

How Ebola affects Education

The effects of Ebola on school attendance in Liberia – with a point of departure in IBIS' education program.

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Schools closed

- In 2014/15 Ebola had significant effect on the education systems in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia and forced 5 million children out of school
- Schools in Liberia were closed in July 2014.
- 1,2 million children could not attend school
- Schools were closed for 7 months

Learning during the emergency

- The Teach by Radio programs were not widely used
- 73% of students reported that they did not participate in any learning activities during the school closure.
- Some students engaged in self-learning or learning with guardian.
- Many communities engaged in school maintenance and repairs during the closure, and PTAs engaged in activities of registering children for the reopening of schools, as well as encouraging parents to send their children back to schools

Consequences of school closure

- The schools and the school system were already in a poor state before Ebola. Primary school attendance was low before the EVD outbreak – only 34% in Liberia
- Children and youth have lost 7 months of schools
- The reading and writing skills of children 5-7 years rapidly deteriorate

Consequences of school closure

- The school closure increased the sense of isolation among children and youth
- While out of school for a significant time, many children will never return, as they often end up working, marrying or becoming pregnant earlier than usual.
- Delayed education also result in delayed unemployment for young adults, having a negative impact on their livelihoods, and ultimately on the economy and social stability of the country.
- Apart from the learning, going to school creates an important sense of normality and routine which is crucial to the healingproces following distressing experiences.
- Recognition of the risks of Ebola to children's physical and psychosocial wellbeing is critical to achieve the ambition of reopening and maintaining safe schools.

IBIS response during the emergency

- IBIS was actively engaged in the social mobilization cluster and took responsibility, as the central education NGO in Grand Gedeh and River Gee counties, to directly conduct or support community assessments, social mobilization, and Ebola prevention messaging.
- From early in the crisis, IBIS advocated for the education sector to:
 - support to children and communities through prolonged school closure
 - the potential of alternative forms of education
 - preparation for the eventual reopening of Liberian schools.

Schools reopened in February 2015

- On February 16, 2015 schools started to open in compliance with the Protocols for Safe School Environment in Liberia.
- 4 components in the preparation for the reopening of schools:
 - Last mile delivery of UNICEF Ebola kits
 - Training in the protocols for safe school reopening
 - WASH in schools
 - Social mobilisation
- IBIS is currently doing LMD, training and social mobilisation in Grand Gedeh and River Gee counties, in coordination with MOE and INGOs.

Challenges to school reopening

- The academic school calendar 2014/15 has been reduced from 200 days to 180 days to slowly revert back to the normal school calendar year (September to June). No guidelines from the Government as to how the teachers are supposed to manage to cover the 200 days curriculum in 180 days, and no support to teachers and students to catch up before they are at the level where they left off in June
- To open the schools safely requires a lot of **volunteer engagement from the community**. Especially if there is no water on the school campus and it will have to be brought to the school every morning. The Government do not provide any money to pay for the water to be brought. Therefore, the School Ebola/Health Safety Committee has to mobilise parents from the community to bring the water. Most families are already economically challenged after the Ebola outbreak as a lot of business has gone down. It might therefore be difficult for the parents to allocate a lot of time to help the schools as they have to find ways of creating income for their families.
- Before schools open **all children are being registered**. However, in order to be able to open the schools safely the school management need to collect more information than normally. They need to know if a child has been exposed to Ebola within the last 21 days before coming to school.
- The Safety Committee is also responsible for **checking the temperature of all students** and staff before entering the campus in the morning. It takes about 30 seconds to take the temperature and if you have 100 students in your school that means it will take at least 50 minutes just to get the kids into the campus. This means that the students have to come earlier in the morning if the teaching is to start on time.

Opportunities

- Stronger community mobilization: PTA's, School Health Committees
- Stronger engagement of CSOs and INGOs with the Ministry of Education for improved quality of education

IBIS future work

- It is essential to support the continued development and implementation of the school Ebola prevention protocols in Grand Gedeh and River Gee counties:
 - Continued training on Safe School Environments Protocol in 100 schools.
 - Preparedness: Development of emergency contingency plans for Schools, districts and counties to be prepared for any disasters including Ebola.
 - Safe School Environment Protocol monitoring to ensure compliance to these protocols in the 100 Schools.
 - Support of community mobilization efforts to address issues and seek solutions to challenges identified in Safe School Protocol compliance monitoring.
- IBIS is engaging in recovery response to ensure that the basic necessities are in place prior to, and after, school reopening.
- IBIS also sees this as an opportunity for engaging with communities and the Ministry of Education for creating the foundation for a longer term holistic school improvement, focusing on increasing the quality of education and including more children in the formal education system.

Thank you!