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SUCCESS STORY

Ebola Survivor Protects His Community

USAID-supported social mobilization efforts have reached at least 2.2 million people across Guinea with critical Ebola-related messages



Courtesy of USAID/OFDA

Together with a fellow Ebola survivor (left) and a local community agent (right), Mohamed Cissé (center) stands in the doorway of the treatment unit where he recovered from Ebola.

"I saw friends and colleagues die of Ebola in the treatment unit. This still motivates me to warn my neighbors and other community members [about the disease] and to help them in taking preventive action."

- Ebola survivor Mohamed Issa Cissé

In March 2014, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed an Ebola outbreak in Guinea, later traced to a two-year old boy who succumbed to the disease in December 2013. For many families throughout the country, the virus—and its means of transmission—remained a mystery.

As part of a comprehensive response to the Ebola outbreak, USAID supported 14 partners in Guinea to launch social mobilization campaigns, raising communities' awareness of Ebola, its symptoms, and methods to prevent the disease's spread. Among these activities, USAID partner the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is training community-based committees to conduct outreach campaigns, reaching approximately 4,000 people with messages on disease surveillance, safe hygiene, and infectious disease prevention methods.

Mohamed Cissé, a health practitioner in northwestern Guinea's Téli-mélé Prefecture, discovered he was Ebola-positive after a colleague at a local health center fell ill with the disease in May 2014. Mohamed, who had entered precautionary observation after his coworker's diagnosis, was quickly transferred to an Ebola treatment unit (ETU) in Téli-mélé. After three weeks of treatment, ETU staff discharged Mohamed as a survivor.

Now, DRC is engaging Mohamed to use his experience as a survivor to strengthen the impact of Ebola-related community outreach. As president of the Téli-mélé association of Ebola survivors, Mohamed works with DRC to involve households in Téli-mélé in ongoing efforts to prevent future Ebola outbreaks.

"Through my knowledge of the local communities and their attitudes towards health services and Ebola, [as well as] my own experience with the disease.... I lend a hand to DRC to raise awareness and prevent new outbreaks," Mohamed explains.

Collectively, USAID partners have supported social mobilizers like Mohamed to reach at least 2.2 million people across Guinea, ensuring that local communities have the knowledge to both prevent and quickly respond to future outbreaks of Ebola and other infectious diseases.