

HOPE FOR MARGINALISED CHILDREN IN MAJALIS IN THE GAMBIA



Context

The Gambia is ranked 174 out of 189 on the Human Development Index 2018, making it one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. Quality education and employment opportunities in The Gambia are a challenge. Only half the children who enrol in primary school transition to secondary school and literacy rate in people over the age of 15 is 51%.

Some 18,000 children in The Gambia live in traditional Quranic education schools called Majalis run by religious teachers called Marabouts. These are traditional, unregulated, and free education centres. Parents give the children to the Marabouts because they do not have the resources to provide for them or afford the costs associated with mainstream education, and because they want their children to receive traditional education.



The problem

Thousands of children across The Gambia live in these traditional Quranic schools. However, Majalis provide poor standards of education, accommodation, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, and healthcare.

At the Majalis, children receive only Islamic education. The children do not receive numeracy or literacy teaching and lack basic primary school education. As the Marabouts are not education professionals the teaching outcomes for the children in the Majalis are poor. Marabouts and the classrooms lack materials and resources to engage children in learning and children lack basic primary level education. Children often leave the Majalis with a lower level of education compared to other children their own age and have a knowledge gap, which severely reduces their employment prospects and future opportunities. They are significantly behind in their learning and lack the necessary numeracy and literacy skills to transition into mainstream education, putting them at great risk of children coming from Majalis of dropping out of education and confining them to poverty.

Weak child protection mechanisms and poor living standards in the Majalis increase the risk of neglect, abuse, and trafficking. The serious overcrowding, poor sanitation, and hygiene conditions of the Majalis, as well as the lack of income of families and the Marabouts as a result of the strict COVID-19 lockdown and curfew measures, makes these children even more vulnerable and at risk.

Project objectives

We are working with three Majalis in the West Coast Region of The Gambia to improve the living conditions and quality of education of 270 children and young people between the ages of 5-21 over the next

Over the course of three years, we will:

- Improve education outcomes: we expect children and young people to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, transitioning from level 1 to level 3, which is the minimum requirement to effectively transit into mainstream primary education.
- Improve protection and living standards in the Majalis: we will work closely with the Marabouts to improve the general living conditions in the Majalis so that they can provide a protective environment where children and young people can grow and thrive.

- Provide vocational training and livelihood opportunities: soap making livelihood initiatives will be set up in each of the Majalis, allowing them to increase their income to provide food, school materials, and healthcare. This will not only benefit those living in the Majalis, but also others in the community who will have access to affordable soap, which is even more crucial now with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Advocacy and outreach campaigns: the project will advocate for safer environments and better quality of education for children in the Majalis with the government and will benefit 1,000 people within the wider local communities and villages through the different advocacy, awareness raising, and livelihood activities.

This project will work as a pilot to be scaled up to other Majalis and used for advocacy purposes with the government.

Our local partner

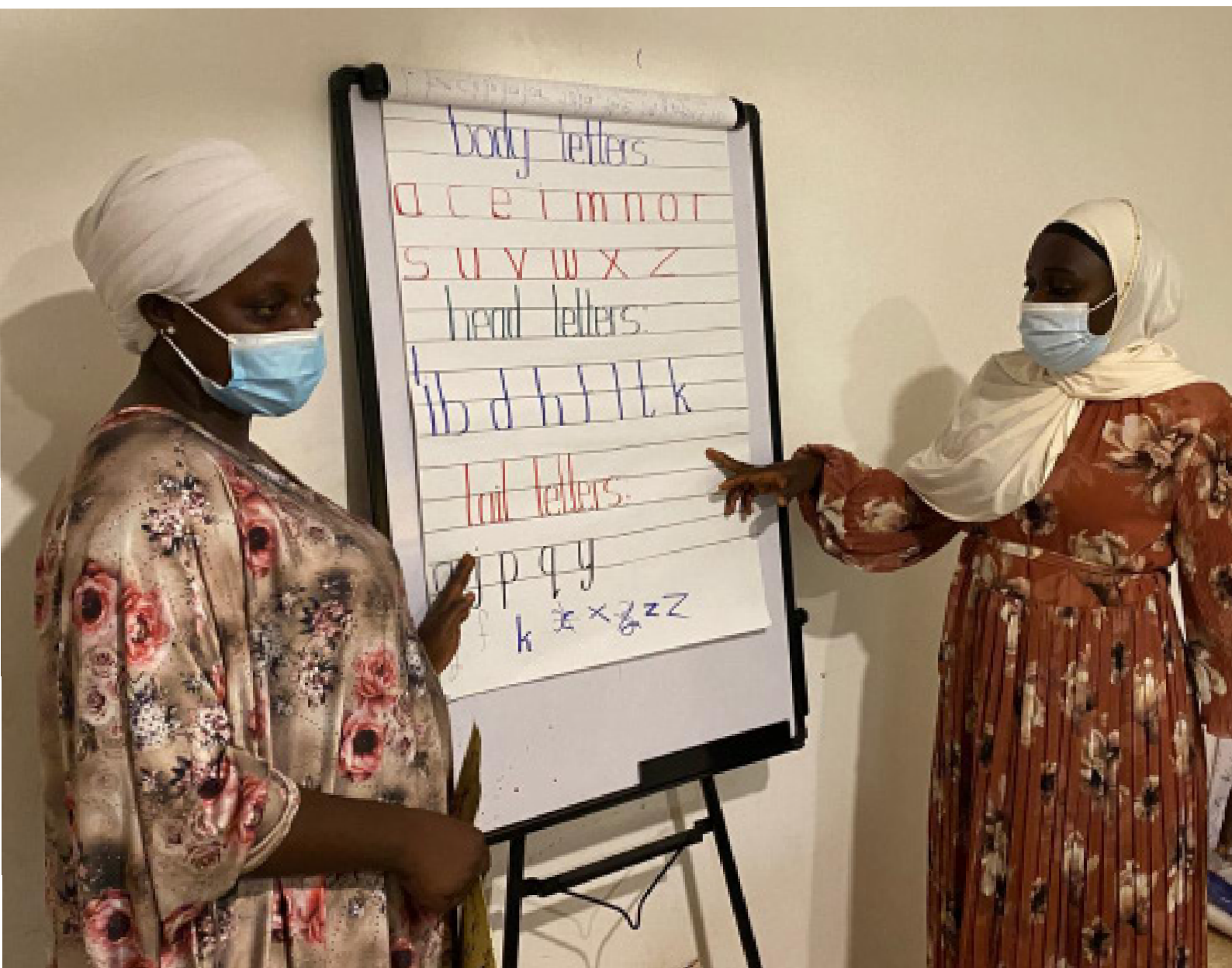
We are working with our local partner in The Gambia, the [Institute of Social Reform and Action](#) (ISRA), founded in 1990. They are one of the few NGOs in the country working directly with children and young people in the traditional education system. ISRA has a strong track record, having worked with over 4000 children and young people in 50 Majalis across The Gambia. They run community and education programmes to advocate for equal access to quality education and protection for all children and young people, and meet the basic needs of the most marginalised.

Our donor

This is a 3-year project funded by [the Angus Lawson Memorial Trust](#), which started in April 2021. The total budget for the project is £53,713.

If you are interesting in finding out more of this project, please [get in touch](#).





Our activities

- Children and young people living in the Majalis receive a minimum of 10 hours a week of literacy and numeracy
- Train education facilitators in disability inclusion, WASH and First Aid.
- Provide teaching and learning materials to facilitators, children and young people. ISRA is also working closely with parents, Marabouts, local schools, and communities to encourage the transfer of children and young people into mainstream schools, providing comprehensive education, including the education of girls.
- Provide child protection and safeguarding training sessions to Marabouts, facilitators, children and young people.
- Develop safeguarding frameworks in each Majalis and effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms.
- Provide children and young people with hygiene and sanitation kits and hand washing facilities to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Key information about COVID-19 and WASH practices are being shared with the community. Facilitators are training students and other members of the Majalis on First Aid and hygiene, and First Aid kits are being provided to each Majalis.
- Soap making livelihood initiatives will be set up in each of the Majalis, allowing them to increase their income to provide food, school materials, and healthcare.
- Women (Marabout's spouses) and those young people who are not able to integrate back into school will take part in vocational training and livelihood initiatives, allowing them to develop vocational and marketable skills.
- The project builds on ISRA's advocacy efforts with the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education, Women, Children and Social Welfare and the Department of Community Development, heads of Majalis to ensure that all institutions are a safe environment for children and offer quality, relevant education.