

## DEMAC & ABC EVENT

Friday 8 July 2016, 18:00 – 21:30

InSpire at St Peter's The Crypt, St Peter's Church, Liverpool Grove, London, SE17 2HH

### 'Sierra Leone's Recovery and the Role of the Diaspora'

The ABC & DEMAC event on 'Sierra Leone's Recovery and the Role of the Diaspora' was a very successful event and insightful discussion, which brought together diverse experiences and views on the contribution of Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora during the Ebola outbreak, as well as the business dimension on how the crisis impacted diaspora investment.

#### The event focused on the Sierra Leonean Diaspora on the key areas below:

- Assistance provided by the diaspora in time of crisis
- What can be achieved when Sierra Leoneans in the UK work together for a common goal
- Sharing key findings and recommendations of the impact of Ebola on business
- Strategies to leverage diaspora contributions to ongoing recovery efforts
- Broaden understanding of the role of the diaspora in humanitarian disaster preparedness, response and coordination.

The key points from each of the areas are summarised below:

#### 1. Assistance provided by the diaspora in time of crisis

During the event, presentations and contributions from the participants highlighted that diaspora humanitarian assistance during crises can take various forms and sizes, which can mainly be grouped into four categories:

**Diaspora Remittances:** the positive role of diaspora remittances, often sent through formal channels such as Western Union, MoneyGram, was highlighted, particularly for receiving families and friends. These inflows help households' consumptions in affected communities to deal with the immediate financial challenges during a disaster.

**Diaspora Relief Aid:** like conventional humanitarian actors, diaspora communities also send humanitarian aid which target hard to reach areas. Relief materials can be sent through various means including by air, sea and land. For instance, in the context of Sierra Leone, Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora, often groups and individuals, sent medications, personal protective equipment, gloves, among others, to healthcare centres across the country during the Ebola crisis (example from Sierra Leone UK Diaspora Ebola Response Taskforce [SLUKDERT](#)). Others provide food – an example from the [Lunchboxgift](#)

**Advocacy, Lobbying & Public Relation:** In the face of a crisis, information is a valuable asset. So too is lobbying key stakeholders with the aim to accelerate and improve response, as well as effective coordination of efforts to save lives and alleviate suffering, while maintaining people's dignity. In terms of public relations, this has included information sharing and best practices amongst diaspora individuals and organisations on how they have been responding to a crisis, as well as encourage collaborative working to improve their response. They have also been innovative in their approach to using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp – to share information amongst themselves, as well as between families and friends back home, as well as sharing their stories through media outlets. Diaspora communities have also employed effective lobbying and advocacy work, engaging, rallying and influencing international coordination of relief efforts. (Examples include: [EngAyde](#))

**Diaspora Technical Assistance:** technical assistance plays a vital part in responding to any humanitarian disaster. For example, experienced and qualified Sierra Leoneans including nurses and doctors in the UK volunteered to work in treatment centres across Sierra Leone caring for Ebola patients. Examples include: The Organisation of Sierra Leonean Healthcare Professionals Abroad ([TOSHPA](#)) and Sierra Leone War Trust ([SLWT](#)). Both TOSHPA and SLWT were part of the human resource arm of SLUKDERT – they organised roadshows aimed at recruiting volunteers to go to Sierra Leone, as well as delivered cultural awareness training to volunteer health carers.

Presentations were provided by three diasporans who were mobilised to provide technical assistance during the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone:

**OB Sisay** – director of the Situation Room at the National Ebola Response Centre (NERC), O.B. Sisay developed Sierra Leone’s first fully operational information management centre that informed the Ebola stakeholders of the situation on the ground. Using his extensive experience as a Risk and Africa Research Analyst, OB Sisay forced stronger Sierra Leonean ownership of the response to Ebola whilst also bringing key international partners including the UK into strategic decision making through the introduction of Command and Coordination Group meetings.

OB’s presentation outlined the challenges faced in the setting up and effective working of the NERC. Some of the key points to come out of his presentation and can be helpful moving forward were:

- There is a need to identify the skills of those within the civil service and encourage the positives while strengthening their weaker points. By doing this at the NERC they have left a team that is more computer literate, aware of their strengths and what they can bring to their work to enhance the outcomes.
- The knowledge and ability to create world class standard of outputs like the maps they produced during Ebola, which were used by all stakeholders during the crisis, is possible within Sierra Leone. The key need is a body to take the time to do a skills audit, place staff members appropriately, an encouraging open attitude and the mechanisms in place to upskill staff.
- A focus should be placed on collection and processing data so it can be utilised widely and effectively. The suggestion of greater systematic ways of working were highlighted.

**Ibrahim Othame Kabia** – a Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army Reserve and command 497 Operations Support Unit, he was mobilised as part of the British military contribution to the UK’s response to the Ebola outbreak emergency and principally Commanded the Bo District Ebola Response Centre.

Ibrahim brought a unique perspective to the event by sharing his experience of contributing to the Ebola response by working with the British Army.

- Ibrahim’s knowledge of the area he was put in charge of, military ways of working (discipline, systems) and being able to speak the local and cultural language, were all instrumental to secure community cooperation
- The combination of his military knowledge from his experience of working in both the British and Sierra Leonean army helped to enhance the response and bring civilians on board to work together to respond effectively.

**Kiptieu F. Agyei** – Kiptieu (Kippy) the founder of Heaven Homes a children’s home utilised her experience of working with and looking after orphan children to adapt her focus to look after children who had become orphans due to their parents dying from Ebola. Kippy’s relationship with the chief and community where her home is based enabled the trust to be extended to her plan to let the orphan children come to the area in a period where there was a high level of fear and stigma directed at ‘Ebola orphans’. Kippy shared some of her learning to assist other diaspora communities wanting to do work that necessitates working with local government and local communities.

- It is important to include the community within which you want to do and build trust from the beginning and to go in with an attitude of learning and cooperation. Do not assume you know best.
- Understand the system you are going to work in so you do not alienate potential partners because you make mistakes you are not aware you are making.
- Participating in an initiative like DEMAC has helped to develop skills and knowledge regarding the formal humanitarian sector and enhance relationships with diaspora organisations from different countries. This has brought about knowledge transfer and potential partnerships.

## **2. What can be achieved when UK Sierra Leoneans work together for a common goal**

There are a number of benefits to be gained when Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora come together to work towards a mutual goal. But perhaps the most important one, among others, is bringing together collective efforts of individuals, organisations and other stakeholders into one towards achieving a bigger impact, as well as accelerating much needed interventions.

## **3. Sharing key findings and recommendations of the impact of Ebola on business**

The AFFORD Business Centre key study findings on the impact of the Ebola outbreak on diaspora business highlights that the outbreak had a negative impact on diaspora businesses including on profits, sales, planned investment and employment of paid staff, as well as risk management issues. In addition, examples of diaspora investment were highlighted including Sierra Leonean UK-based [International Development Enterprise Associates](#), constructing a five star hotel in Sierra Leone and investing an estimated US\$40 million and employing 400 people in Sierra Leone.

More information about the [ABC study](#)

## **4. Strategies to leverage diaspora contribution to ongoing recovery efforts**

Creating a database of Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora could be a useful way to leverage diaspora contribution to ongoing recovery efforts in key areas such as investment in enterprises, education and health.

In terms of diaspora enterprises – a new AFFORD programme will be underway soon aimed at assisting UK-based Sierra Leonean businesses which have a social impact within Sierra Leone through finance and business support. More information will be released in due course.

## **5. Broaden understanding of the role of diaspora in humanitarian disaster preparedness, response and coordination.**

The DEMAC study aims to enhance diaspora emergency response capacity and coordination with the conventional humanitarian system. This study's key findings highlights ways Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora responded to the Ebola outbreak and opportunities they bring to humanitarian response including better access in most areas in the affected country, among others. But also challenges of diaspora response, such as issues of trust amongst them, were also highlighted.

More information about the [DEMAC study](#).

The feedback from the event showed that participants found the discussions very helpful and were eager to identify ways to take the discussion forward such as creating a database to continue sharing and building relationships. Many were encouraged and inspired to see the work that had been done by diaspora and local communities to address Ebola and work together to support Sierra Leone's future development.