



## August 2014 Newsletter

### Special Edition

Because of the situation we are facing in Sierra Leone, I thought I would let people know how things are on the ground.

There have been whispers and rumours of the risk of ebola around Sierra Leone for the last six months but it took Dr Khan, the only virologist in the country, to die in order to President to take any action.

Previously, the rumours and doubts had been allowed to flow freely - the result of which is that people believe all sorts of extraordinary conspiracy theories and act accordingly. There are those who deny the existence of ebola completely and are convinced it is a creation of the government to try and get money from the international community. There are those who believe that it is a creation of the medical profession who kill people, harvest their blood and organs for sale, and then declare the cause of death ebola, therefore removing the possibility of autopsy. There are those who believe that the doctors and nurses in hospitals give ebola to all their patients, arriving with whatever complaint, and therefore are refusing to attend hospital for even very treatable diseases. There are those who believe it can be spread by air and by carriers, and that it is rife throughout the country and could spring out at them at any time. And so it goes on.

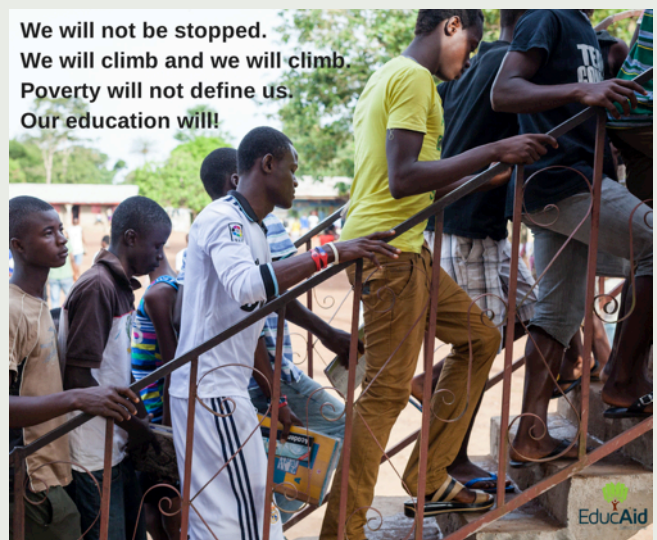
The resultant chaos of behaviour is quite terrifying. The deaths that will directly result from the crisis, aside from ebola itself, will be numerous.

We lost a little girl from one of our primary schools in a village in Tonkolili district, far from any ebola cases, because her parents refused to allow her to be given treatment for malaria and took her instead to the witch doctor who declared her possessed. She died of malaria.

A mother in the Kenema district where Lassa fever, another haemorrhagic fever, is prevalent but treatable, hid her two teenage children in the fear that they would be taken from her because she believed them to have ebola. When her daughter died, the authorities took her body away and she was tested negative for ebola but positive for Lassa fever. The boy was taken for treatment for his Lassa fever but it was too late. He too died.

A very irresponsible pastor in Nigeria spread through social media a 'vision' he had had that all we needed to do was to wash with salt water. Thousands and thousands got up in the wee hours to boil water, saturate it in salt and wash with it. Two people died and twenty were hospitalised in the whole process.

While it is in ways understandable that some foreigners will feel the need to take their families away if they can, it is hard to not judge the general panic ridden fleeing as excessive. Businesses in Freetown are struggling because custom has been so drastically reduced. Flights with British Airways, Gambia Bird and Kenya Airways have been stopped. This all adds to the feeling of panic, confusion and danger.



I got back on 9<sup>th</sup> August to Sierra Leone from a study, fundraising, and 'R & R' trip to the UK and started doing the tour of the school sites. Schools are of course on holiday at this period but we had decided to run a summer school to keep our exam students, in particular, busy and moving forwards. Since the declaration of a State of Emergency, many parents have requested the return of their children. I would rather know where the children are and who they are in touch with than have them often in rather vulnerable situations, e.g. having to walk the streets to sell in order to eat etc. However, I came back to schools with only 30 – 50 children per site.

Our schools are all in the North and the West of the country, the most affected areas are the South and the East. In all the areas in which we work I have yet to meet anyone who knows, or who knows of anyone who has been directly affected by ebola. We are really not in the danger area, if we are careful we will stay safe.

We conducted meetings to clarify the realities about our situation; my messages are simple: Ebola is real, but avoidable, and survivable. Ebola cannot be passed by somebody who does not have it; it is not all body fluids that transmit the disease. It is the body fluids of a seriously infected person that will transmit it.

To give you an idea of the level of foreboding and expectation of disaster, when I addressed the Maronka community with whom I live, the chief told the assembled company that he knew more than ever now that I really loved them all because I had come back to die with them. I reassured him of my love but at the same time that I had no such plan!!

So.... What is life like? Normal life is going on as best as possible but prices have gone up and continue to do so as people try and stock up just in case. Motorbikes, the most common form of public transport, stop running at 7pm and the minibuses stop at 9pm. A city that is usually lively until two or three in the morning is now all but a ghost town by nine. All gatherings of more than five or six people have been banned except for church, mosque and ebola sensitisation meetings. Summer school has thus been abandoned. We run supervised study with children dotted around the classrooms in small groups and not all gathered together, for fear of being arrested by the authorities. The public exams, which should have taken place in July and were postponed to August have now been put back indefinitely. Checkpoints are in operation throughout the country where drivers and passengers have their temperature taken with a remote thermometer.

For many of us ebola has really affected nothing but everything.

We cannot plan but we make 'just in case' plans. We can be sure of nothing but try and get ready for the best-case and worst-case scenarios.

For those in affected areas, the nightmare goes on. For most of us, life goes on.

We wait for this current disaster to move on and then we will pick ourselves up and see where we are. 13 years ago, Sierra Leone dragged itself out of a terrible war. It had seemed that despite so so many problems, things were maybe on the turn but now.... We wait again to see where things will end and what will be needed next. One thing for sure, education will have to be at the heart of the answers.

I have said for many years that, to me, the face of poverty here is the lack of justice and the lack of healthcare but that the answer to both is education. If it has been true in past years, this has been so clearly reinforced by the events of the last few months. The lack of thinking leadership coupled with the lack of a thinking, informed population have been disastrous.

EducAid has been fighting the fight for the spread of thinking education for twenty years in Sierra Leone. We will continue to fight. We have an amazing team of engaged Sierra Leonean staff who have demonstrated their love and commitment in so many ways during this crisis. We will continue to work together to bring our dreams to reality.

We will continue to provide the highest quality thinking education we can to the vulnerable and we will continue to look at ways of eroding the attitudes, policies and ethic which deprives so many good brains and amazing people of the necessary input for them to develop their full potential.

If you are already partners in this work, thank you! Your engagement with us is so vital and greatly appreciated.

If you are not yet a donor and would like to join us by supporting our work, we will be so glad to have you with us. We will gratefully use whatever you are able to give but for example a commitment of £15 provides food, care and education for one month to one student. What is £15? A pizza and a glass of wine in the UK but a changed life in Sierra Leone.

If you would like to sign up, make a one off donation or increase your regular donation, please follow the link our website donate page:

[www.educaid.org.uk/support-us/donate/](http://www.educaid.org.uk/support-us/donate/)

