# *Project title:*

# Skills Training for 100 Imprisoned Adolescents in Sierra Leone

# *(Reducing vulnerability in children in conflict with the law in Sierra Leone through formal education and vocational and livelihood skills training)*

***Project Summary:***

The future of every nation could be predicted looking at the children of that nation. Children represent the surviving future of any nation. They are not only the genetic transmitters of their parent’s traits but also the socio-economic transmitters of their culture and development of their nations. Children who are products of domestic violence, broken homes, and victims of harsh socio-economic forces, unexplained poverty, low quality education and sometimes no education at all, will always be vulnerable.

In Sierra Leone, children in conflict with the law are products of broken homes, single parents, low quality education and most times no education and very prone to crime. As at December 2016, Prison Watch Sierra Leone (PWSL) was able to document a total of four hundred and thirteen (413) children excluding those in police custody who had been detained in the three juveniles homes across the country.

**Age analysis**

Based on age analysis, 16 children reported that they were between the ages of 12 and 13 years. 53 reported that they were 14 years which is the age of criminal responsibility in Sierra Leone. 341 children reported that they were between the ages of 15 and 17. One child reported the he was 18.

**Analysis by residential pattern** (i.e. who they were staying with before detention)

Based on analysis of their residential pattern, 107 children who were in detention reported to be staying only with their fathers prior to their detention and 97 reported that they were only staying with their mothers prior to their detention, 45 reported that they were staying with their uncles. 40 children reported that they were staying with aunts. 6 children reported that they were staying with both parents. The others reported staying on the street, with their friends, sisters and other family relatives. Frome this analysis, it could be seen that children who are staying with both parents are less likely to come in conflict with the law.

**Crime analysis**

Based on crime analysis, 131 children were convicted or standing trial for sexual penetration. 56 children were convicted or standing trial for larceny, 15 children were convicted or standing trial for house breaking and larceny. 31 children were convicted or on pre-trial detention for wounding and wounding with intent. 31 were convicted or on pre-trial detention for conspiracy to commit a felony and 9 children were convicted or on pre-trial detention for assault. There others were convicted or on pre-trial detention for minor offences

This to PWSL is very worrying. It has serious implication to national stability. With the high population of children in conflict with the law for sexual penetration is a predicting indication of high incidence of future adults who will be charged with rape or other gender and sexual based violence.

**Analysis of occupation before detention**

Based on their analysis of occupation before detention, 210 children reported that they were attending school prior to their detention. 78 reported that they were doing nothing and had no history of education prior to coming in conflict with the law. 57 reported that they were street hawkers or petty traders. 13 reported that they were motor apprentices. 11 children reported that they were footballers. 8 reported that they were trainee mechanics and the rest reported that they were masons, carpenters, bike riders, hairdressers, and other occupations.

**WHY ARE THEY VULNERABLE**

In Sierra Leone, the there are three Juvenile homes - two located in the capital and one in the provinces. They are called the Approved School (where children found guilty are sent) and the Remand Home (where children on pre-trial are kept). Contrary to their purpose and functions for which they were established, they are a dead end and do not function as a home or a school. Children who are sent to the Approved School are guaranteed no schooling or vocational or livelihood training throughout their stay.

PWSL have observed that children who are admitted in the Juvenile Homes have come out more dangerous than they entered. PWSL holds evidence of children who after discharge from the juvenile homes upon expiration of their corrective discipline end up in adult correctional centres, especially the maximum security correctional centre.

This begs the question why are children after their discharge from the juvenile homes returning to prison, rather than “*moving out and moving on*”. The answer is obvious: that they are being socialized in crimes. Incarcerating children for four years in an environment where he is taught nothing, where he is not granted the opportunity to continue his schooling, where his future is put on hold, where he has no opportunity to acquire no livelihood and skills training makes these children vulnerable for misuse and exploitation by corrupt politicians, religious fundamentalists and criminal gangs. They become a threat to their own society, their country and for transnational criminals and terrorist groups.

**So what can be done?**

PWSL believes that there is an urgent and strategic need to help reduce the vulnerability of children in conflict With the law in Sierra Leone. We believe that formal education, vocational and livelihood skills training are required.

PWSL holds the firm belief that the best way to reduce vulnerability in children and ensure their positive development of both themselves and society is through education. For children in conflict with the law – those most in need of support and personal development – education is often unavailable. Prison Watch Sierra Leone plans to collaborate with the Ministry of Education Science and technology to recruit 10 teachers to provide free tuition to 100 children and juveniles in detention in Freetown and Bo.

Some of the children detained have not been school, and where they have a history of education they dropped out of school at an early age. To This end PWSL will work with existing vocational skill trainers to provide young people in detention with marketable skills and reduce likelihood of reoffending.

**Requested funding amount:**

$50,000

The requested funding amount will cover several years’ worth of schooling for children in the Remand Homes and Approved School, as well as supporting released children who demonstrate academic promise in returning to formal education.

**Issue/problem/challenge:**

In Sierra Leone, the situation of children involved in the Criminal Justice System remains a real concern. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA) which has the mandate to provide services for children; has to grapple with emerging challenges of ensuring that the rights of children are protected and adhered to in the midst of limited facilities, inadequate systems and structures and lack of trained personnel to apply modern approaches in handling vulnerable children[[1]](#footnote-1).

Mechanisms for responding to children in conflict with the law are inappropriate and substandard as revealed by the appalling facilities and conditions of detention and Reformation Centres; unnecessary delays in court proceedings are common due to frequent adjournments or unavailable fuel or transportation to take children to court[[2]](#footnote-2).

In Sierra Leone, there is only one reformative institution for children in conflict with the law, referred to as the Approved School, located in the eastern part of Freetown. With staff strength of 1946, the Approved School has an average of 20 boys most of them referred from the provinces. Constructed in 1947 during colonial times, the buildings are old and dilapidated, with poor sanitary facilities and non-availability of reliable water supply. Inhabitants within the immediate environment of the school at Wellington are now utilizing the only available source of water supply. There is no demarcation of the school from the community leading to encroachment of land.

The slow court system of Sierra Leone means that many children spend upward of several years in remand homes before even being formally convicted of a crime. Those released without charge may have lost several years of their lives languishing in detention without any real educational or social stimulation. Many are poor and lack prospects after their release. Recidivism is an enormous problem. PWSL’s project will provide these children with help and support to begin a new life after release.

**How Prison Watch will address the problem:**

It is hoped that developing Prevention and Treatment mechanisms at institutional and community levels will not only reduce abuse and delinquency but will help communities initiate systems to protect their own children.

The future of every nation lies in the investment made in its children. Investments not only focused on children living in favorable conditions but ensuring and developing structures and mechanisms that will care and protect vulnerable and at risk children giving them the support required to build a meaningful life[[3]](#footnote-3).

The children will be taught marketable skills such as carpentry, as well as remedial classes in literacy, mathematics and basic life skills. This will develop their ability to problem solve, communicate and work together in groups. They will follow the lead of their teachers as positive role-models and learn how their new skills can be put toward serving their families and communities once they leave the remand home or approved school.

The Riyadh Guidelines provides processes that are geared towards rehabilitating and reintegrating the child into society and the Havana Rules addresses the situation of children who are deprived of their liberty[[4]](#footnote-4). They reinforce the principle that child imprisonment should only be an issue of last resort. In cases requiring institutionalization, this should come only after thorough and careful consideration of alternative dispositional measures have been considered and overruled. Appropriate educational services and care should be provided for all children held in institutions[[5]](#footnote-5).

The Beijing Rules recognizes the use of discretion but holds officers accountable. The essence of children going through the formal justice system is not to criminalize the child offender but to reform that child for eventual reintegration into the society as a responsible and productive citizen. Ensuring the reformation and reintegration of the child requires necessary facilities and skills acquisition[[6]](#footnote-6).

**Potential long-term impact:**

This project will support 100 direct beneficiaries (children in detention) as well as indirectly supporting their families. The children will be given the knowledge to rise out of poverty and better economically support their families with specialised, marketable trades. The improved prospects of children in detention upon release will mean that, with goals to work toward and something to lose, the rate of reoffending will be greatly reduced.

1. National Child Justice Strategy 2006 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)