



What we do in Liberia

- We're providing free healthcare and nutritional support for 102,399 children
- We're saving lives by vaccinating 40,670 children against killer diseases
- We're protecting 15,182 children from violence and abuse
- We're helping 56,094 children get a good quality education



Liberia is on the road to recovery after 14 years of civil war that came to an end in 2003. While the security situation is relatively stable, the country is situated in a fragile region. Well over two-thirds of the population live in poverty on less than US\$1 a day. **One in every nine children dies before their fifth birthday**, and life expectancy is just 45. Health services and schools were destroyed and access to basic services is still very poor in many parts of the country.

As many as 20,000 children were involved with the armed forces during the civil war. During the fighting, large numbers of children became separated from their families. Many children and women have been raped or subject to other forms of sexual violence and exploitation, including trafficking.

Violations against children in Liberia remain high due to high levels of poverty and a breakdown in the social fabric and traditional family structures. Other challenges facing Liberia are high youth unemployment, and the effects of the global economic downturn.

Save the Children in Liberia

We've worked in Liberia since 1991. At first we concentrated on meeting the urgent needs of children caught up in the conflict. Now we're safeguarding children's rights through building safer organisations and enhancing children's participation at all levels of our work. We're helping communities in six counties recover from the devastating effects of war: Bomi, Bong,

Gbarpolu, Grand Gedeh, Margibi and Montserrado, which includes working in poor communities in Monrovia, the capital. Last year our activities benefited 173,675 children.

We're saving children's lives by providing free healthcare and tackling malnutrition. We're protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse. We're reuniting children with their families and communities. And we're providing education for the poorest children, including those who missed out on schooling during the war. 2010 marks the first year of children who have not experienced armed conflict starting primary one at school.

We're saving children's lives

Most people in Liberia are too poor to pay for healthcare. Less than 10% of Liberians have access to quality healthcare. Many children are malnourished and don't get enough food to grow and develop healthily. Child, infant and neonatal mortality rates are among the highest in the world.

We're providing free healthcare to the poorest 10% of the population. We're working with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to reduce child and maternal mortality rates. With funding from the UK government and the European Commission, we're providing good-quality healthcare and essential drugs to 21 clinics in five counties (Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Margibi and Montserrado). We've also helped build one new clinic and renovated 18 others. Last year these clinics carried out 291,861 consultations. Of these, 57,502 were for mothers and 68,366 were for children under five. We're saving lives by vaccinating 40,670 children against preventable diseases. And we've supported the national Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI), reaching a further 32,916 children under five and 35,588 women of childbearing age.

We've also supported county health teams to train 30 traditional midwives over a six-month period in ante- and postnatal care and safe delivery practices, and provided refresher training for 125 midwives. We've provided training for 95 young people (aged 12 to 17) in essential life skills and sexual and reproductive health. And we're encouraging women and children to participate in decisions that affect them. They're now represented on the health committees in all the clinics we support.

With funding from a special Christmas appeal through *The Sunday Times*, we're providing better healthcare for 22,000 people in Kingsville, Montserrado county, who between them only have access to one clinic. We've installed two water pumps to provide clean water. We've trained and equipped 50 traditional midwives in ante- and postnatal care, to support safe delivery of babies and to track complications, enabling early referral of pregnant women to the clinic.

By 2012, we aim to provide access to free, quality healthcare for 284,000 children, young people and pregnant women in the areas where we work. It's also our aim that the

government will be able to take on the running of these clinics without relying on external aid for essential medicines and supplies.

One of the biggest problems is that people can't afford even basic healthcare. We've worked hard to persuade the government to avoid reintroducing user fees for healthcare, and have achieved sustained access to free healthcare through the Basic Package of Health Services in 21 remote communities. We've lobbied the Ministry of Health to include neonatal mortality in its healthcare strategy, which is part of its wider roadmap towards reducing maternal and child deaths across the country.

We're protecting children from sexual violence and abuse

Rape and other forms of sexual abuse are common throughout Liberia. Children, especially those separated from their families, are at high risk of violence and exploitation, and child trafficking is on the rise, particularly as it is easy to move children across borders. Even adults whose role is to protect – such as humanitarian workers – have been involved in abusing children. The civil war resulted in the collapse of government structures at all levels, so there is limited legal protection for children. Cultural practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation also put children at risk of harm.

Our child protection work reached 15,182 children last year – more than 6,800 girls and more than 8,300 boys. We work closely with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Gender and Development, to coordinate our efforts to tackle violations of children's rights, and find the best ways to protect children at risk of exploitation.

The war resulted in thousands of children living in orphanages, many of which fail to meet the minimum standards laid down by the government. Most of these children have family members alive, but who cannot cope with another mouth to feed. We supported the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to relocate and reunify 43 children from an orphanage that was at the centre of a sexual abuse scandal in Bong County. We also relocated 35 children from an orphanage that was alleged to be preparing children for illegal adoption. We're now trying to trace members of the children's families so they can be reunited with them.

As well as practical help, we're pushing for changes in the policies that will improve children's lives. Together with UNICEF, we lobbied for reforms in the national adoption law to bring it in line with international standards and prevent people abusing loopholes. And we successfully lobbied the government around the Social Welfare Policy and Children's Bill, to prioritise care in the community, with institutional care for children only as a last resort.

One of our main areas of work is a sub-regional project, 'Children on the Move', which includes children at risk of trafficking. We produced a report, *Blind Hope*, which will inform our regional child protection work in future. From Liberia, children are easily moved across

borders into neighbouring countries where they are used as child labour, domestic workers, or work in mines or on plantations.

We're helping people rebuild their lives

Many thousands of children, especially those who were involved with armed forces, had their lives devastated by the civil war. We're helping the most vulnerable young people and families earn an income so they can give their children a better diet and send them to school.

In Kingsville, we've organised workshops and trained 150 vulnerable young women – Girl Mothers – in how to set up and run a small business. They receive start-up grants of \$150 so that they can start to earn a living and can continue their education (many drop out of school to earn money). We've also set up two children's clubs, and have trained 124 club members on how to improve their life skills, as well as how to protect themselves from harm and exploitation.

We're getting children back into school

Many schools were destroyed during the civil war and families struggle to afford to send their children to school. Girls are much more likely than boys to drop out. Unless the hundreds of thousands of children who have missed out on school manage to get a good quality education, the cycle of poverty will go on.

Through our Rewrite the Future programme, last year, 56,094 children had access to a good quality education in 84 schools in Bong, Montserrado and Grand Gedeh. Save the Children UK is the lead agency for Rewrite the Future in Liberia. We distributed 9,340 school uniforms to the most vulnerable children, who otherwise would not have been able to attend school. We carried out repairs to 68 schools, and equipped more than 400 classrooms. We've also set up 22 new children's clubs so there are now clubs in all 84 schools we support, involving 2,940 children who receive training in children's rights, to improve their confidence and help them protect themselves and other children.

We want all children affected by armed conflict to be able to learn, develop and play in a safe, protective environment. So we're mobilising communities to get involved in the way schools are run. We're improving the quality of teaching by training teachers, and helping parents get involved in their children's education by training members of parent-teacher associations (PTAs) in all 84 schools that we support, and getting them involved in school management. We make sure all groups within the community are represented, particularly girls and students from the poorest families.

One of our big successes in 2008 was working with other partners to help persuade the government to register and pay salaries for 6,379 qualified volunteer primary school teachers. These include 1,249 women teachers, who will be a strong role model for girl students. We've also worked closely with the Ministry of Education on a code of conduct for

teachers, aimed at protecting children, particularly girls, from sexual abuse and exploitation. We'll be working hard to help the Ministry implement these codes of conduct.

This year, we're moving the focus of our Rewrite the Future work from improving school infrastructure to improving quality of education, so that children are more likely to stay on and complete their education. This means we'll be phasing out our accelerated learning programme classes, and focusing on getting more primary age children into school, working closely with the Ministry of Education on a strategy for early childhood development.

We're continuing to lobby the government to allocate 20% of the national budget to education (with 40% of this budget line going to primary education), and to ensure that all children have access to free primary education.



Save the Children UK
1 St John's Lane
London EC1M 4AR
Telephone +44 (0)20 7012 6400
Fax +44 (0)20 7012 6963
savethechildren.org.uk

Registered charity England and Wales (213890) Scotland (SC039570)