IFRC
Psychosocial Centre

Case study, Sierra Leone

You have been deployed by your national society to Kailahun Branch in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone as a psychosocial delegate to support the Ebola Response Phase 3 Framework.

In March 2014 an outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) was detected in Guinea, close to the boarders of Sierra Leone and Liberia. EVD is highly infectious and persons infected by the disease have a 25-90% risk of surviving. Due to limited knowledge of EVD and modes of transmission within the population, the disease spread rapidly in Sierra Leone during 2014. Military personnel were placed on access points to screen people moving in and out of the district for fever. Schools were closed, mass gatherings banned and local cross-border prohibited. 2169 persons passed away in Sierra Leone due to EVD. Not since the civil war ended in Sierra Leone in 2002 had the country faced a bigger challenge than during the Ebola outbreak.

The EVD outbreak in Sierra Leone was declared to have ended on 7 November 2015. The country then entered a 90-day period of enhanced surveillance to ensure the rapid detection of any further cases that might arise. On 14 January 2016, 68 days into the 90-day surveillance period, a new confirmed case of EVD was reported in Sierra Leone after a post-mortem swab collected from a deceased 22-year-old woman tested positive for EVD. The woman died at her family home in the town of Magburaka, Tonkolili district, and received an unsafe burial.

Many survivors have lost close friends and relatives to the illness and are struggling to cope with loss and grief. Many children have been left orphaned. Many persons express a profound feeling of guilt and do not understand why they have survived, and their loved ones have not. Several persons have approached the Kailahun branch to address their loneliness.

Despite the relatively stable and controlled situation in Kailahun, people fear for more outbreaks in Sierra Leone. There are still many roomers and misconceptions connected to EVD. The rumors and misconceptions span from modes of transmission to witchcraft and affect both the risk of new incidents, stigmatization of survivors, lack of trust and the general social cohesion of the district. Kailahun city is a major business and commercial centre, but many survivors are no longer welcome in the community, have lost their means of livelihood, and are not able to re-enter the labor market due to their association with EVD.

The IFRC is involved in recovery activities as they review their systems and learn lessons from the outbreak. The approach incorporates new developments in Ebola control from vaccines, diagnostics, and response operations. Up until now, the Red Cross PS staff and volunteers have being working mainly with PFA training and promoting safe and dignified burials. Staff and volunteers are complaining about the lack of confidence and trust for the response, which they say is still making their work in the villages extremely hard. You are being deployed to support design and development of a programme that can support some of the above described needs with special focus on the psychosocial needs.