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## The Education System of Sierra Leone

Marian Wright Edelman once said, “Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and the world better than you found it.” Education is one of the most important things in your life and most people who have it, take it for granted. Places in Africa such as Sierra Leone have little to no opportunity for education, which is quite significant. Without the tools and teachers needed, how exactly can they have a good education system? Without education, students can’t get good jobs when they graduate, meaning poverty levels are way too high. In this essay, you will learn about these problems in Sierra Leone and the impact those problems have on its people. First I will talk about family life in Sierra Leone, then about the challenges they face and how these challenges impact Sierra Leone, and finally, I will talk about how we can solve the problems that have been long below the expectations of a good education system.

In Sierra Leone, most families including aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, usually live in the same household. One parent of the household will have the responsibility to financially support the whole family. Most houses are small and do not have a dining area, so each member of the family will eat their meals on their own time separate from the family. (Our students from Sierra Leone) The main food they eat consists of rice and fish. Other foods they eat would be fruits and vegetables from their personal gardens, such as potatoes, melons, cucumbers, and tomatoes. Most families can’t grow crops because they don’t have money for fertilizer and because pests eat their crops. (Rice Development Strategy 2009) If people in Sierra Leone got enough of the food they already have then they would be getting the nutrients they need, but the lack of money makes it so families don’t have enough food. In a household of 5-7 people, there is usually not enough food to go around for everyone to have a normal-sized meal. Other than when they eat, no member of the family is left alone. Children never have their own time for social activities, or time to play with their friends. The whole family spends most of their time together. Sierra Leone students don’t normally sit and talk with their friends but instead with their mothers. The whole family is very open with each other compared to households with teenagers in America. In the household, female teenagers have more responsibilities than males. Female teenagers are responsible for cooking and housekeeping. The teens shower twice a day, and their bathrooms must be clean after they use them. They can not wear the same clothes on two separate occasions without washing them, and they change right when they get home from school or formal events. They have to wash their own clothes by hand, most

have never even seen an American style washing machine. In Sierra Leone, most children do not own a device such as a computer, even at school. So textbooks in school are needed since they are not offered on electronics. Everything is borrowed between the kids in the family without permission. It does not upset anyone because it's normal for them to do so since the family does not own much of anything. Sierra Leone teenagers are very dependent on their parents because they can't get part-time jobs. Normally there are no pets found in households. If the family has a pet it is normally a dog but they're not allowed inside of the house. (Our Students of Sierra Leone 2017)

Sierra Leone, located in western Africa on the Atlantic ocean was one of the countries that were largely affected by Ebola. In 2014 and 2015 the disease infected around 14,000 people. The exposure of Ebola caused there to be curfews which caused economic and social repercussions. They had to close down schools to avoid the disease from spreading more, which left thousands of students without an education. In 2004, 70 percent of the 4.9 million people in Sierra Leone, were under the national poverty line, and 52 percent of the population was living on only one US dollar a day. (Sierra Leone Population Live) In 2017 there were 6.4 million people living in Sierra Leone and 52.9% of those people were under the national poverty line. (UNDP about Sierra Leone) In Sierra Leone, pests, diseases, and low soil fertility make it hard to grow crops. This makes crops more expensive, making it harder for families to afford food. (National Rice Development 2009) Because they use up most of their money on food it is hard to afford an education for the kids. Education is a big challenge that Sierra Leone is facing. The Civil War that lasted from 1991 to 2002 and Ebola caused the education system to stop completely. It closed down 1,270 primary schools and forced 67 percent of students from every grade out of school in 2001. (The collapse of Educational Standards 2013) For ages 15 to 24 the literacy rate is below 50 percent, and the adult literacy rate is only 43 percent. Nearly 60% of the population is under the age of 24. If changes are to be made, it is necessary to increase the current literacy rate of females beyond the 37% rate. Statistics worldwide show that a better educated female population leads to stronger families and economies. As bad as all of this may seem, Sierra Leone has made a big comeback compared to what the rates were in the past. Only 55 percent of children were finishing primary school. Since then the amount of kids finishing primary school has raised to 76 percent of students, and 77 percent of those children advance to the junior secondary level. (Education in Sierra Leone 2018) As of now education in Sierra Leone is still recovering from the mess that was caused by the war. If there is a student at all hoping to go to a university there are only two options in which they can choose from, Njala University and the University of Sierra Leone. Less than 3% of the country's GDP is spent on education.

Some problems cause Sierra Leone to have a poor education system, but how exactly can we fix it? There are multiple ways in which we can solve the problems a couple of them in which are reasonable. The shortage and quality of the teachers in Sierra Leone is not where it should be. Countries like the United States, The United Kingdom, Canada, and Finland have some of the best education in the world. More teachers who are willing to teach in countries facing poverty like Sierra Leone should be trained and sent over to that country to teach the students who need it. There are also plenty of people willing to do this for free. (Improving Education Sierra Leone) There are some areas where teachers can sign up to volunteer and teach students in countries with poverty. If more people knew about this I think that there would be many teachers signing up to do so, even if it is just during the summer for 3 months, in Sierra Leone it would be better than none. The sign-ups just need a larger advertisement so that more people know of this opportunity. For the teachers who are already in Sierra Leone but are untrained, we could have volunteers to go down for 3 months during the summer and train the teachers to get them prepared for the next school year. With better teachers, the students will have the ability to learn more, bettering their generation which is our future. The better education that they receive the better jobs they can get and the better jobs they get the more money they can make. The other major reason that students in Sierra Leone aren't getting a good enough education is that of the lack of textbooks. Many schools in the United States at this point are using computers and other devices which have textbooks on them. There are hundreds of textbooks in schools with electronics that never get used and take up space. Sometime there will be computer issues so a student may have to use the paper copy of a textbook. In most classes, you only ever use a couple of those textbooks in case of computer issues. Instead of them sitting on a shelf collecting dust in the school, the schools should donate as many as possible to countries like Sierra Leone. The setup of classrooms also affects the quality of education that students get. In Sierra Leone, it is common for classrooms to have dirt floors and no air conditioning. The average temperature in Sierra Leone is between eighty to ninety degrees Fahrenheit. The classrooms get very hot making it hard for students to pay attention. If we had more mission trips in churches, then we could send people from the United States to install air conditioners, then it would make the classrooms much cooler, and it is the simplest way of improving the classroom that makes a big difference. Another option would be to update or build a school. Since American money is worth more in Sierra Leone it would cost around \$12,500 in American money to build a new school. (You Can Build a \$12,500 School Sierra Leone 2007) Many churches do mission trips and raise money to do so. There are close to 300 people who attend big churches in America. The average amount of money made by a church for business trips within the span of a year is \$22,000. (Making a Major Donation 2014) If those three churches went to Sierra Leone to build schools, then within 2 years, there would be enough money to build three schools in Sierra Leone. This means six to eight different classrooms every two years. In the span of six years, we could put up nine schools

which would be approximately 27-30 new classrooms. The new classrooms would include an air conditioning system making a better environment for a better education.

Now that we've gone over the challenges of having a good education in Sierra Leone, you now know how important it is that we fix them. Today I talked about how Ebola and the civil war in Sierra Leone caused many struggles, to afford food and education. In addition to that, I talked about how poverty makes it nearly impossible for people to afford education and the tools needed for a good education. I gave some solutions for these causes such as churches going on mission trips in Sierra Leone to have 30 new classrooms built within six years. The better the education the better the economy and the lives of people in that nation. As Richard Williams once said, "Students may be 20% of our population, but they are 100% of our future."

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