

## **GUINEA**

### **Water and school after emergency in Pamelap, Guinea**

“I should have been in sixth grade this year, but I am only in second grade because of the war. I would like to be a tailor one day, because most of the tailors have left our village during the war. I hope UNICEF will build a real school for us with water pumps like the one on the other side of Pamelap. We cannot stay in the school our parents made during the heavy rainy season... we will be all wet. It's a bit hard for us to go back to school, we forgot everything already,” says shyly little Hadiatou Savané. She heard from her parents that UNICEF would help them very soon, but she is not sure how.

In 2000 rebels invaded Forécariah, a region one hour away from Conakry, the capital city, and only few minutes from Sierra Leone. In the small town of Pamelap all the infrastructures were burned down or destroyed – schools, medical centres, recreational centres, government offices. Seven years after the invasion, life has retaken rights in Pamelap thanks to the support of several international organizations, among which UNICEF stands out.

To get water, village girls no longer have to walk so far. That means they get to school on time, they commit to their studies and have the feeling that, each morning, they are on a level playing field with their brothers. As a result, more Pamelap girls, indeed more children in general, are going to school. In 2004, before the borehole was drilled, only 59 girls (out of 170 schoolchildren, or 35 per cent) were enrolled. By 2006, the number had risen to 150 (out of 370). In terms of percentage, girls' enrolment increased from 35 to 41 per cent. Teachers have also become involved by advocating equality, both at school and at home. Their message is clear: parents must ensure that household chores are shared equally among children of both sexes.

Nowadays, there is a new borehole in the centre of the village, next to a brand new primary school. It looks like just any other borehole: a pump, a small concrete wall and a shelter made from dried leaves. The school was rebuilt after it was burned down by rebels from neighbouring Sierra Leone. The new building is equipped with toilets, including separate latrines for girls, a measure that encourages parents to send their daughters to school. Hadiatou, a very cute 13-year-old girl, has started school again only two years ago. No school was available for four years in her small town.

The water from the borehole has changed schoolchildren's lives, particularly for girls like Hadiatou. As a general rule, fetching water is seen as a woman's or a girl's job. Schoolgirls therefore wake up at dawn to get water before classes start. Since it is up to them to do both water carrying and wood gathering, they are often late for school and miss out on morning lessons. It comes as no surprise, then, that they do less well than boys.

The girls' school results have already started to improve. “In some classes, girls have come top,” says the school principal, Souleymane Sylla. That had never happened before in Pamelap.