



Bernadette Thomas, Bonthe district



Dauda Rogers, Bonthe District

What a photovoice project with Community Health Workers in Sierra Leone teaches us about health systems

**Rings**  
 Research in  
 Gender & Ethics

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 Consortium



Following the Ebola epidemic Sierra Leone is investing in a new cadre of Community Health Workers. A policy was launched in 2016 and 15,000 Community Health Workers have been selected, trained and deployed.

This collaborative project between the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) and the College of Medicine and Allied, Health Sciences (COMAHS) used photovoice to conduct research with seven Community Health Workers in two purposefully selected districts in Sierra Leone: Bonthe district (rural, hard to reach, riverine) and eight in Kenema district (rural). They took photos of their communities, and the work they do, to illustrate their experiences and the opportunities and challenges they face.



*“We did this photovoice study in Sierra Leone to better understand the experiences, challenges and opportunities Community Health Workers are facing through their own lens in two different districts in Sierra Leone. This is timely given the new policy and investment in this cadre.”*

**Dr. Haja Wurie, CHW Research Lead, REBUILD Sierra Leone, COMAHS**



*“We showed the Community Health Workers how to use the phone to capture photographs of their community and their work. They took some practice ones that we discussed and then they had a few months to take the pictures they wanted.”*

**Ayesha Idriss, Research Fellow, COMAHS**

*“The Community Health Workers came back together to present and discuss their photos, why they took them and what effect it had on their work. With facilitation they discussed them as a group and found joint solutions to many of the problems they faced.”*

**Abdulai Jawo Bah, Research Fellow, COMAHS**

## Context shapes the social determinants of health

There are many challenges in the environment that shape the social determinants of health. Community Health Workers understand these challenges as they are embedded in their contexts

➔ They are using this stream to launder, bathe and defecate in, after doing all these practices in the water, they will drink it. This is really not good for their health. Some people are really stubborn by saying that this is what our predecessors practised, so they are doing the same practices.



Cultural norms and stagnant water  
by Isata Sheriff

➔ This structure is a death trap. No one is living in the house but lots of people including children are living around there. In case that building falls on anyone it will lead to death. Even snakes can enter that building and bite children. This can lead to serious problems for us as health workers.



Dilapidated buildings bring risks: snakes and injuries  
by Dauda Rogers



Rubbish in the market area brings health risks by Jenneh Momoh

← This rubbish tip is by the market. When food falls on the ground, people don't bother to wash them and they sell them like that. People don't cover their food products and flies from the rubbish sit on them putting customers at risk of diseases.

→ Whenever there is high tide, the water enters the town, making it very dangerous for the community. What we need is a retaining wall to protect this community.



High tides are a flooding threat by Sebatu Lahai

# How Community Health Workers act and innovate to improve health

Community Health Workers can innovate and improvise to bring about positive change within their communities



Community Health Workers successfully bringing change in their community by Daniel Mustapha

← This is about our training, all that we learned I made it known to the chief and he in turn spread the message all over. We do regular cleaning up as soon as the grass grows.



Women's actions to prevent infections by Mamie Fadiru

← This is a photo of a table built with sticks that is used to drain dishes and bowls away from the floor instead of draining them closer to the floor to prevent germs that might lead to diseases. This is a good concept that I introduced in the community.

↓ This is a hand hygiene method that is still in practice in the community since the Ebola outbreak. If someone is passing in the street they can also come and wash their hands. It is not something that we should hide from the public.

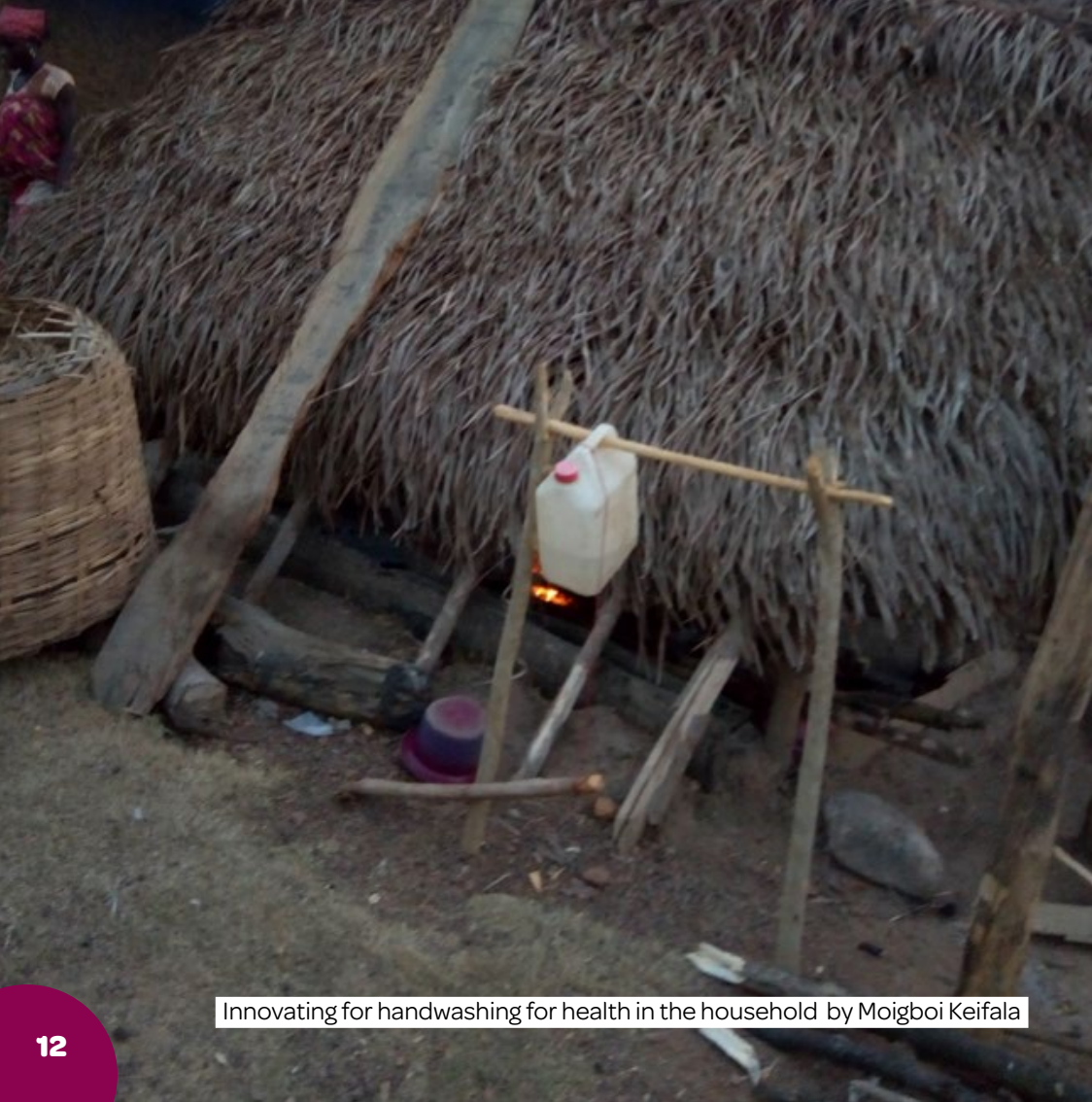


Hand washing station used by everyone by Bernadette Thomas

➔ This picture shows that after washing clothes, they should be hung on a line and not spread on the ground as people normally do.



Washing line for health by Margaret Kini



Innovating for handwashing for health in the household by Moigboi Keifala

← It's a hand wash basin. What we are saying is that it's an addition whether it's in the kitchen or the toilet or in both.

→ A decent toilet facility prevents diarrhoea related cases. Some communities need the government to help them with land to build toilet facilities for the communities.



Advocating for toilets in the community by Fatmata Bundu



## Community Health Workers link communities and the health system

Community Health Workers play a critical interface role linking the community with the health system. They require continued support and recognition

↓ We were handed over to our 'in-charge' and the people interviewed us on our roles and responsibilities towards the community people. We were all in our uniforms.



Community Health Worker uniforms: recognition and a source of pride by Bernadette Thomas

➔ This shows the limited amount of medications they supply us with. When it finishes we go for another supply and we are told that it is not yet time for a new supply, so I have to return empty handed.



Limited amounts of drugs by Dominic Brima

We work at night too: Let there be light by Mohammed Koroma



← When we complain, even if it doesn't light, they tell us "too bad it's your luck."



Listening to Community Health Workers' advice: A healthy newborn baby by Christianna Palmer

← I was monitoring the women in the community and she delivered in a health facility. As Community Health Workers we advise against delivering at home.

➔ Suckling mother showing a healthy baby and preventing the tendency of malnutrition setting in. This is in line with the recommendation of the six months exclusive breast feeding for babies.



Breast is best by Samuel Koroma

➔ It's good in our community to see sick patients coming in and this is being dealt with at the community level. Its serves as health promotion. Showing people that when you are sick, don't stay at home but go to the hospital and you will be cured.



Referral in action by Hawa Kamara

## What do stakeholders in Sierra Leone think of the photos?



*“Supporting Community Health Workers is really important – the photovoice project demonstrates the importance of working together.”*

Haillemariam Legesse, UNICEF, Sierra Leone

*“What I like about the photovoice project is that in itself it’s a motivation for Community Health Workers to show the work they do and to have this recognised and appreciated.”*

Elizabeth Musa, Principal  
Community Health Officer,  
Primary Health Care  
Directorate, Ministry of Health



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**For further information please contact:**

Dr Haja Wurie, College of Medicine and Applied Health Sciences, Sierra Leone  
[haja.wurie@usl.edu.sl](mailto:haja.wurie@usl.edu.sl)

Dr Joanna Raven, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK  
[Joanna.Raven@lstm.ac.uk](mailto:Joanna.Raven@lstm.ac.uk)

