

Turning girls  
into teachers

in **Sierra Leone**



**PLAN**  
INTERNATIONAL

# Turning girls into teachers in Sierra Leone



## Project overview

### The problem

In Sierra Leone, only a quarter of girls are still attending school by the time they finish primary school. We know that a powerful reason for this is the lack of female teachers in schools. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that girls respond better to – and are best motivated by – female teachers, who can also improve security and perceptions of gender equity. In the rural communities where we are delivering this project in Sierra Leone, women make up just 16% of primary school teachers and 8% of secondary school teachers. Male teachers often give more attention to boys within the classroom, asking them more questions, and girls' learning is further hampered by teachers' low expectations of



their intellectual skills. And without female teachers or role models, girls coping with issues of early marriage, pregnancy or feelings of vulnerability have few places to turn.

Women wishing to become qualified teachers in Sierra Leone have a choice of just two universities or two teacher training colleges. Large rural areas and poor roads mean these facilities are out of reach to the majority. Even if young women have the required education (only 15% of girls finish high school) and can afford the tuition, families are often reluctant to allow them to live away from home.

**Plan International UK is helping to put more female teachers into classrooms.**  
**Thank you for considering this important work!**

### The project

We are working to give **485 young women** the chance to become teachers through specially-designed distance learning courses. Our candidates will prepare for their studies with targeted support from the **Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE)**, receiving coaching and building up classroom experience. Having qualified, they will start a three-year distance learning teaching degree which will enable them to gain qualifications while studying close to home. This **innovative approach**, used for the first time in Sierra Leone, has been developed by the **Open University**. We are working across **five districts** of rural Sierra Leone.

*"Men learn negative stereotypes at school – female teachers can stop this" –*

*'Mammy Queen', Community Leader, Kenema*

### Goal 1: Young women gain experience in schools as Learning Assistants

Our trainee teachers started their journey as **Learning Assistants** in Plan International UK's existing **Girls Education Challenge** project. During 2015 and 2016, our project partner FAWE supported 500 young women in two groups to gain a year of **practical experience in classrooms** as teaching and learning assistants. This experience gave our candidates the chance to get to know the teaching profession and gave

them valuable practical skills. Completing this placement period is a requirement to entering teacher training college. Cohort 1 of 227 young women completed their year's experience in mid-2016, while the second group of 273 finished in November 2016.

Many of our Learning Assistants have told Plan that taking part in the project has increased their self-esteem and self-respect. The opportunity to take a more prominent role within their community has given them with a 'voice' and a status that has not been available to them before the project.

*"We can see our lives changing – people's perception of us is changing....We are becoming role models in the community"* - Fatmata, Kailahun Town, Kailahun

### Goal 2: Young women have the support they need to qualify for teacher training

While our candidates gained their classroom experience, we also helped them prepare for their entrance exams to teacher training college:

- Across the five districts, we have engaged and trained a network of tutors who are running **special classes** for the Learning Assistants - one class in Maths and one in English each week. The classes help build their knowledge of the core subjects which the entrance exams will focus on.
- The girls been provided with **self-study** material to keep up their learning on their own.
- The tutors have coached the girls through a series of **mock exams** which helped them prepare for the exams, but also helped us to monitor their progress.

We're very pleased to say that, out of our original 550 Learning Assistants, **485 young women are projected to pass their exams to enter teacher training college**. We originally expected that only 375 of our Learning Assistants would qualify, so this is a fantastic result. Our first group of 212 trainees have completed their induction and started their courses as of October. The second group will begin their induction in early 2017



### Where we're working – the project districts

**Cohort 1** – Kailahun and Port Loko - began the programme in July 2015  
**Cohort 2** – Kenema, Moyamba and Kono - began the programme in January 2016

*"There is no reason these girls cannot 'make' it at whatever they want to be – they need to be told that and that needs to be reinforced in them"* - Tutor, Blama, Kenema

### Goal 3: Young women are supported to complete three years of teacher training

We will pay for the young women to complete their three-year distance learning courses, covering their tuition fees as well as all costs such as stationary, student fees, travel and meal allowances. Each trainee will study at home, with visits and support from FAWE's staff, and will visit one of the three teacher training colleges about three times a year.

Open University will also work with staff at the teacher training colleges to strengthen the curriculum and provide technical support in rolling out the distance courses.

*"Marriage takes away power...a job gives you the power back"* - Eveline,  
Mentor, Blama, Kenema

## Creating lasting change

Over four years this project will:

**Contribute 4% of the qualified female teachers in Sierra Leone.** There are currently around 6,500 trained female teachers in Sierra Leone. Therefore, the 485 young women involved in this project, once trained, will make up an incredible 4% of all trained female teachers in the country.

**Create systemic change in the improvement of distance learning teacher training.** The project will create systemic change by improving the quality of distance learning teacher training in Sierra Leone and has the potential to change the face of teaching across the country and other West African countries that face similar challenges and can follow this model in the future.

**Change the lives of thousands of children for generations to come.** Beyond the benefits to the young women who are becoming teachers, and their families and communities, we can estimate that these young women will between them teach more than **121,250** children over the next ten years. These children, and in particular the girls, will benefit from having a qualified and motivated female teacher who understands their needs and encourages them to achieve their potential. They can then go on to earn their own living and lift their future families out of poverty.

## Who will benefit from this project?

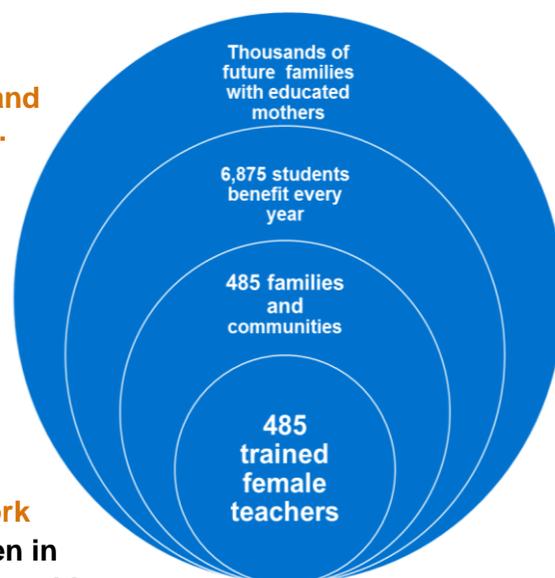
**This project will help to create a positive cycle of education and teaching – now and in the future – for girls in rural Sierra Leone.**

- 485 trainees
- 62 tutors
- 21 education staff and social workers
- 12 staff at Teacher Training Colleges
- 13,750 children with Learning Assistants helping out in class

## How you can help

**We are currently seeking donations to ensure this important work can go ahead as planned.** Your support could help young women in Sierra Leone build a better future for themselves and their communities.

**Project duration:** November 2015 – June 2019



Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four
Time in classrooms Exam preparation (2015-2016)	Teacher training (2016-2017)	Teacher training (2017-2018)	Teacher training (2018-2019)

**£25,000**

Enough to support at least 13 young women to complete her three-year teacher training course

## Voices from the project: Margaret's Story

Margaret (left in the photo) is 22 years old and lives in Kailahun in south-eastern Sierra Leone, where she works as a Learning Assistant with children studying in grades 5 and 6 at the local junior secondary school. She moved to Kailahun after the Ebola crisis devastated her community in Konido, approximately 100km away.

Margaret sadly lost her husband and son, and the rest of her immediate family during the Ebola outbreak. Margaret was distressed and traumatised after losing her loved ones and made the decision to move to Kailahun for a fresh start.

In Kailahun, Margaret was recommended to receive support and training to become a Learning Assistant. Through the project, Margaret is receiving the help and resources she needs to take and hopefully pass the entrance exams to train as a qualified teacher. Margaret says the programme has provided her **“with a new focus”** and that she is very happy to be involved.

Margaret has enjoyed improving her own knowledge – “I can now do maths! My uncle says ‘you are a Mathematician!’” and wants to offer support in the future to girls and boys she will eventually teach. “Female teachers offer encouragement, they are not hard on pupils. If you have a lot of educated females in the community then it will develop a lot more quickly. We can do what men can do!”

Margaret's story is an exceptional one and it demonstrates just how this project is making a real difference in the participating communities – for the children who will eventually benefit from qualified female teachers, but also for the young women themselves, whose confidence and self-esteem has been transformed. As Margaret says: **“We have learned to talk to many different people...the project has given us a voice and hope for our future”**.



Margaret (left) “We can do what men do!”

**On behalf of young women  
in Sierra Leone,  
thank you  
for considering  
this project!**

