

World Toilet Day: Wednesday November 19, 2008

'Toilets for All'

Lack of sanitation is a critical problem in both urban and rural areas of Liberia. The sanitation situation is dire in urban communities, especially Monrovia, where dense housing, no responsibility for landlords to provide sanitary facilities, and poor urban planning, compounds the situation. A recent government led Water and Sanitation sector assessment report (October 2008) reveals that there are only 19,691 family latrines for a population of close to 3.5 million people. This translates to coverage of a little more than 4 % when measured on a county-by-county basis for Liberia's 15 counties. Additionally, over 60% of the people use open defecation (in the bushes) to dispose of human waste while for those with latrines, over 45% are 50 metres or more from their houses, a May 2008 study carried out in around 1000 communities by Subah-Belleh Associates reveals.

Studies that rank community priorities show that most communities rank sanitation either first or second in their priorities. In communities where ranking is not done, it is always clear from discussions and site visitations that water, sanitation, solid waste and drainage are problems and priorities. The priority given to sanitation is also indicative of the communities' willingness to engage in community led sanitation activities.

Clearly, the persistence of acute diarrhoeal diseases such as Cholera and diarrhoea is linked to the lack of adequate sanitation facilities making Cholera outbreaks an annual occurrence in both urban and rural environments across the country. Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy notes that Malaria remains the leading cause of morbidity and mortality, followed by diarrhea and acute respiratory infections. While Malaria is the leading cause of child morbidity (42%), diarrhea is second accounting for 22% of child morbidity. According to the UN 2008 Critical Humanitarian Gaps document, diarrhoeal diseases remain a chronic problem in urban and rural areas, accounting for 19% of Liberia's high child mortality rates, and cholera remains endemic in the country, affecting over one thousand people per year.

These problems continue to challenge the Government of Liberia, which is working to develop water and sanitation policies through the Liberia Reconstruction Development Committee and line Ministries with UNICEF's funding and input from a number of partners including the five International non-Governmental Organisations forming the Liberia WASH Consortium.

Better and adequate sanitation services for Liberia are needed not only for a better and healthy nation but also for providing dignity to many people Who Deserve Better. Therefore, the theme for the World Toilet Day set for November 19, 2008, 'We Deserve Better', should help galvanise support for meeting the aspirations of the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan. The consequences of delayed action on either the part of the Government or donors could only serve to maintain the unacceptable human conditions and lack of dignity for many people. The Government's efforts to provide a clear policy and strategy should be complemented by adequate and aligned donor resources towards the PRSP. The PRSP estimates that US\$143 million will be needed for Water and Sanitation over the period 2008-2011. International donors should ensure that Liberia's Water and Sanitation Strategy does not fail on account of lack of resources.

END

For Further Information Contact: Tel: +231 77 916 323
Email: MSitali@oxfam.org.uk or BCaddy@oxfam.org.uk

Liberia WASH Consortium is a group of five International Non Governmental Organisations including Oxfam GB, Concern, Tearfund, Action Contre la Faim and Solidarités. They are supporting the government of Liberia to implement WASH activities in line with the PRSP in 9 of the 15 Counties with funding from DFID, ECHO and Irish Aid.

More information for News Editors**Hygiene-risk behaviours⁵³**

A study by Subah-Belleh Associates on hygiene-related risky behaviours in around 1,000 communities in eight counties in Liberia in early 2008, lead to the following findings. Of the 9,541 people interviewed:

- 43% are obtaining water from unprotected sources
- 63% store their water in open containers
- 60% use open defecation (in the bushes) to dispose of their human waste
- For those that have latrines, over 45% are over 50m from their houses
- 43% do not practice hand-washing with soap in their communities
- 62% do not wash their hands after using the toilet
- Only 10% wash their hands before preparing food
- 68% do not wash their hands before eating
- 50% said that the handle 'running stomach' bodies the same way as bodies of other people who have died
- 62.8% contributed nothing to the construction of their water pump and 26.2% contributed something, most of which was in kind, such as food for workers, local materials or labour

The source of health and sanitation information for the people met was noted as:

- Health workers – 35.8%
- Electronic media – 34.5%
- The community – 17.3%

Sanitation interventions between 2004-2008

County	2008 Pop.	Average Family Size	No. of families	No. of Family Latrines constructed and functional as per Six Counties surveillance Study of MOH	% met need
Bomi	82036	3.4	24128	870	3.6
Bong	328919	4.7	69983	671	1.0
Gbarpolu*	83758	5.6	14957	775	5.2
Grand Bassa*	224839	5.4	41637	1635	3.9
Grand Cape Mount	129055	4.8	26886	300	1.1
Grand Gedeh	126146	7.6	16598	1759	10.6
Grand Kru	57106	5.3	10775	1052	9.8
Lofa	270114	4.4	61390	3826	6.2
Margibi*	199689	4.8	41602	1099	2.6
Maryland	136404	7.8	17488	121	0.7
Montserrado*	1144806	4.7	243576	2470	1.0
Nimba	468088	5.9	79337	2257	2.8
River Cess*	65862	4.5	14636	206	1.4
River Gee	67318	7	9617	850	8.8
Sinoe*	104932	5.8	18092	1800	9.9
	3489072			19,691	4.58

Source: Haraprasad, Liberia Water and Sanitation Sector Assessment report 2008.

* Counties in which the MOH study was carried out.

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