

# IMPROVE GIRLS ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN LIBERIA

With the education of girls, gender inequality, and gender-based violence, increasingly recognized as issues that have profound impacts on communities across the world, it is imperative that we, as communities of faith, continue to participate in transformative and sustainable societal change. The Church has historically been a pioneering force behind social transformation around the world, recognizing the ongoing need to share God's love in practical and innovative ways. As girls in Liberia continue to face a multitude of barriers, including access to education, now more than ever, it is important that the Church continues to step up to the challenge of contributing to positive and lasting change in the lives of those who need it most.

One of the countries in which Shelter For Life (SFL) have worked over the past few years is Liberia. Between early 1980s and 2003, civil wars displaced a large number of Liberians and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure. With the help of the United States and other European nations, Charles Taylor, the last dictator of Liberia, was ousted and replaced by an interim government. In 2005 the first female Africa President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was elected by the people of Liberia and in 2018, after two terms, President Sirleaf will peacefully step down and pass the presidency to her successor.

For girls in Liberia, however, access to education remains a predominant point of inequality, with boys more than twice as likely to be literate than girls. One of the central barriers preventing girls from attending school is the lack of access to safe, affordable, and reliable transportation. Presently, transportation options for children to attend school in Monrovia are scarce, and often include two options; either walking more than two hours (each way) to school, or competing with adults to ride in one of very few and expensive taxis. As a result, families are reluctant to send their children, especially female children, to school, due to stories of harassment, abuse and even abduction of young children.

SFL are seeking to address these issues through implementation of the Improve Girls Access To Education (iGATE) project. Central to the iGATE project is the generation of a twice-daily bus service for girls in urban Liberia to and from school in the greater metro area of Monrovia. With the objective of increasing school enrollment and attendance, Shelter For Life hopes to obtain 10 buses, that will stop a number of key Monrovia schools. Children will be required to pay a regular fare, which is substantially lower than a taxi fare, in order to enable the service to cover its cost of operation.

Consultations and literature have shown that interventions that focus on resource and infrastructure enhancements, are potentially the most impactful and cost-effective kinds of interventions to improve girls' school enrollment and attendance. While we believe this to be true, we also acknowledge the necessity of development projects to be sustainable. For this reason, iGATE invests in a sustainable market-based approach that once seeded, develops over time into a thriving and fruitful self-sufficient business.

By utilizing a market-based approach, this simple yet transformative project is sure to have a profound impact on children in Monrovia. By creating a safe, affordable, and reliable bus service for school children, not only will children no longer be required to take unsafe means at unreasonable hours to attend school, but families may also be more supportive of their daughters maintaining an education. With your help, we can make the iGATE project a reality, and significantly change the lives of urban children in Liberia.

*Shelter For Life International (SFL) is a Christian relief and development organization, based in Minnetonka, MN, with a mission to demonstrate God's love by enabling people affected by conflict and disaster to restore their lives and rebuild their communities. SFL has historically worked in post-conflict countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Sri Lanka, and Senegal, to name a few.*

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