



Organisation	Schooling for Life (SfL)
Programme	Skills for a Successful Future
Country Director	Sjierly Pereira

Problem Description

After the civil war between 1991-2002 Sierra Leone made a great effort to reconstruct the country. Despite the fact that Sierra Leone is a constitutional democracy, the country is still 1 of the 10 poorest countries in the world with 60% of the people earning less than \$1.25 per person per day. The life expectancy of adults is 48 years. Only 9.5% of female adults are educated to the secondary level compared to the men of whom 20% are educated to the secondary level. The country has a 70% unemployment rate amongst youth. The youth are not a priority to the government and despite of the compulsory free education schools still ask admission fees and other extra schooling costs, which the average family is not able to pay. If by chance a family is able to pay the fees and the additional costs then the quality of the given education is often so poor that it will not give any guarantee for a solid base for the youth to rely on in the future. The lack of chances for the youth to create a better future remains a problem and a potential threat to peace in Sierra Leone.

Field research conducted by the founder of Schooling for Life in 2008 has shown that youth in Sierra Leone often are not able to pay for their school fees. The study also shows that school doesn't prepare youth for their future on the job market nor are they guided properly to fit the job market demands. In addition, employers are reluctant to hire local employees stating that there is a lack of work ethic, basic principles, and practical and relevant knowledge. The lack of these skills makes employers hire international staff rather than local staff. As a consequence, youth have trouble finding but also keeping a job. This immediately affects the youth unemployment rate, perpetuation of poverty, and it undermines the reconstruction of the economy and the development of the country. SfL wants to help the youth, the future of the country, by giving them the knowledge, the brainpower and the guidance they need in order to develop a better future for themselves and their environment. The Ebola outbreak in March 2014 had a big damaging effect on the educational system and the development of the country, which now has to be fully restored. Before the Ebola outbreak Sierra Leone was one of the fastest growing economies in Africa.

Programme Description

General

SfL has the strong belief that all youth should get the same chances to develop to their full potential, despite of their ancestry or geographical origin. In order to do this, it is important to know what is needed within a specific context and what the demands of a society are, reflecting all levels that will influence the success of a programme. SfL believes in an all-round approach for creating a better future. Without proper social and other supporting skills the knowledge gained from formal education will give insufficient basis to turn theory into practice. Active learning and critical thinking, being pro-active and assertiveness are just as important to develop as any other skills in order to change one's future for the best and help others do the same. Preparing the youth for a better future can't be done without the input of the employers, who will facilitate this future. That is why the Skills for a Successful Future programme is build on the input of all stakeholders in this challenge and the skills training has been adjusted to what employers indicate as being essential and needed. Students choose



their own course of study, as long as it is a vocational study and it fits into the demand of the job market in Sierra Leone. The reason for letting students choose is to have a higher chance of intrinsic motivation. In addition, all students receive personal guidance. This part is highly focused on the individual; on building self-confidence and learning how to achieve their own goals. Finally, SfL is focused on quality and sustainability. The number of participants is kept low at first in order to guarantee the quality of the results. After a successful first year, the programme will be expanded for the next year with a second class of 20 young people.

Goal

The aim of the programme is:

- To close the gap that now exists between employers' needs and what young people in Sierra Leone have to offer, so that young people can find work and employers can rely on local workers without affecting the quality of work and productivity.

Objectives

1. Enhance access to quality education.
2. Improve employability of youth by equipping them with social and professional skills necessary to succeed in the Sierra Leonean job market.
3. Empower motivated but underprivileged youth through character building and behavioural change.

Success factors

1. At least 80% of the students who have gone through the two-year programme have successfully completed their training (both formal and non-formal) and have found a job, either through their internship or somewhere else.
2. These young people are still successful on the labour market after a year.
3. After 5 years the Skills for a Successful Future programme becomes a quality label recognised by companies for guaranty of well-trained staff.

Target group

The programme is focused on youth in Sierra Leone between 15-25 years old who cannot afford tertiary education and who are unemployed. They however have shown motivation and willpower to finish their high school.

Location

The programme is active in the capital of Sierra Leone, Freetown. When the programme is stable and successful, expansion within other cities of Sierra Leone will be possible.



Duration

For the students the programme takes 2 or 3 years, depending on their choice of study. After that, they will apply for jobs in order to work. Yearly, a new class of 20-25 youth will start with the programme (keeping the quality of the programme in mind).

Strategy

The programme is built on three pillars:

1. Formal education: scholarships for vocational education
2. Non-formal education: Employability skills training
3. Personal guidance: focused on character building of the individual student



This unique combination of knowledge, skills and guidance in the transformation from theory to practice, gives the students the best possible foundation for achieving a better future. The first year, the programme focuses on broadening the general knowledge of the students. They learn skills like time management, communication, and general soft skills focused on behaviour, which they need to succeed both socially and professionally. We are also working hard to improve the quality of their English and maths, which is often not up to standard after their high school education. The second year we specifically focus on work ethics (how to behave at work), and increase the overall knowledge and skills of obtaining and keeping a job. The students will do internships to gain experience, to introduce them to potential employers and, if possible, to secure a future job. They also receive master classes on additional subjects, taught by national and international professionals. Students will keep being monitored for a year after leaving the programme in order to evaluate the impact of the programme; both for students and employers.

SfL believes that in order to have a programme succeed one must respond to local demand. That is why we have done initial and follow up research locally. Additionally, we have looked at similar programmes in Sierra Leone and concluded that this programme is unique in its all-round approach to preparing youth and involving the needs of both recipients and suppliers (employers and youth). Multiple NGOs and (local) companies have underlined this fact.

Activities

(A) Scholarships



As a consequence of the demand for and need of skilled vocational workers, Schooling for Life only funds vocational education. The student chooses his/her own study, after which Schooling for Life chooses the educational institute of the highest quality available in Freetown. Schooling for Life will pay scholarships for all selected students, both school fees and school materials. This requires time to be invested in the evaluation of individual motivation and abilities of the students to ensure they choose a study that matches these factors.

Time also needs to be invested in evaluation of the quality of different educational institutes in Freetown that match the choice of study of the students.

(B) Employability skills training

The non-formal education focuses on supporting skills that students need in addition to their formal education. Strengthening social skills offers the students the opportunity to use professional skills more effectively. To do this, the following actions are undertaken:

- In order to achieve quality, SfL trains its own trainers in the student-focused training method, developed by Schooling for Life. This method creates an optimal learning environment for the student.
- Every trainer creates a curriculum in consultation with SfL for his/her course, focused on specific objectives.
- Trainers are monitored on the implementation of the student-focused training method and the curriculum.
- The training centre that is used for the training activities is located in the city centre and is equipped with the necessary facilities.

For internships in the second or third year (depending on the course of study) eligible companies will be approached and if possible preliminary agreements will be made. Students



are monitored and supervised during the internship in order to increase the possibility of keeping the job even after the internship.

(C) Personal Guidance

Youth in Sierra Leone greatly lack personal guidance, which is a very important aspect for creating self-confidence and perseverance. Every two weeks students have a one-on-one talk with their personal mentor.

Partnerships

SfL now works with the following local organisations and companies:

- An important partner organisation for advice and recommendations is the National Youth Commission, established in 2010 in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth.
- SfL is a partner in the Sierra Leone TVET Coalition Working Group. A working group, founded to support the Min. of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) in achieving its goals of developing TVET and creating better prepared TVET graduates for the job market.
- Afriqia HR Solutions supports through HR advise and support in the Work Ethics skills training.
- SfL works together with Africell SL in providing the social and practical skills training for the students. Africell SL provides free skills training space to the organisation and other in kind support to promote our work.
- For the formal education of the students, SfL works with BlueCrest College, Milton Margai College for Education and Technology, Redeemers School of Nursing, Government Technical Institute, The College of Medicine and Applied Health Sciences, and Institute for Advanced Medicine and Technology.

Evaluation

Twice per year, a monitoring and evaluation report is written. The report reflects how the programme has progressed and points of possible improvement. For this, the experience of the trainers and the views of employers (in the future) and the students play an important role. At the end of the budget year we report on the organisation's finances.



During the progress of the programme, we will continuously look at specific needs of the students for knowledge on certain topics. This is used to create master classes with professionals (national and international).

Additionally, we have the following moments of monitoring and evaluation:

1. At the end of each year, the results of the students are evaluated in formal and non-formal education. Depending on the conclusions, the topics of skills classes may be adjusted to increase all-round development of the students;
2. At the beginning and the end of the internships students are evaluated on skills level to see impact;
3. At the end of the first year of work, the applicability of learned skills will be evaluated through feedback of the students and the employers. Also, the number of (former) students who have kept their jobs, have switched jobs or are out off jobs will be evaluated.

Sustainability: In time, SfL wants to add a commercial branch to the programme through which local businesses can have their current employees trained. The revenues of these commercial activities will then be invested back into the programme. In the near future we



will also look for local partners to invest in the programme so that in due time international funding will no longer be needed. When the programme runs successfully, we will be looking at expansion to other cities within the country.

Impact

- There are currently two IT students who have been offered full employment after their internships.; one student has been hired by SfL after both internal and external internships and the second student is employed with a local company.
- There is one student who, after six months, was given a foreman position on the construction site where he works, in absence of the manager, and is still working for the same employer after 1,5 years.
- At least three students are in employment next to their studies and are lauded for their positive work ethics, hard work and dedication. They are also making a small fee that supports them.
- Trainers are spreading the knowledge and experience they get from Schooling for Life. Testimonial of Schooling for Life math trainer: Math is usually the least popular and least performing subject in high schools in Sierra Leone, and in addition teachers still use physical punishment to enforce obedience and attention in general. However, at the end of last school year, our trainer's math subject came second in ranking in his school. Even though our trainer had refused to use physical punishment in his classes. Upon the question from the principal as to how he had accomplished this, he replied that students need to feel respected to be able to learn, and the teacher needs to respect them before they can respect the teacher. Our trainers are paying the Schooling for Life methodologies and ideologies forward.
- Parents/guardians and staff of our students' colleges indicate the proactive and participatory attitude of our students. They are in class in time, attentive and hard working.

Successes

- Over two years, Schooling for Life has engaged six of her students in internships and has seen clear improvement in office related skills as well as work ethics.
- On the 1st of July 2018, Schooling for Life was on Lifestyle Experience (RTL4), on Dutch television. Schooling for Life was asked to feature on the show to highlight the importance of the work we do.
- July 2016, one of the students of Schooling for Life was asked to open the national World Youth Skills day celebration at the British Council in Freetown. The country director of Schooling for Life was invited to participate in a 4 person panel at the same celebration to discuss the importance of vocational skills development for youth in Sierra Leone.
- November 2016, the director of Schooling for Life was asked as an expert on mentoring youth in study choices, to participate on a tv show with the topic of who should make study choices for youth in Sierra Leone; students, parents or guardians.
- During 2016, Schooling for Life's country director was asked to represent the TVET Coalition resp. when meeting the Dep. Minister of Education and during the signing of the MOU with all Coalition partners.

