

The Inter Religious Response to the **Ebola** Outbreak in Sierra Leone

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This is Sierra Leone.....



The Inter-Religious Council (IRC SL)

- IRC SL was created in **1999** to **broker** and **consolidate** the **Peace** process during the civil war
- It is now the official body for inter-faith **Response** and **Coordination** for key national issues
- Membership comprised of **Heads** of all **Faiths** from the various **Denominations/Sects** of **Islam** and **Christianity**
- IRC SL is a member of the **World Council of Religious Leaders**

The Value Addition of Religion in National Issues in S/Leone

- Almost all Sierra Leoneans belong **with their hearts** to one of the 2 dominant religions (Christianity & Islam)
- Religion has the **largest constituency**; every village with either a Church or Mosque, or both
- The Religious Leadership is **structured** and **organised** with little room for **animosities**
- The **Congregation** observe the **daily routine services** in Mosques and Churches
- Religious Leaders are **accorded** the **highest regard** at the **Political Level**, and the most listened to by their **congregation**

Key Achievement of IRCSL

- A key constituent group that **Brokered** Peace amongst the **various factions** and **Reconciliation** among the **citizenry** during the Civil War
- Contributed to major child health ventures such as **Universal Child Immunisation** and a **Polio free** S/L
- Created **ISLAG** and **CHRISTAG** championing national Health Related Issues
- Created the **S/L Inter-religious AIDS Network** (SLIRAN) to provide coordinated support to the national HIV response in **Awareness Raising; HIV Testing and Treatment;** and **Care and Support**

The **EVD** Outbreak

- First case reported in Guinea in March 2014
- In S/Leone, first case was reported in May 2014
- S/L recorded **8665** case of which **3,566** Deaths and Discharged Cases, **4029** (As of June 29).

In S/L, increased and spread of EVD are due to:

- **Customs** and Ingrained **Socio-cultural beliefs & practices** (Eg. **Washing the Dead**)
- **Denial, Misconceptions** coupled with **high illiteracy**
- Initial **conflicting messages** from health authorities
- **Weak** Health systems

IRCSL Contribution to the **EVD** Response

Political Engagement

- Engaged the Presidency leading to a declaration and implementation of a 3 days national Prayer and Fasting
- Advocated for the Declaration of Public Health Emergency especially in epi-regions

IRCSL Contribution to the **EVD** Response

Partnership Creation

- Negotiated & have active representation within NERC and DERCs
- Partnered with various **CSOs** (eg. Focus 1000, Community Radio Network etc.) and **UN Agencies** (UNICEF, UNAIDS) for Social & Resource Mobilisation, and Capacity Building
- Enrolled in the **Social Mobilisation** Pillar for **Learning and Experience Sharing**, and the **National Burial Command Centre** for the roll out of safe and dignified burials

IRCSL Contribution to the **EVD** Response

Community Level Implementation

- Developed a harmonised Inter Religious EVD prevention messages & engaged the congregation in Churches & Mosques
- Modified and Sanctioned changes to some religious rituals (eg Hand shakes and deliverance by touching)
- Closed Praying (temporarily) in Mosques and Churches in some epicentre communities
- Trained and Deployed Religious Community Mobilisers alongside other Social Mobilisers
- Contextualised and Implemented WHO Safe and Dignified Burial guidelines
- Provided Chlorine and hand Sanitisers in every Mosque & Church

SLIRAN EVD Response: A Special Case Study

- Sierra Leone Inter Religious AIDS Network (SLIRAN) is an off shoot of IRCSL created to primarily support the National Response to **HIV**
- SLIRAN has rich experience in Awareness Raising & Social Mobilisation of religious congregation for HIV services, & Care and support for people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the country
- The above are **key thematic Areas** in the EVD Response as well
- SLIRAN thus Exported its HIV experience into the EVD Response eg. Fighting Stigma against EVD Survivors

Key Outcomes of SLIRAN EVD Response

- With Support from UNAIDS, SLIRAN organised Religious Leaders to target one of the Most affected communities in Port Loko District, Northern Sierra Leone
 - **SLIRAN specifically conducted:**
 - Awareness Raising and Mobilised Communities for EVD Services
 - Documented EVD Experiences for Community Preparedness targeting Community Stakeholders (Religious Leaders, Traditional Healers & Chiefs, and EVD Survivors)
 - Created Linkages and Partnership for experience sharing between EVD Survivors and the Network of PLHIV
 - Documented Psychosocial and Livelihood Needs Assessment of about 100 EVD Survivors in the target community

Main **Challenges** to IRC Response

- **Difficulty** in changing some **inherent socio-cultural practices** in rural communities eg washing of dead bodies
- **Traditional healing practices** still common in some communities
- **Extreme Poverty** (eg non- quarantined persons visited quarantine homes for food)
- **Limited funding** to sustain efforts (eg support to EVD survivors)
- **Weak** Health Systems
- **Difficulty** in accessing some remote communities

The End but it Continues.....



A Dream Time to Save Mama Salone!!!!!!!