

Ebola: 'survivors are left alone to carry their pain and loneliness'

On the Ebola frontline: how life in rural Sierra Leone is unfolding for one community worker



A cemetery outside an Ebola treatment centre in Kenema, Sierra Leone. Photograph: Francisco Leong/AFP/Getty Images

Isaac Bayoh, Sierra Leone

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Isaac Bayoh, 25, volunteers as an [Ebola](#) quarantine and awareness worker. He is part of a team that isolates the houses of those who have the disease, educates the family and neighbours, and monitors the patient's progress. Here, in his own words sent via WhatsApp, he shares his experiences about how people and communities are affected

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My story just like many has been a terrible experience, I have seen friends and loved ones taken away and never returned.

I have seen the most sorrowful reaction of people upon hearing of being positive with the Ebola virus or their family or a friend or a neighbour have tested positive. I have seen joy in a family being vanished away, I have seen things that my eyes cannot ever believe but yet they are fact, they are happening every day with people, with friends, loved ones, families and communities.



Issac in Sierra Leone

A woman tells me after being quarantined when her son died of the Ebola virus that her life has ended because her only son, who was her only support, is dead and it's just a matter of time before her own symptoms begin to show. I can clearly see the fear in her eyes as we speak. That when I came in to give the psychological support, and because of what I told her, when her result came and it was positive, I saw that state of mind in her, that emotion. She is strong and [has] not given up. She is here today after surviving the virus, and she said one of her recovery methods was to stay positive no matter what. She never gave up.

Unlike this woman, who was lucky, many are not having that opportunity, many have died – especially children who haven't even begun to enjoy the beautifulness of this world, perishing at the hands of this virus.

The story is hard to tell, and I am also in fear as a colleague volunteer I am working with contracted the virus.

But I get up every day determined to help as many people as I can. My job is to go around houses to sensitise and train on quarantining family and also to check their diet. My work, just like many, is very important in trying to end this virus and make our country and the world a better safe place for all.

17 November 2014

“The Ebola virus is real, the Ebola virus kills, the Ebola virus is contagious.” These words are being said everywhere, on the radio, on the internet, even little children know the dangers of this virus, yet people are dying every day, people are being infected every day, the culture that binds us and our communities together no longer stands.

Many who have contracted the virus and died, it is not because they didn't report it earlier or run away but because they lacked the intensive care they needed. Those who are lucky have survived the virus but have been stigmatised, left to stand alone, to carry their pains, their trauma and loneliness.

Many of us who have not contracted the virus yet are suffering, starving, living in fear – in fear that when we go to the market, use public transport, use the toilet, fetch water from the well, or share anything with people, that we don't come in contact with an infected person. That is the kind of life we are living today.

“We have been asked to stay at home, not to visit our loved ones even when they are sick, not get together or touch each other; how can we do this when we hardly get anything to eat?” says Sami, who is a farmer.



Issac in Sierra Leone

We are now in the festive season, before the parties, the musical shows would have now started, news of the coming of our loved ones from overseas for holiday spreads like wildfire, and the sound of music hitting our rooms from night till morning. But here we are today, our communities, our neighbours and houses are getting silent every day with fear and the death of our loved ones.

I met a woman a few days back, I took up to three hours talking to her. She has lost her only daughter who was a nurse and contacted the virus when she was treating a patient at the hospital. She is now devastated, angry at herself for not doing anything to help her child.

Another man in his mid-30s also told me of how he lost his fiancée. They were supposed to get married this weekend.

“I have lost everyone, a family of seven, I am the only one alive today. It all started when my elder sister went out selling vegetables and at the end of the day she got infected by one of her customer[s]. That’s how the virus entered my family, first my sister, to my mum, to my dad, my brothers, and on to me,” says Hawa. If you walk the streets of my country today these are the kind of stories you will hear. Thousands of them.

But one thing I know for sure is that, whatever we are doing, or giving, to make this situation better, we are touching lives, we are giving hope to someone who has given up, we bring a smile on somebody’s face, we are preventing somebody, somewhere from contracting the Ebola virus – and even when they are infected, we still give them hope to live. We are making an impact on the lives of others.