

# SAFE ACCESS TO LEARNING, DURING AND AFTER THE EBOLA CRISIS

This brief welcomes safe school reopening plans across Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and explains how education partners are supporting the reopening of schools and continued learning for out-of-school children and youth. To ensure all schools are safe before they open and to secure long-term education opportunities for all children in a region with some of the lowest education indicators in the world, this brief recommends four key actions:

## Recommendations

- 1) **Make schools safe and supportive**  
Governments, partners and community members ensure that schools are safe places to learn, with clean water for hand washing; temperature screening to monitor students' health; referral mechanisms established with local health centres; and teachers and Parent Teacher Associations trained on Ebola prevention and psychosocial support.
- 2) **Support home-learning**  
Governments, partners and community members support continued home-learning, including radio programmes, take-home materials and catch-up classes to provide creative means of learning, during and after the crisis.
- 3) **Strengthen the education system**  
Governments and partners' response to the Ebola education crisis addresses long-term challenges of low enrolment rates and insufficient numbers of teachers to ensure the education system is stronger than it was prior to the crisis.
- 4) **Recognise the role of education in the Ebola response**  
Governments, donors and partners recognise within their response and funding plans the critical role of education in preventing the further spread of Ebola, protecting children and youth, and catalysing social and economic recovery.

For the full list of recommendations see p4.

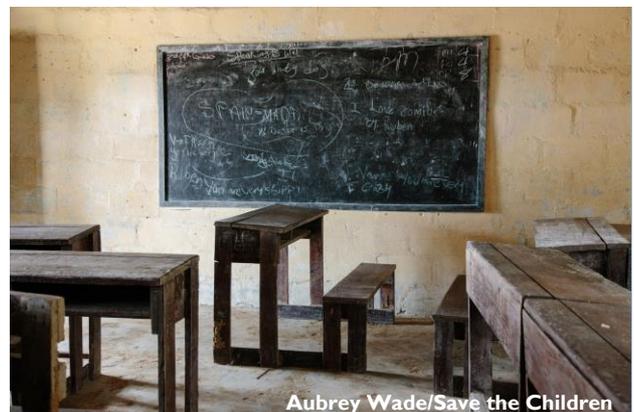
**“Wat bother u d most abt Ebola?”  
71% say “No School”<sup>1</sup>**

UNICEF U-Report

## How Ebola impacts education

Since the Ebola outbreak, according to UNICEF an estimated 5 million children and youth have been denied access to education in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone as schools did not re-open at the start of the new school year in September 2014. Children, youth and their families are increasingly concerned about the impact this will have on their futures and the future of their countries. When a U-Report Poll by UNICEF asked the question: ‘Wat bother U d most abt Ebola? No touchin; No bollin; handwashin; No school; No new bf / gf’, 71% of 253 youth across Liberia responded with ‘no school’.

Before the Ebola outbreak, just 58% of children attended primary school in Guinea; 74% in Sierra Leone; and 34% in Liberia<sup>2</sup>. The impact of prolonged school closures in a region with some of the lowest education indicators in the world is dire and the outbreak has negative consequences on the availability of teachers, the safety of school premises, vulnerability of girls and women<sup>3</sup> and, in the longer term, the ability of affected countries to accelerate economic and social development. In addition, schools in all three countries had limited access to safe water prior to the crisis, a critical factor given the key role of hand-washing in preventing transmission.



Aubrey Wade/Save the Children

Interior of a classroom in a school supported by Save the Children in a community outside Kakata, Margibi province. Following the outbreak of Ebola in Liberia the authorities closed schools until further notice.

**Children and youth's well-being** is also impacted by school closures as school provides a sense of stability, hope and helps to mitigate the psychosocial impact of a crisis. Thousands of children have lost parents and caregivers and are at increased risk of homelessness, neglect and malnutrition. The Ebola crisis has made the poorest families even more vulnerable, increasing the risk of children being forced to work to contribute to the household economy and subsequently lose out on their education. The longer a child stays out of school the less likely they are to return.

## Education is helping prevent Ebola

### Safe school reopening

Decisions regarding when to reopen schools are made by the governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. UNICEF and Save the Children support the reopening of schools and are helping to ensure that schools are safe and protective places to learn. Education partners are helping to develop and implement protocols that need to be in place before schools reopen to reduce the risk of Ebola transmission on school premises.

**In Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone**, the Ministries of Education together with education partners have worked on a set of country-specific protocols. The Center for

Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also been part of the protocol development and validation.

Education partners are supporting these protocols by providing hand washing kits, temperature screenings, developing psychosocial support programmes for teachers and children and working with parents and communities to supply water.

### Teachers as Social Mobilisers

Teachers have been trained to support house to house campaigns to raise awareness about how Ebola is spread and prevented. Teachers are invaluable in this work as experienced communicators and trusted members of their communities.

**In Sierra Leone**, 7,000 teachers have been trained as social mobilizers and are leading prevention activities.

**In Liberia**, 203 national youth volunteers and 11,000 teachers have been trained to reach 30,000 community members with messages on hygiene promotion, infection control and early warning.

**In Guinea**, 123 education district officials and 310 trainers are being trained to support teachers, principals and 2,591 schools to deliver psychological first aid, basic counselling and psychosocial support.



Aubrey Wade/Save the Children

It has been 5 months since Joshua\*, 12, has been able to go to school.

He used to attend a school supported by Save the Children in Margibi, Liberia, but due to the Ebola crisis, schools across the country have been closed.

He is missing his spelling and mathematics lessons. His favourite subject is maths and he wants to become a mathematician, but for now he uses his maths skills to help his mother sell goods.

Joshua's parents encourage him to practice his reading and writing at home after he has finished helping his mother with household chores.

\*name changed to protect identity

### References:

<sup>1</sup> U-Report Liberia (<http://liberia.ureport.in/poll/41/>)

<sup>2</sup> Childinfo 2014.

<sup>3</sup> <http://becauseiamagirl.ca/ebolas-impact-on-girls>

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Sierra Leone EVD Weekly SitRep 21 Jan 2015



A teacher uses an infrared thermometer to take the temperature of girls as they arrive at Coleyah Centre Primary School, in Conakry.

On 19 January 2015 in Guinea, as schools reopen, UNICEF and partners are helping to reduce the risk of Ebola virus disease transmission.

## Radio and distance learning opportunities

Radio education and self-directed learning opportunities continue to ensure children and youth have access to education while schools remain closed. Parents and community members play a critical role in encouraging children to learn at home and return to school. Students and their families are engaged in the development of radio education materials and mobile-phone awareness-raising messages and are providing feedback to inform the education response going forward. Once schools have reopened and the Ebola crisis is over, use of radios and involving community members in children's education will continue in order to improve access to learning.

**In Liberia and Sierra Leone**, national curriculum radio education programmes have been airing since September 2014. Over 50% of households in Sierra Leone had children listening to the education programmes.<sup>4</sup>

**In Guinea**, education partners are making current radio programmes more child-friendly.

## Working together

These interventions are the result of collective efforts by national, local and international education partners and community members. In order to ensure education materials are shared and duplication avoided, UNICEF, Save the Children, INEE and Global Education Cluster members are coordinating their support to the Ebola education response:

**In Liberia**, the Ministry of Education requested the establishment of the Education Cluster and UNICEF and Save the Children are working with partners to ensure a collaborative and integrated quality response.

**In Sierra Leone and Guinea**, UNICEF and Save the Children are working with Ministries of Education to coordinate the Ebola education response, through existing education groups.

**Regionally**, education partners are coordinating efforts through regional forums in Dakar (co-chaired by UNICEF and Plan International) and virtual Global Education Cluster meetings.

For more information on existing materials and guidance related to the Ebola Education response, see: <http://educationcluster.net/education-response-for-the-ebola-crisis/>.

For additional recommendations, put forward by the Global Business Coalition for Education, see: [http://gbc-education.org/ebola\\_response/](http://gbc-education.org/ebola_response/)

## Recommendations

### 1 Make schools safe and supportive

**Governments, partners and community members ensure that schools are safe places to learn, with clean water for hand washing; temperature screening to monitor students' health; referral mechanisms established with local health centres; and teachers and Parent Teacher Associations trained on Ebola prevention and psychosocial support.**

- 1.1 Government decisions on school opening are guided by Ministries of Health and health partners and based on reliable epidemiological information about the level of containment of the virus; the safety of large group gatherings; capacity of the health system and level of preparedness of the schools.
- 1.2 Ministries of Education, partners, donors and community members support the sanitization of schools; equipping of clean, sustainable water supplies, sanitation and hygiene facilities; and in-school temperature screening in all school premises prior to reopening.
- 1.3 Governments, partners and donors ensure teachers receive the psychosocial support they need in order to deal with their own experiences during and after the Ebola crisis.
- 1.4 Governments, partners and donors ensure teachers are trained on Ebola prevention, student support systems, psychosocial support and existing referral systems to protection and health services, including the provision of clear criteria for children who may require significant support.
- 1.5 Local education, protection and health authorities support communities to keep schools safe, ensuring they have the resources they need to implement the protocols.

### 2 Support home-learning

**Governments, partners and community members support continued home-learning, including radio programmes, take-home materials and catch-up classes to provide creative means of learning, during and after the crisis.**

- 2.1 Partners continue to work with Ministries of Education to enhance national radio-learning programmes and take-home learning materials, including complementing academic programmes with elements of life skills and psychosocial support.
- 2.2 Ministries of Education, partners and donors invest in strengthening home learning and community engagement education interventions (including accelerated and alternative learning programmes) to keep children in school and provide opportunities to out-of-school children and youth during and after the Ebola crisis.

### 3 Strengthen the education system

**Governments and partners' response to the Ebola education crisis addresses long-term challenges of low enrolment rates and insufficient numbers of teachers to ensure the education system is stronger than it was prior to the crisis.**

- 3.1 Ministries of Education, partners and donors strengthen primary, secondary, higher and vocational education to ensure the education system is equipped to educate and certify quality teachers and health professionals.
- 3.2 Ministries of Education, partners and donors support students to prepare for and sit exams that have been missed due to the crisis.
- 3.3 Ministries of Education and Finance ensure continued payment of teachers during and after school closures to retain existing teachers.
- 3.4 Ministries of Education strengthen in-service teacher training and accreditation policies to ensure volunteer teachers receive the certification needed and to expand the pool of qualified teachers.
- 3.5 Ministries of Education, donors and partners support pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes to ensure teachers are qualified and equipped to teach and support their students when schools re-open.

### 4 Recognise the role of education in the Ebola response

**Governments, donors and partners recognise within their response and funding plans the critical role of education in preventing the further spread of Ebola, protecting children and youth, and catalysing social and economic recovery.**

- 4.1 Governments commit to maintaining their existing national education budget allocations.
- 4.2 Donors commit to strengthening the Ebola education response and consider joined-up funding which links the immediate response with longer-term education system support.
- 4.3 Governments and partners ensure education is included in national strategic response planning and budgeting processes and secure education as a key sector or pillar within the response at country-level (e.g. within the National Ebola Response Centre in Sierra Leone and National Coordination Cell for the Ebola Response in Guinea).
- 4.4 Relevant government ministries including Education, Health, Water, Gender, Social Affairs, Children and Youth, etc. establish functional multi-sector coordination mechanisms at national, local and school levels.
- 4.5 Ministries of Education, donors and partners support a coordinated education response by strengthening existing sector coordination groups and/or Education Clusters and by allocating resources to strengthen information management and joint assessments.