

## **A Desperate Need**

After 14 years of civil war that ended in 2003, Liberia's water supply and sanitation systems remain in poor condition. Urban overcrowding and ruined infrastructure created widespread thirst and disease. According to UNICEF, 55% of Liberian schools do not have access to a functional water supply, and 82% lack handwashing facilities. It's no wonder that lower respiratory infections, tuberculosis, and diarrheal diseases are among the top 10 causes of death in Liberia.

## **Launching a Vision**

Moved by this ongoing crisis, a group of young adults at McLean Bible Church in Washington, D.C., founded [TLW] in 2008. Their goal: to provide clean water and the Gospel message to the entire nation of Liberia by the year 2020.

"We call it the mission's '4-minute mile,'" says Todd Phillips, TLW founder and president. "Nobody believed that it could go border-to-border." Just as Roger Bannister defied naysayers to run a mile in 4 minutes, TLW's leaders intend to beat the odds and reach all of Liberia.

## **Working Together**

Providing clean water to 4.5 million people in 15 counties is no task for a single organization. TLW partners with numerous donors, non-profits, non-government organizations (NGOs), and government leaders of all levels in Liberia. TLW currently has four employees in the United States and eight employees in Liberia. Another 150-300 volunteers and partners help build the wells and conduct evangelism. Nine donors provide 100 percent of its U.S. operations, allowing all other funding to go directly to TLW's work.

Among TLW's partners is Water4, a public charity headquartered in Oklahoma City that provides water-related training and support in developing nations. This organization helps nationals solve their own water problems by teaching them to install and maintain devices such as sump pumps and latrines. Together, TLW and Water4 drilled 30 wells in Liberia in 2016, and expect to complete 30 more in 2017, with a Sierra Leone-based enterprise partner.

## **Making a Plan**

"What really got us excited about The Last Well is, they had a strategy," says Matt Hangen, Chief Operations Officer at Water4. "[TLW is] really the only organization that we'd come across that has that sort of vision."

Besides digging the initial wells, TLW works with its partners to develop sustainable, long-term strategies to keep wells functioning for years. Water4, with sister company Access Development, has launched locally owned "service delivery providers." Similar to U.S. utilities, these businesses offer maintenance for wells in the communities where wells have already been built.

"One of the questions I asked [TLW] was, 'After all the wells have been fixed, who's gonna ensure that they're all working?'" Hangen says. "And that's really an emphasis of ours, is to make sure that in five years when those pumps are breaking again, that there's a mechanism in place, in-country, that can service those in a sustainable way. So [TLW's] relationship with government, the mapping work they've done, and then all the work they've done to quarterback other NGOs...laid such a strong foundation for sustainability moving forward in the country."

## **Success So Far**

So far, the model is working. In December 2016, a letter from Liberia's Ministry of Public Works declared that the county of Grand Kru had 100% access to clean drinking water. Phillips expects the next county, Bomi, to be completed by June 2017.

"If we can do a county, we can do a country," Phillips says.