



# EBOLA IN CONTEXT: UNDERSTANDING TRANSMISSION, RESPONSE AND CONTROL

## WEEK 1 THE EPIDEMIC AND THE RESPONSE LIFE IN AREAS AFFECTED BY EBOLA

REGINA BASH-TAQI: If you talk to people, who are in Sierra Leone-- so my husband is in Sierre Leone right now, and I'll be back in January - they will just say like, yeah. Things are OK. And everything seems OK.

But you only have to have an in-depth discussion to begin to understand how significantly they've had to modify their life. I know, certainly, when I left Sierra Leone in August, for instance, we weren't shaking hands anymore. And that was the strangest thing.

People have made significant changes to their lifestyles where people, for instance, we're always visiting each other. People would always just drop by without the need for big appointments and things like that. All of that is changing significantly.

YASMIN JUSU-SHERIFF: I think even before I travelled, and it's even worse now, people were making a joke about the issue of shaking hands and avoiding body contact. But in the Western Area, they were responding.

And I recall that in July, some colleagues went up-country for a funeral of someone who had died in Freetown. And when they got to Kenema, they found that nobody was touching. They came back and commented about the different ways in which people greeted one another. Nobody was touching, even more than in Freetown.

So I assume that, by now, in Freetown, nobody is touching. When you speak to people, they will comment with concern at the fact that people don't visit each other as they used to. They don't visit around funerals at all. People don't attend funerals to pay their last respects to people who have died.

The economic activity has really, really slowed down, especially in Freetown. There, amongst professional business people-- lawyers-- you hear a lot of complaints about lack of work. The courts are hardly functioning. So that is having an impact.

The schools, of course, are closed, which causes a lot of problems within the homes. So I think it's, maybe, there's a lot of boredom. And that's an

atmosphere in which a lot of rumours will proliferate.

REGINA BASH-TAQI: Well, let's take the school industry, for instance. So I know a lot of people who own schools and who own daycare centres. And their businesses are effectively closed. All the industries-- so I know someone, for instance, who runs a uniform business and supplies whole chains of schools. That's at a standstill.

YASMIN JUSU-SHERIFF: In the Tonkolili District and in Port Loko District, where you have the bulk of the mining activity, a lot of the mining activity has been suspended. And that has had an impact on those communities, a substantial impact on those communities.

PEARLYN MAMULU: I talked to my cousin not too long ago. And I was saying like, how are things in the market? Because there was a point in time, some of the markets were shut down. They closed them down. People weren't allowed to sell.

And our markets are different than the markets in the west. It's everything is out in the open. Everything's very fresh, organic. So everything's raw, especially with the meats, and fish, and poultry, and all of that. Everything is raw.

And it's very congested. The market that I used to go to is very congested. You are literally bumping and rubbing up against people. So for a while, they shut all the markets down.

And she was saying now that at one point there was a black market. So it was like people were selling things even though they weren't supposed to. And she was like, what else are we supposed to do? How are we going to eat?

Because I remember I was in Liberia. They sent out a message saying that people should buy canned goods and packaged goods. The average Liberian doesn't even live off of \$2.00 a day. How do you expect them to go to a grocery store and buy canned goods? That's not a logical suggestion where you have the majority of the population living in poverty. So you need markets. How else are they going to eat?

And so she was like, what else do they expect us to do? We can't go to the supermarket and buy canned beans. We need the fresh ones. It's cheaper.

And so they started out with the underground black markets. And then, now, people are just like, this is not going to work. So they, eventually, opened the markets back up again. And she was like, yeah, the markets are back open. People are selling.

She's like, but we just have to be very careful. She was like, it's hot. But you

see people walking around in jackets and sweaters, protecting themselves so that they don't rub up against people. If somebody has the virus, they don't want to get their sweat on them.

She's like, it's hot. And people are literally burning up going to the markets because they have on all of this protective clothing. She's like, but we have to do what we have to do. We have to survive. We have to eat.

So I was like, well, just as long as you're being safe.

YASMIN JUSU-SHERIFF: One of the first structures, that were suspended, were the periodic markets in the rural areas-- the weekly markets, the Lumas or Dorweis they're called. And that hit people very hard, especially the women. And then, the closures of the borders, eventually, affected cross-border trade for many of the women in the organisations that I am part of and work with.

It has had some impact on farming. Because people are not necessarily able to get people to come and help them on their farms. I think that, in the planting season, there are groups of people who move around the country, young people who move, working on farms. And with the quarantine, that has had an impact on that movement, around the country, to do farming.

REGINA BASH-TAQI: The markets are working. So, I mean, there may be shortages. So you may not get exactly what you want to eat every day. But you'll get something to eat. It's more expensive.

And, of course then, for poorer people, that affects them a lot more. Because, maybe, it's the prices are not doubled or anything. But they're significant enough for people to be having significantly poorer and less quality meals.

And we already have a huge problem with malnutrition in Sierra Leone. And so for this to add to it, that's just raising the bar of the problems that we'll have to deal with after. The other thing is that a lot of farmers, because of the quarantines, are not able to shift their food. So all of these foods are rotting in the fields while people are actually hungry and there's not enough in the markets.