Protecting the Living, Honouring the Dead

The barriers and enablers to community acceptance and implementation of safe burials

Caroline Iliffe, Emergency Programme Officer, WVUK

Teddy Morlai, Independent Consultant
Background

- Spread of Ebola at funerals
- SMART consortium took on management November 14
- Aim of research: assess the barriers and enablers to community acceptance and implementation of safe burials in Sierra Leone
Barriers

- Use of black body bags and chlorine
- Unethical treatment of corpses

Joseph Komeh who lost his wife and two children:

“My wife was everything to me. I expected to see that her corpse was washed and the body wrapped in clean white cloths. But the burial team opposed this, and even drove us from the view of the corpses, only to see them later dragging three black bags on the ground towards the pick-up van. The process was so sorrowful and frightening. Anyone that sees this would not encourage the Burial Teams to handle the remains of their loved ones. I really hate that black bag!”
• Lack of customary & religious rites
  Exclusion of bereaved families
  Violation of customary and religious rituals
Underlying factors

- Poorly coordinated structures slowed down the response
- Weak capacity support and monitoring systems
- Failure to meet basic needs of Burial Teams
Enablers

- Inclusion of customary and religious rites

“Before this time those burial people were not polite. They used inflammatory languages against bereaved families and the corpse; and they handled the corpse in a dehumanising manner. However, we saw them as changed people when we were bereaved in July 2015. They were very polite; they asked us to provide cloth for the corpse, dig the grave and involved a religious leader to pray. There was no change to what we used to do before Ebola, except for the use of the body bag. We really appreciate their method this time.”

Bereaved family member, Kamadu New Site, Kono District
• Recognition of faith leaders & women
Adressing underlying factors

- Command centres established in each district
- Increased capacity of staff & resources
- Met basic needs of Burial Teams
Gaps

- Sustainability of District Health Management Team activities
- Lack of effective reintegration modalities for Burial workers
Recommendations

1. Deeper engagement and involvement of communities is critical to ensuring behaviour change.

2. Faith-based alliances should be utilised for building community trust.

3. Greater consideration should be given to gender aspects of public health emergencies.

4. Ensure effective capacity building of health personnel, such as burial workers.

5. Ensure adequate support of health personnel.

6. Burial and other health workers should be provided with coping mechanisms for community reintegration.