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Placing Ebola survivor stories at the center of efforts to inform, protect, and spread hope  
 *December 2014*

1. **The Problem**

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa is one of the most complex and severe public health emergencies of our time. With some 20,000 cases and over 7,500 deaths reported to date, the epidemic has spread fear across affected nations and alarmed the world. The international community has responded with a multi-million dollar effort to control, prevent, and stop the spread of Ebola at its source. Yet despite this, the number of Ebola cases continues to rise each week and the virus has trickled beyond the borders of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, where the outbreak began.

In the countries hardest-hit by Ebola, uncertainty, misinformation, and lack of public trust in health systems and governments have aggravated the medical, social, and economic impacts of the outbreak. Many of those who have survived the virus are being stigmatized instead of embraced. Rumors abound; access to timely and reliable information remains uneven; and denial, fear, and panic continue to pose challenges to halting the epidemic – not only in West Africa, but around the world. In other words, Ebola is affecting us all, and we all need to step up to stop it.

1. **The Collaboration**

For 30 years, PCI Media Impact has harnessed the power of Entertainment-Education (E-E) to shift attitudes and behaviors in ways that improve – and often save – lives. They do this by capturing the attention of target audiences with entertaining media content that both communicates key messages on social issues and helps create a safe space in which communities can discuss sensitive topics.

The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, Vulcan Productions, and UNICEF also recognize the power of E-E to address social issues. So the three organizations have teamed up with PCI Media Impact to apply this methodology to tackling Ebola through the #ISurvivedEbola campaign.

1. **The Campaign**

Funded by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and Vulcan Productions, #ISurvivedEbola is being implemented by PCI Media Impact in collaboration with UNICEF. It isjust one part of Paul G. Allen’s broader #TackleEbola initiative, and is consistent with Allen’s overall efforts.

A multidimensional communications campaign, #ISurvivedEbola places Ebola survivor stories from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea at the center of national and international efforts to:

* Inform the West African general public about the virus and how they can protect themselves and their communities from it;
* Reduce stigmatization and promote reintegration of Ebola survivors; and
* Shift the international narrative around the Ebola outbreak away from fear and despair, toward resilience and hope, while vigorously addressing the remaining challenges.

To achieve these objectives, #ISurvivedEbola is:

* Inviting survivors from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea to share their stories of recovery with the world in video, audio, and print formats, and is disseminating these stories at the local, national, and international levels;
* Producing and broadcasting Ebola-focused radio dramas and call-in shows in the three most affected countries;
* Working with West African and international artists to produce and broadcast inspirational and educational songs and music videos about Ebola; and
* Creating and supporting mobile and online platforms that allow for interaction between survivors, campaign staff, and the world.

To encourage global engagement in the campaign, #ISurvivedEbola is asking every person reached by its activities to join the movement by following #ISurvivedEbola social media accounts, sharing #ISurvivedEbola productions, voicing their support online with the “#ISurvivedEbola” hashtag, and creating original multimedia pieces and artwork in support of the movement.

The result is an integrated campaign that delivers potentially life-saving information to those who need it most; humanizes the Ebola outbreak and its growing number of survivors; and spreads hope at the community level in West Africa all the way across the globe.

1. **The Projects**

**Ebola Survivor Stories**

The hallmark of the #ISurvivedEbola campaign is the use of Ebola survivor stories to promote protective behaviors in affected countries and reduce stigmatization of Ebola survivors. Our hope is that, by adding survivor testimonies to the mix of current Ebola outreach and education strategies, #ISurvivedEbola can complement the work of Governments, UN agencies and missions, and civil society and nongovernmental organizations working to raise awareness of key messages aimed at stopping the spread of the disease.

To do this, #ISurvivedEbola has invited over 30 survivors from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea to share their stories locally, nationally, and internationally in video, audio, and print formats. In an innovative and exciting twist, each survivor is also being provided a smartphone installed with a mobile app through which they can provide updates with the world on their lives post-recovery. *(See final section for more on the app.)*

The survivor testimonials have been captured by production teams in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, and are now being broadcast across multiple news, media, and online platforms in West Africa and beyond. To maximize the reach of these stories, the campaign is also investigating ways to distribute the materials in hard copy formats through the many trained mobilizers and health promoters canvassing major cities, small towns, and remote villages throughout the sub-region. These outreach workers are on the frontlines of the outbreak and, as such, their efforts to educate and shift behaviors are the key to stopping it.

#ISurvivedEbola hopes that by sharing survivor stories and empowering survivors to serve as role models for their communities, West Africans will be motivated to communicate about Ebola; to protect themselves and their families from the virus; and to support the reintegration of Ebola survivors and contacts.

**Ebola E-E Serial Radio Dramas and Call-in Shows**

Radio is the most effective means of mass communication in West Africa, where illiteracy is high and televisions are scarce. Recognizing this, #ISurvivedEbola is developing serial radio dramas in12 regional languages to be broadcast on 50 national and local radio stations across Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. These dramas accurately portray the current situations on the ground in the target country using fictional characters to whom the target audiences can relate.

Over the course of the drama series, characters face common challenges related to Ebola. Some overcome these challenges to successfully protect themselves, their families, and their communities from the virus, while others go against the advice of health authorities and face negative consequences. Key messages on Ebola are being woven into intriguing storylines that not only catch, but also hold the attention of the target audience, sparking interpersonal dialogues.

Each drama episode is being followed by an interactive radio call-in show during which the host encourages listeners to share their opinions and thoughts about the drama. To further reinforce key messages, the call-in shows are carrying pre-packaged materials, including audio clips from the survivor stories; featuring interviews with experts on Ebola, survivors, and key opinion leaders; and providing additional information and resources to listeners.

To ensure the success of the call-in shows, radio hosts are being trained to facilitate each discussion; equipped with discussion guides to assist them; and provided with additional information on Ebola prevention and response. The primary aim of the call-in shows is to help audiences incorporate critical information about Ebola into their daily lives by reinforcing the radio dramas and facilitating direct dialogue with informed hosts and guests. Such dialogue is critical to Ebola education, as the virus is complex and people often have many questions, but lack access to those who can provide technically sound answers.

To complement the Ebola serial dramas, PCI Media Impact is also mainstreaming Ebola messaging into its existing radio drama projects in West Africa. Specifically, the organization is inserting Ebola messaging into dramas developed under STEWARD, a three-year, USAID and US Forest Service-supported environmental communications campaign being implemented by PCI Media Impact in Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea.

**Music to #TackleEbola**

Music is an integral part of everyday life in West Africa. In Liberia, traditional drumming, Gospel hymns, and pop songs by local “HipCo” artists complete the music landscape. Recognizing the power and popularity of music in this region, #ISurvivedEbola is developing songs and music videos that reinforce key messages about the virus. These products will feature West African artists popular in the sub-region, thereby maximizing their resonance and impact. International artists are also being approached to develop songs and music videos that communicate solidarity with West Africa.

Both PCI Media Impact and UNICEF are experienced in producing E-E songs and music videos in Liberia, and are building upon this to #TackleEbola throughout the sub-region.

**Online Campaigning and Survivor MobileApp**

#ISurvivedEbola has launched a series of online and social media platforms that aim to build a truly global movement in support of Ebola recovery and survival. These platforms include a website ([www.isurvivedebola.org](http://www.isurvivedebola.org)), Facebook page ([Facebook.com/ISurvivedEbola.org)](http://www.facebook.com/ISurvivedEbola.org)), Twitter account (@SurvivedEbola), and Instagram account (@isurvivedebola). The website will feature the most cutting-edge component of the campaign: the survivor mobile app. This app has been installed on smartphones, which were donated to #ISurvivedEbola by our friends at GlobalGiving, and whicha re being handed out to survivors by our campaign managers in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. By the first week of January, survivors will be submitting updates to the campaign through the app, which will be shared with the #ISurvivedEbola online community.



**#ISurvivedEbola is poised to make a dramatic difference in the public health communications effort in West Africa. For the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, Vulcan Productions, UNICEF and PCI Media Impact, this is a historic opportunity to demonstrate what evaluators have repeatedly confirmed: that Entertainment-Education can save lives. Join us in supporting the #TackleEbola initiative through the #ISurvivedEbola program...and follow these efforts online at Tackleebola.com and Facebook.com/ISurvivedEbola.org!**