

Response to the WaterAid campaign on the UK response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa and the importance of water and sanitation

Thank you for contacting the Prime Minister regarding the UK response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa and the importance of water and sanitation.

The UK has provided £230 million to support the response to the Ebola crisis, particularly in Sierra Leone. This includes the construction of treatment centres and community care centres. We are ensuring that these facilities have adequate sanitation that safely contains and disposes of faecal and other waste from Ebola patients. We have also supported widespread hygiene promotion campaigns, which are essential to prevent the spread of the disease and in particular around safe burial of those who have died. This is when the risks of infection are most acute.

Strong health systems are critical to a country's development and DFID continues to support the improvement of water and sanitation in developing countries, including in countries affected by Ebola. Prior to the Ebola outbreak our support to health programmes in Sierra Leone resulted in over 50,000 more births delivered by skilled health personnel and the use of a modern method of family planning by almost 40,000 women. Healthcare systems in the countries afflicted by Ebola are weak, following a long history of political instability and civil war.

The Ebola outbreak has undoubtedly weakened health systems and we are already thinking about how to support the region post Ebola. Provision of basic healthcare provision will continue to be a priority. The UK is also continuing to support health systems strengthening in countries in the wider region, including Ghana and Nigeria. This includes making sure that systems are well managed and financed and that they have the facilities, staff and commodities they need to ensure that good quality services can be provided to all people, when and where they need them.

The UK remains committed to ensuring the post-2015 framework is effective and provides the basis for poverty reduction and sustainable development in the future. We consider water and sanitation as important elements in this framework to ensure we finish the job started by the MDGs.

I hope this will reassure you how importantly the UK and DFID in particular view water and sanitation and health system strengthening.

JUSTINE GREENING