

WHAT'S
WORKING:
*Stories from
the Field*

Building the capacity of Liberia's Ministry of Education to harness the power of information

2,300

government-run schools in Liberia have been mapped using FHI 360's K-Mobile geographic information system.



Jessica Scranton

Liberia is Africa's oldest republic and one of the least developed countries on the continent. During a series of brutal civil wars that lasted for 14 years, the country's education system was decimated. Schools were shuttered and a generation of students had no access to formal education. The conflict caused massive destruction to Liberia's infrastructure and civil systems, which has made it difficult for the government to deliver basic services, including education.

About FHI 360: FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing — creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories.

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Schools closed from August 2014 to early 2015 as children and teachers were told to stay home for their safety.

Before the Ebola crisis, one of Liberia's biggest education challenges was a lack of data about schools and teachers. The Ministry of Education did not know how many schools, teachers, and students were in the country, nor the condition of the facilities. As a result, the ministry has not been able to allocate resources to the schools that need them most. The USAID-funded Liberia Teacher Training Program II (LTTP II) mapped 2,300 government-run schools in Liberia using K-Mobile, a geographic information system that FHI 360 developed and uses in 17 countries.

Rather than treating mapping as a one-time exercise, FHI 360 has integrated the location data into a larger system that includes the number of students and teachers, ground-level photos of the schools, and infrastructure data, such as whether the facility has a roof, desks, latrines, wells, and blackboards. The Ministry of Education can now produce reports on school conditions and can more accurately track the teacher payroll. In the future, the ministry will use the database to track academic achievement so it can measure school effectiveness.

"Until recently, very few people could tell you how many schools we had, let alone how many children or how many teachers. A lot of decision making was really driven by guess work, so you can imagine the huge gaps in terms of resources," said Dr. Khalipha M. Bility, the former Ministry of Education's Deputy Minister of Planning, Research, and Development. "Now we are able to target resources based upon needs."

When the Ebola outbreak began, health officials used some schools as temporary health facilities to treat sick patients. The location information FHI 360 gathered will help officials determine which schools will need to be disinfected before they can be re-opened, and which are safe for children to attend.

Now that the Ministry of Education has information on the number of teachers at each school, they are better prepared to ensure that all of the country's instructors receive training on how to prevent the spread of Ebola in their classes.

For more information on the Liberia Teacher Training Program, contact globallearning@fhi360.org.