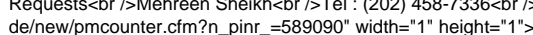




Households Begin Returning To Work in Liberia as Ebola Crisis Wanes

Households Begin Returning To Work in Liberia as Ebola Crisis Wanes
Long-term welfare remains a concern as country moves toward economic recovery
Nearly 20 percent of the Liberians who had stopped working since the Ebola crisis have returned to work in the last month, according to the World Bank Groups most recent round of cell-phone surveys, signaling both important progress and the magnitude of the challenge ahead.
This improvement, an encouraging sign of a shift toward economic normalization, was mainly driven by a large increase in wage work in urban areas. A substantial percentage of those working pre-crisis remain out of work, however; those in self-employment continue to be the hardest hit by the Ebola crisis, pointing to a lack of working capital and a lack of customers as the main barriers to their operation.
As the pressing health crisis in Liberia slows, it will be important to identify and support those who are most vulnerable to a sluggish economy and the increasing number of households whose long-term welfare may be negatively impacted by coping decisions made in the name of immediate stability. Nearly 85 percent of those surveyed in December and January report having sold assets, sold or slaughtered livestock, borrowed money, sent children to live with relatives, spent savings, or delayed investments in order to manage since the start of the Ebola crisis.
"As Liberia approaches zero cases of Ebola, our focus on supporting the countrys economic recovery and preparedness for future shocks will move to the forefront" said Inguna Dobraja, World Bank Group Country Manager for Liberia, "There is still much work to be done to protect the long-term welfare of the most vulnerable in Liberia."
Despite an improved outlook, agriculture remains a concern. Nearly 65 percent of agricultural households surveyed in this round believed that their harvest would be smaller than it had been in the previous year, though this is down from 80 percent in December. Labor shortages and inability to work in groups due to Ebola infection fears continue to pose a problem for agricultural households; if the fear persists into the new season beginning in April, it could impact the amount of land under cultivation, as the clearing process is more labor intensive than the harvest.
Food insecurity persists nationwide, with nearly three-quarters of households reporting that they were worried at some point in the previous week that they would not have enough to eat; households continue to cite a lack of money as the main constraint to purchasing enough food to feed their families.
"It is encouraging to see good news related to jobs," said Kristen Himelein, World Bank Group Poverty Economist for Liberia, "While the food insecurity and self-employment numbers are still concerning, the economic turnaround has begun. We are seeing the lowest out-of-work numbers since October."
As households send their children back to school in the next month, and with the opening of international borders and lifting of the curfew, the World Bank Group and its partners in the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services and the Gallup Organization will continue to monitor the crisis and work to support the Liberian government and its people as they move into economic recovery.
The World Bank Groups Response to Ebola
The World Bank Group has mobilized about \$1 billion in financing for the countries hardest hit by the Ebola crisis. This includes \$518 million from IDA, the World Bank Groups fund for the poorest countries, to provide treatment and care, contain and prevent the spread of infections, help communities cope with the economic impact of the crisis, and improve public health systems; and at least \$450 million from IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, to enable trade, investment and employment.
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