

## NOT TOUCHING ANYONE IS JUST UNNATURAL...

In April I moved to Sierra Leone, finally. After three and a half years of hard work, fundraising, planning, fine tuning and organising, I was ready. More than ready. I gave up my job, sublet my apartment in Amsterdam and said my goodbyes to everyone. I was on the plane and off to my new life, how exiting!

Initially I had planned to have a two-week holiday, but after five days I was bored and decided to just get started on establishing Schooling for Life in Sierra Leone. Now it all became real. High on my "to do list" was to find an office, as I didn't have a location to work from and electricity is a real problem in Sierra Leone. So, I started to work from a restaurant, Crown Xpress. I was there from morning till evening and in doing so I became a regular in the restaurant. The staff would joke with me: "you should pay rent." But working from there brought me in contact with many people, and helped me forward. In Sierra Leone your network is everything and people are generally very helpful. It doesn't take long to get into a conversation with someone who will link you to others, who will help you on. Thankfully a friend offered me to share her office with her. Point one of my list, Check!



Soon I followed suit with the other items on my list. Mostly I could check off things rather successfully but obviously

not everything worked out as planned. For example buying a car was a real nightmare and I can fill pages on that issue. Then there is the Sierra Leone corruption; a truly ugly and frustrating side of the country. Trying to register Schooling for Life with various institutions was a nightmare at times. Arrogant and unhelpful people who frustrate things for their own gain or just because they can. Again network is everything. Through connections and by going over someone's head and not taking "no" for an answer you DO get it done, but it's hard. However this was all expected. I knew this, from previous visits, my volunteers and Desmond, my "rock" in Sierra Leone. What we didn't count on in all the planning and risk assessments, was Ebola...



Ebola disrupted our lives in so many ways. By the time Ebola became a serious threat, we were doing so well, we had almost successfully implemented the entire start-up phase! Our students were recruited, the trainers were on board, we had been registered, we were contacting educational institutes, and then there was this damn Ebola. The outbreak had obviously already started, as there were cases in Guinea when I left for Sierra Leone. I

even discussed with different people how bad it could be. Nobody had imagined this...

The state of emergency was declared in July and things moved quickly from this moment on. We had to disinfect all the time. So we bought a bucket with a tap, chlorine and everyone who entered our office had to wash hands. If we were in close contact, we had a thermometer to check for fever. We stopped touching people entirely. This is weird because touching people is such a natural thing.. So it takes some getting used to when you can't touch at all. We didn't go out that much anymore, so life became more and more confined to specific places and people.



We now found ourselves in a completely different ball game and I realised that a different kind of leadership was needed. I had to rewrite my back-up - and evacuation plans, and emergency measures had to be instilled for our staff and students. I had to consider all the scenarios and consequences, on a personal and professional level. End of August small riots erupted in the city and that was the moment I decided that we would pause the programme. Even more importantly, we couldn't proceed with the programme anymore as schools were closed and we weren't allowed to gather in large groups. Making training impossible and even punishable by law. All in all, the situation became unworkable.

However, I didn't just want to go, the urgency to do something was so big! It seemed the rest of the world didn't realise what was going on. UN, WHO, EU and the US were just talking, organisations sounding the alarm bell, but few were doing anything on the ground. I couldn't just do nothing, so I decided to devote some of the SfL time to a fundraiser for Connaught hospital and King's Sierra Leone Partnership. We raised almost €1700 with

which we bought pillows, clothes, juice, soap, disinfectant, toothpaste, towels, cleaning materials and much more. For our students, we organised an Ebola information class (group split in two of course), to make sure that they knew how to protect themselves and others from Ebola.

Saying goodbye to them and others, even if for a short while, was so, so hard. Especially because I couldn't shake anyone's hand or hug a single person. How do you do that? It's so unnatural to have emotions and not touch... It feels horrible to leave people behind and know that they can't leave, it feels horrible to leave the programme behind and not know what will remain when I come back. It feels horrible to have to fear for people's lives... Ebola isn't just a news item for me, for me Ebola was and still is very, very real...

Schooling for Life however is not on "pause", in fact we are very active. Early next year we will start again in Sierra Leone and we will include an Ebola response. There is a dire need for education and as we are an education NGO, we are looking to develop a programme and partnerships on this topic as we speak. One thing is for sure, even though Ebola affects us all, it doesn't define us; not the country, not the people, not our organisation.



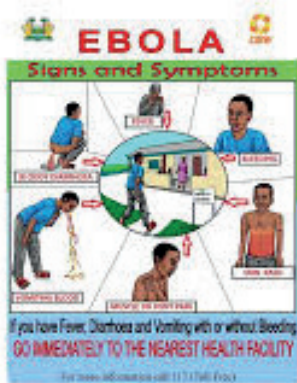
*Sjierly Pereira, Founder & Country director*

**FACT**

**EBOLA IS A DEADLY VIRUS BUT CANNOT BE TRANSMITTED BEFORE A PERSON DISPLAYS SYMPTOMS. THEREFORE IT IS IRRATIONAL FOR PEOPLE TO BE AFRAID OF PEOPLE COMING FROM WEST AFRICA IF THEY ARE NOT SICK.**



## WHAT IS EBOLA?



The current outbreak in West Africa, (first cases notified in March 2014 in Guinea), is the largest and most complex Ebola outbreak since the Ebola virus was first discovered in 1976. It is thought that fruit bats are natural Ebola virus hosts. Ebola is introduced into the

human population through close contact with the blood, feces and urine, organs or other bodily fluids of infected animals. Ebola then spreads through human-to-human transmission via direct contact with the blood, feces and urine, organs or other bodily fluids of infected people, and with surfaces and materials (e.g. bedding, clothing) contaminated with these fluids. Burial ceremonies in which mourners have direct contact with the body of the deceased person can also play a role in the transmission of

Ebola as an infected dead body is highly infectious. People remain infectious as long as their blood and body fluids, including semen and breast milk, contain the virus. Men who have recovered from the disease can still transmit the virus through their semen for up to 7 weeks after recovery from illness. The incubation period, that is the time interval from infection with the virus to onset of symptoms, is 2 to 21 days. Humans are not infectious until they develop symptoms. First symptoms are the sudden onset of fever, fatigue, muscle pain, headache and sore throat. This is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, rash, symptoms of impaired kidney and liver function, and in some cases, both internal and external bleeding. There is as yet no proven treatment available for Ebola. However, a range of potential treatments including blood products, immune therapies and drug therapies are currently being evaluated. No licensed vaccines are available to date of publication of this newsletter, but 2 potential vaccines are undergoing human safety testing.

## THE IMPACT OF EBOLA ON THE COUNTRY AND SCHOOLING FOR LIFE

On 20 July the first case of Ebola is reported in Freetown. Over the next week Freetown is starting to realise the seriousness of the situation and reality is sinking in. Airlines stop flying, people start to panic... Richer residents start to pull out and leave the country in large numbers, business drops dramatically, and the city is put on lock down for one day in August.

The craziness continues however, the number of Ebola cases keeps rising and a state of emergency is declared... Common sights in Freetown are: bleach buckets, people with rubber gloves and ambulances flying up and down carrying sick people. People have stopped touching one another. This is the real Ebola effect: it stops normal human interaction, banning you from taking care of your sick child, mother, father, brother, sister, banning you from giving your loved one a proper funeral. It's cruel and merciless... The government is overwhelmed and the international community is not yet responding.

Slowly the effects of the outbreak become more visible in the streets. From time to time bodies are found and small riots erupt over continued slow government response. This is the moment Schooling for Life decides to seize its activities for the moment. The situation has become too volatile. By order of the government the schools have closed, all public places have to be closed at night and public gatherings are banned.



Schooling for Life can no longer safely continue with its intended activities. With a heavy heart we left for the airport on September the 14th...

## WHAT ARE WE DOING NOW?

During our time in Sierra Leone the importance of the programme of Schooling for Life is revealed once again. Local population, companies and NGO's told us that Sierra Leone is in need of such a programme as Schooling for Life offers. For the simple reason that there is no other programme in the country that provides such comprehensive preparation in the lives of young people. Now, because of the Ebola outbreak it has become even clearer how important it is to ensure that the country's population is capable of actively and assertively thinking about her actions and the consequences, and that she is well educated. And once again it shows that young people in the country react most strongly to the actions and especially the failures of the government. Therefore it is precisely this group that needs to be given the chance to become good examples and leaders through education. Schooling for Life builds a perfect base for this with her students.

The fact that our programme in Sierra Leone has been temporarily paused, does not mean that Schooling for Life is not active at this moment. We are still working in the Netherlands and also our local staff are still active, in particular to maintain contact with the selected students. Schooling for Life encourages the youth of Sierra Leone to keep up their education and 'keep their minds alive'. We are currently looking at different possibilities to continue the programme in Sierra Leone, despite Ebola.

**FACT**

THE EBOLA VIRUS FIRST APPEARED IN 1976 IN SUDAN AND CONGO AND IS NAMED AFTER A RIVER IN CONGO WHERE THE FIRST RECORDED CASES OF EBOLA WERE.

## ORGANISE A SCHOOLING FOR LIFE CHRISTMAS DINNER!

Do you want to support Schooling for Life in her work? Christmas is the time of sharing and spending time with your loved ones. Do you want to support SfL in the process by organising a 'Schooling for Life Christmas dinner'? When you organise a dinner party, your guests may often give you a bottle of wine or flowers when they arrive, instead why not ask them to donate to Schooling for Life? And then have a lovely dinner! If you would like more information, advice or tips from us on this activity, then please contact us by sending an email to [info@schoolingforlife.net](mailto:info@schoolingforlife.net).



## VACANCIES (VOLUNTARY) IN THE NETHERLANDS

Schooling for Life in the Netherlands is the driving force behind Schooling for Life Sierra Leone. Without our team in the Netherlands, our activities in Sierra Leone are not possible. Do you want to help us and be part of this driving force, do you know somebody or do you want to have more

information? Send an e-mail to [info@schoolingforlife.net](mailto:info@schoolingforlife.net) or visit our website [www.schoolingforlife.net](http://www.schoolingforlife.net).

We are looking for an **operational manager**, a **social media manager**, a **marketing and communication specialist** and a **fundraiser**.

## NEW WEBSITE MANAGER IN THE NETHERLANDS!



We want to introduce you to our new website manager in the Netherlands: Dries!

*"My name is Dries Arnolds, I run a web development business and I'm very passionate about websites and web-technology. My aim with every website is to make it as good as it possibly can be. I joined Schooling for Life because I was looking for volunteer work for some time. After I read about the aims and methods I was convinced this was the organisation I wanted to help achieve its goals. I hope I can help Schooling for Life achieve great things and make a change in its field."*



THE ANNUAL REPORT 2013 OF SCHOOLING FOR LIFE CAN BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE:

[WWW.SCHOOLINGFORLIFE.NET/ABOUT/PUBLICATIONS/](http://WWW.SCHOOLINGFORLIFE.NET/ABOUT/PUBLICATIONS/)

## DONATION

Do you want to help the youth in Sierra Leone receive good quality education and the skills to create a better life? Please help Schooling for Life accomplish this with your donation.

### Donations done in the Netherlands

Send your donation to:

Schooling for Life Foundation,  
Account number (IBAN): NL49 RABO  
0171749022 Rabobank, the Hague.  
BIC Code: RABONL2U.

### Donations in Sierra Leone

Send your donation to:

Schooling for Life Foundation,  
Account number: 1004011804011,  
Ecobank, Freetown.  
BBAN code: 008010401180401141

If you want to subscribe to this newsletter, please go to [www.schoolingforlife.net](http://www.schoolingforlife.net).



*"We are the students who participate in the Schooling for Life programme. We want to thank you for making this possible. We and the Schooling for Life team wish you Happy Holidays and a very happy New Year."*