

# WASH IN SCHOOLS

## Liberia's first step to recovery from Ebola

The Ebola outbreak has brought preventative health issues to the forefront for communities in Liberia, resulting in increased understanding and use of good hygiene practices. The recovery process should retain, build and embed this into daily life in Liberia in order to reap broad, long-lasting health benefits. As schools reopen in Liberia, it is clear that the lack of clean water, hand washing and sanitation facilities in thousands of schools is a major block to children developing and carrying out life-changing hygiene practices.

**Providing safe drinking water, improved sanitation facilities and hygiene education (WASH) for the 2,800 schools in Liberia currently without these basic services is estimated to cost up to \$60.5m,<sup>1</sup> with scale-up over the next two years.**



Water point at a school at the Firestone plantation concession area. Credit: Government of Liberia

*'The Government of Liberia is committed to providing safe, clean environments where our children can learn effectively. Despite some progress, over half of Liberian schools still lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, which puts millions of students at risk of diseases and is a major stumbling block to their education. Investing in WASH in schools is an important step on the road to recovery from Ebola and towards Liberia's sustainable long-term development.'*

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia

Providing WASH in schools is important as it will directly improve the health of school children by reducing the transmission of disease. It will have wider benefits too, by enabling children to be effective agents of change and to promote improved health and hygiene practices within their families and communities. Good WASH facilities will also reassure parents of a safe learning environment, thereby supporting strong school attendance. It should be noted that investment in WASH is highly cost effective; on average, every \$1 spent on water and sanitation in sub-Saharan Africa brings benefits of \$2.5.<sup>2</sup>

### KEY STATISTICS – LIBERIA

- **55 per cent** of schools do not have access to a functional water supply<sup>3</sup>
- **43 per cent** of schools do not have access to functional latrines<sup>3</sup>
- Schools with sanitation facilities average **118 boys per latrine** and **113 girls per latrine**<sup>4</sup>
- Only **18 per cent** of schools have hand washing facilities<sup>3</sup>



## THE PROBLEM – AND THE SOLUTION

*'I don't feel 100 per cent safe or good about sending my children to school. Many schools are not equipped with proper latrines and hand pumps for washing [...] we need the government to step in and make sure schools are safe – so children can get back to school.'*

Jacob Myers, Central New Kru Town, Liberia

Out of **4,460<sup>5</sup> schools** in Liberia, a staggering **55 per cent do not have access to a functional water supply** and **43 per cent are without basic sanitation facilities**.<sup>3</sup> Current funding for water and sanitation is insufficient to meet this urgent need. As children spend long hours in school, often in cramped conditions, the absence of water, latrines and hand washing facilities with soap can make schools fertile grounds for diseases. Many parents in Liberia understand the importance of education and would like to send their children back to school, but are worried about the lack of WASH services.<sup>6</sup>

A proven and effective solution is however within reach. Under the leadership of the Government of Liberia, development and implementing partners have a proven track record in delivering effective WASH interventions. The resources are now needed to scale up and achieve 100 per cent WASH coverage in schools as a long-term strategy for supporting health outcomes and as a springboard for the country's recovery and sustainable development. A comprehensive approach that brings together new and rehabilitated water and sanitation infrastructure, alongside a tailored education and communication effort, will maximize sustainability and impact.

### Ensuring that every school in Liberia has water and sanitation requires:

- Building new water points and hand washing facilities in **1,800 schools**
- Building new latrines for **1,300 schools**
- Rehabilitating water points, latrines and hand washing facilities in **1,000 schools**
- Roll out of an evidence based multimedia **behaviour change communication strategy** that ensures usability, functionality and sustainability of the WASH structures in **2,800 schools**

The total cost of providing these services is estimated to be up to **\$60.5m<sup>1</sup>** with scale-up over the next two years.

**Ebola has had a crippling effect on the economy, health services and education system in Liberia. Investing in WASH in schools is a tangible, cost-effective and sustainable way to support Liberia towards a fast recovery with long-lasting health, educational and economic benefits.**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This figure represents the upper limit of the total cost (e.g. a new well ranges between \$3,100 and \$4,600)

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization (2012). 'Global costs and benefits of drinking-water supply and sanitation interventions to reach the MDG target and universal coverage' [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/publications/2012/globalcosts.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/2012/globalcosts.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 2014 survey results from Education Management Information System (EMIS), Ministry of Education

<sup>4</sup> 2015 Survey completed by Education Cluster of 351 schools in 9 counties

<sup>5</sup> There is a total of 5,181 schools in Liberia, 4,460 have been verified in the Ministry of Education EMIS database

<sup>6</sup> From Oxfam interviews and focus groups in forthcoming communities where it works, February 2015, see 'Ebola is still here: Voices from Liberia and Sierra Leone on response and recovery', Oxfam

