



Christmas 2014 Newsletter

Generally, Christmas in Sierra Leone is a loud and fun-filled affair with many weeks of build up. There are threads of religion through the celebrations but mostly, the whole season is a time to come together, to celebrate life and still all being together. The New Year song is literally, 'Tell God tenkee, I no die o'. (Thank God I didn't die) i.e. Yes! I have made it to another year!

This year, however, things are very different. No Christmas songs playing in the streets. No parties being prepared for. No Christmas noise at all. In the first place, there is no gathering allowed and in addition, though, of course, there are lots and lots of people who are no longer here – this makes the song more poignant for those in a position to sing it.

Christmas is destined to be a sorry affair this year here with the numbers of communities that have been torn apart.

In 2000, Sierra Leone ranked as the poorest country in the world on the UN's Human Development Index. In 2013, we had climbed to 11th poorest. A few terrible statistics had moved in the right direction a little: 1 in 5 instead of 1 in 3 children dying under 5. The average life expectancy in the 40s instead of the 30s. Women dying in childbirth and pregnancy down from 1 in 8 to 1 in 10.

With Ebola, nearly all of these statistics have been reversed. Ebola is not just killing people directly but the devastation of the health services and the impossibility of accessing health care for anything other than Ebola means that women are dying in childbirth even more again, babies are not being inoculated, treatment for

malaria and TB and all the common killers is not available etc.

It is our belief that the lack of education in Sierra Leone is a significant factor in the uncontrolled spread of this disease. People with no ability to find out for themselves, because they can't read – Adult literacy levels are rated between 20 and 30% – have to depend on others for explanations of what is happening. If you don't know who to trust and you have no way of checking the varying stories out, all the explanations are equally viable and credible: Ebola is a virus and these are the rules for how to protect yourself. The deaths are due to witchcraft and black magic. Health workers are harvesting organs and that is why nobody ever leaves the health centres alive any more. There is no particular reason to believe one explanation over another and thus no particular reason to follow the 'ABC' Ebola prevention rules: Avoid Body Contact.

EducAid would normally be providing education for 3000 children across 9 schools but we only have the very few left who spent the summer holidays with us. Our top priority is to keep these students and all our staff safe and healthy. Next, we are endeavouring not only to keep all of these engaged with their education but also to find alternative ways of getting materials to our youngsters who are out of school. Many lively lesson podcasts have been recorded and we are starting to distribute via Bluetooth, WhatsApp, CDs and MP3 players. *£10 will fund an MP3 player fully loaded with audio lessons – please do [donate](#) if you can.* Disconnecting from their education for months at a time will bring the end of schooling for many – this is one way of keeping them in the loop so it doesn't

become too difficult to re-engage when #AfterEbola comes.

In addition, EducAid is working with 'Partners in Health' to provide Interim Care Centres for children who have been orphaned by Ebola

These children, if they survive, will need care at every level: food, clothes, bedding, medical care, an education and lots of love for the foreseeable future. *If you are in a position to sign up for a regular donation to support one of these children long term, please do follow this link to download the [standing order form](#).*

Meanwhile, we are also working with the authorities to see if we will be able to start training – let's use this down time well! We have fifteen schools who have asked to participate in the EducAid 'Quality Enhancement Programme' as soon as we can arrange it and eighteen more who want to be in the second wave.

An exciting aspect of this project is that, not only does it mean that teachers will be better placed, when schools open to undertake their work, it is also going to be a key part in a piece of serious research to see what can constructively be done to change things more broadly in the country.

Education standards are pitifully low and yet, in EducAid, we see some of the poorest children achieve some of the best results in the country. We want to harness the ideas, the methods, the attitudes that has made our success possible and spread it as far and wide as we can. With a properly researched and reported intervention, we believe we will be able to position ourselves to start making this happen.

I have been made incredibly proud by the EducAid team and their willingness to sacrifice, put themselves out, reach out to the less fortunate and get ready to make whatever difference we can.

Together we can achieve great things.

Staff have given up their homes and moved in together. Staff and students have dug the latrine required to make the care centres independent, made bricks to build the walls, fenced the centres off to make them safe, gone out in teams to inform their communities about how to stay safe, counselled those needing support when they have lost loved ones and so on and so on.

You too can be part of Team EducAid (if you are not already, of course!). If you find yourself moved by the plight of those in such vulnerable circumstances and are able to donate, please do. Whatever you are able to contribute will make a difference to these young people, some of the most vulnerable in the world.

Thank you in advance for your generosity. All the links are available on the [Donate](#) page of our website if you would like to make a contribution.

EducAid looks forward to #AfterEbola and to a time when we can resume our normal activities. We hope schools will open soon and we may quickly draw back in those children who were with us previously as well as, as many as we are able to of the youngsters most seriously affected by this latest disaster.



Let's open the door to education to all these little ones yearning for a constructive future.

