

Stories of change

“ The YMCA has supported me through vocational skills training at the Salvation Army. The project also provided us with transportation to help us find our way to school. I am using my skill well in the community. The project has given me a lot that I am grateful for. After the training, the YMCA gave me a toolkit which included a wheelbarrow, level, steel cutter and hammer. The skills I acquired are now helping my family and my community. I am making money more than before. I can do many contracts in the community and this is bringing income for me and is developing the community. I have helped to build up to 10 houses, 2 wells and other construction works in and out of the community. My income level is on the average of US\$190 monthly. My income has massively

increased; unlike in the past where I was earning U\$1 equivalent in my pocket before. ”

Chamakh, 28, West Point

“ After the effects of the Ebola outbreak I was very happy to be selected as a peer educator on health and hygiene. I now raise awareness in the community on how to keep their surroundings clean, and also the importance of personal hygiene, washing hands and the importance of cleaning their dishes to avoid sicknesses and diseases. The knowledge I received from the project has helped me and my community a lot. ”

Zeanab, 25, West Point

Project dashboard: Mobilising Young Slum Dwellers in Liberia to Rebuild Communities after the Ebola Outbreak

Goal

Improved health, livelihoods and resilience for 12,960 slum dwellers affected by Ebola in West Point, Monrovia

Implementing partners:



Technical partners: Federation of the Liberia Urban Poor Savers (FOLUPS)
Slum/Shack Dwellers International



Funders:

UK Aid (DFID)
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Y Care International creates opportunities for vulnerable young people across the globe to change their lives for the better. Inspired by and faithful to our Christian values, we work with people of all faiths and none to build a more just world, free from poverty.



Mobilising Young Slum Dwellers in Liberia to Rebuild Communities after the Ebola Outbreak

Following the devastating effects of the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, Y Care International partnered with YMCA Liberia from 2015 to 2019 on a project supporting youth in West Point Township, a deprived slum area in Monrovia.

We supported young people with skills and resources to increase income; promoted access to the knowledge and skills needed to increase resilience to disaster; and supported young slum-dwellers to demand their rights to social and economic development.

YMCA

The results

Context

West Point Township in the Liberian capital city of Monrovia is located on a peninsula which juts out into the Atlantic Ocean. Home to approximately 75,000 people, West Point is one of Monrovia's largest and most densely populated slums.

Environmental degradation has gradually caused part of the township to erode into the ocean. Endemic problems include overpopulation and unsanitary conditions. The surrounding beach is often used as a lavatory, creating health hazards as the water is used for drinking and fish from the water are also consumed. Other than piped water from very limited water points, other water sources are unsafe for drinking.

Following a government-enforced quarantine at the height of the Ebola epidemic in 2014, residents returned despite squalid living conditions. People moved back to fish and make a living through market and petty street trading.

In 2015, Y Care International and YMCA Liberia assessed the needs of communities in West Point after the Ebola outbreak. The main barriers to rebuild livelihoods were limited access to health and hygiene services, skills and knowledge to increase economic resilience, and limited knowledge on how to respond in case of a future disaster. At the time of the final evaluation, most male (87%) and female (81%) survey respondents reported that they are now much better off since the project began.

Health, Sanitation and Hygiene

We trained 63 youth peer educators who shared information and knowledge on health and sanitation through house visits and public events. The health awareness activities cascaded to over 18,100 slum dwellers in West Point. Due to this increased awareness, the voluntary visits of pregnant women to health care facilities increased, which in turn helped to reduce maternal mortality rates.

Trained young peer health educators helped reduce incidences of diarrhoea and other sicknesses in the communities. The majority of women (92%) and men (88%) reported no cases of diarrhoea in the previous 3-6 months. A significant achievement compared to the beginning of the project where most men and women indicated a case of diarrhoea almost every 6 months. In general, most men and women identified an increased awareness of good health practices and engagement in keeping their environment clean.

A total of 4,050 beneficiaries now have access to safe drinking water from the construction of 4 water points.

Economic Empowerment

Aside from the devastating health effects, the Ebola epidemic also had a pronounced socio-economic impact in Liberia; many people had difficulties restarting their livelihood activities.

Young men and women were provided with technical vocational training. 91% of them now report to be employed, self-employed, on call or retained at their training facility contributing to improving their livelihood and well-being. Transport allowances were provided to technical-vocational trainees, which contributed to their effective participation and the rate of training completion.

Our project focused not only on technical training but also on grant and loan support for women, in recognition of their dependence on petty trade as a first source of income for themselves and their families.

84% of people involved in the project have reported an increase in their monthly income. In addition, 183 young people (72% women) have joined savings schemes and started saving. With the savings made from their businesses, most of the women involved in the project have been able to support their children's education including payment of school fees.

A young male project participant said that "the project has helped me recover and improve my livelihood by 100%." He now earns a living for himself and his family through tailoring services offered to clients. As a result of his technical skills he has also been employed by his training institution as a tutor, training, on average, 15 young people per session.

Disaster Risk Reduction

According to the 2015 needs assessment, young people had little knowledge on how to address and reduce risk in their community.

70 young slum dwellers were selected and supported to use their skills to engage in disaster mitigation activities in their communities. Through focus group discussions, they reached 3,756 people in West Point. At the final evaluation, 90% of the males and 84% of the females surveyed reported they have a better understanding on disaster awareness, preparedness and responses.

What changed?

Our project in numbers

Youth Advocacy Groups (YAGs) conducted **33** engagement activities and reached



slum dwellers through their community awareness and engagement activities



4,050

residents of West Point can now access safe drinking water from the 4 water points constructed during the project



96%

of project participants reported positive behaviour change regarding health and hygiene, contributing to a significant reduction in cases of diarrhoea

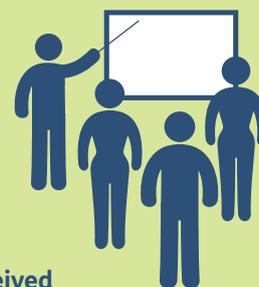


84%

of people involved in the project have reported an increase in their monthly income

91%

of the young men and women that received vocational training have been able to access employment or set up a business



What next?

Y Care International is committed to continuing its work with YMCA Liberia to ensure that the benefits of this work are scaled up, and we are actively seeking new opportunities together.

Health and hygiene have been rated as one of the most significant changes by project participants, with improvements in community members' health and hygiene knowledge and practices. The Youth Advocates will need to continue their engagement with the community leadership, the WASH Committee and the Liberia Water and Sewage Company to ensure regular water supply into West Point.

Waste disposal was a critical issue in West Point and the project team worked closely with community members and leadership on achieving a clean and sanitary community. There has been an increase in the sanitary disposal of waste and participation in community efforts

to clean and unclog drainage channels which has led to a reduction in flooding. Positive results were also achieved through peer educators raising awareness on DRR and dissemination of important messaging.

In order to engage meaningfully to reduce risks which may not be in their control or are influenced by others, communities must be connected with relevant government institutions.

The project provided the platform to engage with elected and appointed officials of government on accountability and governance issues in West Point. On several occasions, the youth advocates brought representatives of government face-to-face with the community to discuss their needs. We aim to continue providing a platform for young slum dwellers' voices to help reduce the negative attitude towards slum dwellers and lift some of the threats of demolition and relocation.