



# Improving Fistula, Maternity and Child Healthcare in Sierra Leone

GG1981430





## Who we are

Dame Ann Gloag, co-founder of the Stagecoach transport company, set up **Freedom From Fistula** in 2008 to help women and children in Sierra Leone, Malawi and Madagascar. The charity provides free surgeries to heal their fistulas; free maternity care to reduce the prevalence of fistula; an outpatient clinic for children up to 15 years; education, empowerment and income generation projects to help patients reintegrate into society post surgery; sexual and gender based violence medical care, counselling, support and rehabilitation; and training for healthcare professionals to build capacity in healthcare systems in the countries in which the Charity works.



Founder Dame Ann Gloag

Since 2008, Freedom From Fistula has...

Performed more than



**8,500**

Fistula Surgeries

Safely delivered more than



**20,000**

Babies

Provided care to more than



**200,000**

Women & Children

Trained more than



**500**

Healthcare Professionals

Immunised more than



**240,000**

Children under 15

Educated more than



**9,500**

Former Patients

## The need

Sierra Leone is one of the world's poorest countries with more than **60%** of the 7.65 million population living on less than \$1 per day.



### 1. Fistula

An estimated **2 million** women across Africa are living with an obstetric fistula - a childbirth injury caused by prolonged obstructed labour and lack of access to maternity care.

### 2. Maternity

Sierra Leone is thought to have the highest rate of maternal mortality in the world, with **1,360** women per 100,000 dying during childbirth. Women in Sierra Leone have an estimated **1 in 17** chance of dying from pregnancy and/or childbirth related causes and **1 in 3** deaths of women aged 15-49 is due to maternal causes, the majority of which can be prevented by basic interventions by a medical professional.

### 3. Children's Outpatient Clinic

In 2010, Sierra Leone was ranked as having the fourth highest child mortality rate in the world, and by 2013, the second highest. Approximately **1 in 5** children do not reach their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. Over **70%** of child mortality in the country is due to preventable conditions, including malaria, pneumonia, diarrhoea, and neonatal conditions.

### 4. Teenage Mother Empowerment

In 2019 it was reported that Sierra Leone has "one of the world's highest adolescent birth rates", the 13<sup>th</sup> highest rate of teenage pregnancy globally (2017, World Bank), with **113** births per 1,000 adolescents which is more than **10 times** the rate in Europe.

### 5. Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)

WHO estimated in 2013 that **1 in 3 women and girls** globally have been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some way during their life. More than **30,000** cases of SGBV, mainly rape, have been seen in Sierra Leone since 2003. In 2018, **93%** of cases seen were girls aged 17 years or below, with **60%** of these cases being girls under 15. FGM is common, with Sierra Leone classified as a Group One country, demonstrating a very high prevalence of the practice (UNICEF, 2013). Around **89.6%** of women in Sierra Leone between 15-49 have experienced FGM.





## Partnership working

Over many years Rotarians around the world have worked in partnership with Freedom From Fistula to offer invaluable support to the charity. In particular, GG1411138 provided funding for the 3 year training of 60 nurse midwife technicians in Malawi and GG1525603 funded the purchase of 2 landcruisers kitted out as ambulances which provide a lifeline for the team in Malawi, enabling them to reach patients in the most remote and rural parts of the country. Watch Dame Ann Gloag presenting at Rotary Convention in Toronto in 2018 <https://bit.ly/3m52OKL>



## GG1981430

Rotary International is delighted to once again be working in partnership with Freedom From Fistula on **GG1981430** - Improving Fistula, Maternity and Child Healthcare in Sierra Leone.

Aberdeen Women's Centre (AWC) in Freetown, Sierra Leone is Freedom From Fistula's largest project and is a perfect fit with Rotary's Maternal and Child Health area of focus. Every year the Charity performs around **250** fistula surgeries; delivers up to **3,000** babies in the maternity unit; treats **20,000** children in the Children's Outpatient Clinic; provides family planning services to more than **3,000** women and girls; provides literacy and numeracy classes to all fistula patients, as well as health education and skills training and trains national healthcare professionals to help build capacity in Sierra Leone's healthcare system. All these services are offered free of charge to patients but cost Freedom From Fistula **£1,000,000** every year.

***We need Rotarians to support Freedom From Fistula to do even more...***

**Every £1,000 raised by Rotarians can provide one of the following:**

**200** consultations at the Children's Outpatient Clinic including consultation, treatment and vaccinations;

**10** safe births in the maternity unit;

**2** life changing fistula surgeries including rehabilitation and reintegration;

provide literacy and numeracy classes for **20** girls;

feed **500** patients.

**100% of donations to Freedom From Fistula go directly to the projects. The Gloag Foundation covers all Freedom From Fistula's administration costs.**

I am totally committed to supporting this Global Grant. During the Covid 19 pandemic, despite fistula surgeries being suspended temporarily, the charity has worked tirelessly to ensure that the children's outpatient clinic has remained open, seeing between 380 and 400 children every week, and that pregnant women can still deliver their babies in the maternity unit - around 300 per month, with dignity and the very best of medical care.

IPDG Jo Pawley D1020 (Scotland)

## Isatu's story

Isatu arrived at the Aberdeen Women's Centre on New Years Eve. The 18 year old was severely malnourished, dehydrated and suffered from infected wounds. Isatu had a double fistula following a tortuous 5 day labour and the death of her baby. She was unable to walk because the nerves in her legs were badly damaged. Before going in for surgery she would need to be nursed back to health. The staff tailored a feeding programme, physiotherapy and expert wound care specifically for Isatu, and she slowly began to heal and build strength. After 9 months of care, Isatu was finally healthy enough to be repaired. During this healing process Isatu enjoyed the daily arts and crafts activities that are offered at the centre. Her fistula was severe so she received surgery during a 2 week "fistula camp" where an expert surgeon was flown in to perform over 50 complicated surgeries. Isatu's surgery was a huge success and it wouldn't have been possible without the dedication of the staff at the Aberdeen Women's Centre. Every week the hospital holds a "GladiGladi" celebration for healed patients who are ready to rejoin society. The hospital celebrated its largest "GladiGladi" ever and Isatu was the centre of attention.



Watch Isatu's story 'In Her Words' on YouTube  
<https://bit.ly/31udEBZ>



## A family for Fatima

Fatima is a farmer living in Freetown, Sierra Leone. She first came to Aberdeen Women's Centre in 2009 as a fistula patient. She developed an obstetric fistula injury during her first pregnancy. Like many fistula patients, Fatima found herself in prolonged obstructed labour with no medical assistance.

After receiving restorative surgery at AWC, Fatima remained at the clinic for a month during which she received post surgical care, rehabilitative skills training and counselling on reproductive health. Like all patients that pass through AWC's fistula centre, Fatima was advised to seek Caesarean

## Making Life Worth Living

sections for any subsequent pregnancies. She was discharged with a caesarean section access card, which ensures ex fistula patients are able to seek caesarean sections at any medical centre in Sierra Leone.

Since her first admittance into the Centre with fistula, Fatima has returned to Aberdeen Women's Centre three times to safely deliver her three daughters. Pictured here in 2018 with little baby Aye who was 4 months old, Haja (3) and Nancy (6).

# SHOUT

## GLADI GLADI

### Oscar® winner Meryl Streep narrates Fistula Documentary

‘SHOUT GLADI GLADI’, documents the efforts of Freedom From Fistula as we work with some of the world’s most destitute women. The feature-length film, the first documentary to be narrated by Meryl Streep, focuses on women’s health in Africa with a particular emphasis on fistula - a common, debilitating condition which renders women and girls injured after childbirth. Watch a 10 minute version of the film here <https://bit.ly/2ThRRc8>



**Contact us for more information on GG1981430 - Improving  
Fistula, Maternity and Child Healthcare in Sierra Leone, support  
in raising funds or to organise a zoom presentation to your Club  
or District**

Contact Sue Hope, or Rotarians Jo Pawley (IPDG D1020) or Allan Maclaughlan (DRFC D1020) by email:

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