six girls and one boy. I had my daughter when I was in the second grade, so I had to stop school. My children feel good about me going back to school, and to support them I do gardening and I sew."

Mary Mulbah, 45, Night School Student



### The kids are very 'hard'

"Liberian children are 'grown up' because of the war. Oxfam trained us to teach them in a new way. Before we just wrote on the blackboard now everything is done by the student and we guide and direct them. The children face a lot of problems, but the psychology training has helped me a lot."

Mary N Kartee, MCSS Trained English Teacher



### I want to take care of our people's welfare

"I work two days a week in school and three in the community. I visit homes of children who are not in school and encourage parents to send them to class rather than to work. In December 2006, there were 150 students coming to the school, now there are 510 - and 206 are girls."

Korpo Lape, Community Education Monitor



Abraham Conneh, Oxfam Education Officer based in Monrovia, Liberia.

### Partners

Various parts of the overall project will be managed by different partners, supported by Oxfam's Education staff: teacher training - Monrovia Consolidated School System (MCSS); teacher training and library project - Restoration of Education Advancement Programme (REAP), by a local NGO; PTA elements - Liberia Education Action for Development (LEAD); NGO and community advocacy activities - Liberia Education For All Technical Committee (LETCOM).

## About **direct**

By supporting direct projects you're joining a global network of supporters, local people and partner organisations, all working with Oxfam to end poverty and suffering for good. From helping whole communities to protect themselves against disaster, to working with national governments to transform a country's schools, to helping individual families to earn a living, all direct projects offer you the chance to change lives.

### Our commitment to you:

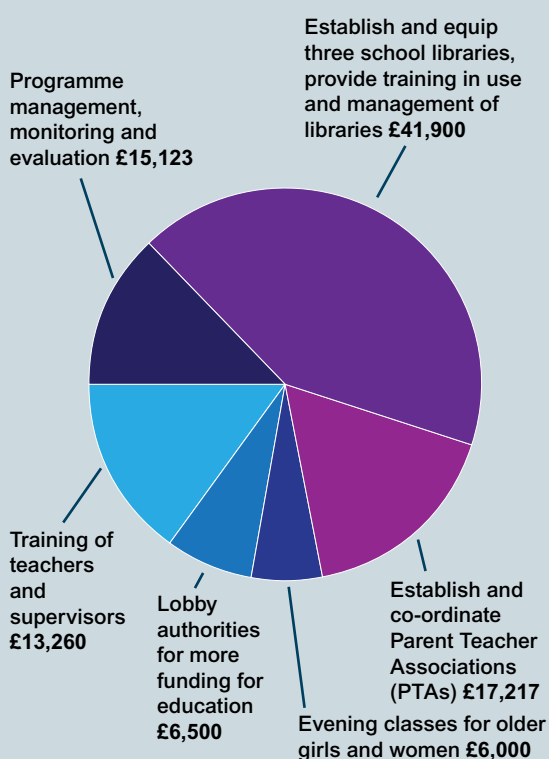
- One hundred per cent of your money is invested in your chosen project
- You'll receive 6 and 12 month progress reports on your project
- Email alerts when new information is posted on the website
- A dedicated account manager to answer questions and keep you informed.

### Other countries needing your support:

Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Honduras, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Nepal, Philippines, Sudan, Tanzania, West Africa regional, Viet Nam, Zambia.

## The Budget

Total £100,000



## Liberia: country profile



Population	3.2 million
Life expectancy at birth	42.5 years
GDP per capita	\$152 (UK GDP per capita \$33,238)
Adult literacy rate	55%*
Youth literacy rate	57%*
Attendance rate for primary education	66%*
Attendance rate for secondary education	17%*

Source: UNDP Human Development Report, 2006, except \* which are sourced from www.unicef.org

All photos: Aubrey Wade/Oxfam