

PROFESSORS WITHOUT BORDERS (PROWIBO) PRESS RELEASE

26 April, 2018 | LONDON - New study on the **impact of the Ebola outbreak on higher education institutions in Sierra Leone** shows students **lost at least nine months of studies** and an overall **absence of basic mental health support systems**.

The impacts of Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone are causing long term economic damage to the country and severe mental distress to students. The socio-economic/development impact of closing universities for nearly a year is a massive setback to development.

New study shows universities and related organisations in Sierra Leone had no concrete action plan for devastating events such as Ebola. When the Ebola outbreak peaked, researchers found that all of the country's 64,000 university students had their schooling disrupted for at least nine months. Condensed academic schedules and delayed graduation dates have yet to be normalised in many institutions.

From September to December 2017, researchers interviewed students and faculty members from Fourah Bay College (FBC), Milton Margai College, and the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) – 3 of the country's 17 higher education institutions. The report recommends developing distance learning programs and improving mental health and crisis planning, including financial planning to help cope with disruptions caused by such epidemics.

One law student interviewed noted the personal effects of this delay: "now that we're in the final year and we've nearly finished the course, we are going to wait for another year to actually go to law school. Something I should have spent five years on, I'm now going to spend six."

Many businesses and operations closed during the Ebola outbreak, resulting in students having to pull out of school because relatives who paid for their tuition had died, or could not go to work, resulting in lost earnings. The report recommends developing a government-backed financial plan that would "pledge to support students affected by a health crisis e.g. when a student cannot continue education due to the loss of the major breadwinner."

Findings show mental health support was either non-existent or unintegrated into higher education healthcare services so students experiencing trauma and other mental health symptoms were unable to receive much-needed support during and after the disaster.

The authors note that this is especially critical "for students and staff who have lost close family members and for members of the college and university community who are Ebola survivors."

This study can serve as a template for better assessing the extent to which health disasters affect development. The international development sector could extrapolate from these recommendations and data lessons for countries with similar lack of infrastructure in times of national crisis. This report calls upon university administrators and the Ministry of Health in Sierra Leone to include some of the above recommendations, made possible with the advent of new teaching technology, as students of higher education directly impact the overall development and economy of Sierra Leone.

Notes to Editors

Yanoh Jalloh is an adjunct lecturer at New York Institute of Technology in the Department of Health Sciences and a visiting lecturer with Professors Without Borders in Sierra Leone. Jalloh has worked with several different organizations in Sierra Leone regarding girls empowerment and health education programming and resiliency planning for communities hit by disaster. Jalloh serves as a strategic adviser for SUDU, an organization that aims to provide quality homes and educations to orphans in Sierra Leone.

Mucktarr Raschid is a civil rights activist and an intern with Professors Without Borders. Raschid is a founding member of the Movement for Social Progress, a grassroots Pan African movement in Sierra Leone. He holds a BA General History & Sociology and BA of Laws (Hons).

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