

Rose Simbo

Rose Simbo was born in the early 1960s in the Kori Province of Sierra Leone and lived there until her twenties. As a teenager she acted as an interpreter of the Mende language into English, for a VSO midwife who was helping the mothers in rural areas to give birth, and this midwife recognised Rose's intelligence and encouraged her.

In her twenties Rose came to the UK and trained as a nurse at Amersham Hospital in Buckinghamshire. She later trained and worked as a midwife at St George's Hospital in Tooting. She has widened her experience in many different midwifery situations over the years, and studied for her degree and Masters in her spare time, giving testament to her dedication. By the time she retired she was employed by the NHS to train new midwives, as well as lecturing at the University of the South Bank in specialist skills such as FGM and its impact on labour and birth, haemoglobinopathies, and sexually transmitted diseases.

In 2009 Rose came to give an illustrated talk at SI Thames Valley on the horrors of the effects of FGM. She had always tried to help her own people in Sierra Leone, but this was the start of a group of Soroptimists supporting her with Programme Action. This eventually led to the formation of the Kori Development Project charity. She became a member of this small club, because she thought the members welcomed her, and her cause, so warmly.

SI Thames Valley aim to support women and girls in this underdeveloped rural African region. They encouraged the elimination of FGM by initiating alternative economic, educational and social schemes, but in fact their work led to helping and changing the whole society around the small town of Taiama.

Although many people, including Soroptimist clubs across the UK, have become stalwart supporters of her work, Rose has been utterly single-minded in her mission. She is an accomplished public speaker, often at Soroptimist conferences and clubs. Because people believe in her cause, she now leads a team of dedicated helpers, many of whom are also active Soroptimists.

Alongside her professional life, Rose has raised three children, mostly as a single parent.

An effective Soroptimist has not only to believe in the principles of Soroptimism, but also be an effective and sociable communicator. With the support of her Soroptimist sisters, Rose has empowered, in many different ways, the girls and young women of the Kori region, and also made life better for many of the young men. They all use the library and the schools which the Kori Development Project has rebuilt and furnished.

This is the story of a strong woman who progressed from humble beginnings to make her professional mark in a different country. But Rose was driven not by the accumulation of wealth, but rather by the desire to help the women in her original country.

