

In Times of Adversity

The Western African Ebola virus epidemic (2013–2016) was the most widespread outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in history. Worldwide, 28,646 people were infected and 11,323 died.

In 2011, Eileen and I were transferred from northern Alberta, Canada to Lagos, Nigeria where I took up the posting of Audit Division Manager for my employer's African operations. Life was very different in a city with over 20 million people, most facing hardships that were unimaginable (e.g. no running water, sanitation or proper drainage) and foreign to us. We lived in a gated compound with armed security, together with over 40 other expatriate families, in what was deemed as the safest part of town. To get from the airport to our compound (~25Km) we travelled in an armed convoy (led and chase configuration) with the trip taking from 1.5 hours to sometimes more than 3 hours, no toilet breaks allowed. Daily we would average around 10 power outages of varying lengths and internet was very intermittent.



Each family had a company vehicle and an experienced driver (by the way, our driver who lived a fair way away only had power for about 2 hours daily, generally from midnight to 2 or 3 am). Daniel was a beautiful big man, a definite advantage in our new environment, he was our rock. While living just under a kilometre from my office, I had to be driven along the potholed dirt road (wasn't allowed to walk) that could take up to an hour depending on the time of day. I'm thinking you are now getting the picture, life was not always a bowl of roses.

On 20th July 2014, a Liberian man with Ebola virus arrived by plane to Lagos. He died 5 days later. His arrival set off a chain that infected 19 people of whom 7 died. Given the difficult environment, everyone (including us) was very frightened. Here we had a crisis in a place where nothing, except crime, really worked effectively from the Government down. However, amazingly this fear seemed to pull everyone together.

The Government, working in close liaison with the big companies, mine included, quickly introduced very strict measures, controls and curfews. The people fell into line and I believe a huge disaster was averted. Ebola has an incubation period of up to 21 days. Nigeria would be declared Ebola free if there were no new cases identified for a period of 42 days. This occurred on 20th October 2014, we left on 14th September 2014 for my next posting based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Life in Lagos was a roller coaster, lot of highs and lot of lows, but most of the locals we encountered were beautiful, kind people. How blessed we were to have had this experience. One of the greatest gifts from this is that we can now better appreciate many things we previously took for granted. Given our adventures, the following pointers may assist you as we face our current challenge or rather opportunity.

Key Take-aways

- ***Fear is natural but don't panic***, it increases stress and clouds rational thinking. Accept this, think of a silver lining and move forward.
- ***Heed the advice of Regulatory Authorities***. They know better than us (although some soothsayers out there may argue this point) and they will be the ones with the best grasp of the bigger picture. They will coordinate and implement the necessary policy, steps, assistance and restrictions to get us through.
- ***The crisis will pass***. No one knows how long it will take and forecasts of up to 6 months are stressful and frightening. Break up your time by segmenting it into manageable lengths, this may vary from person to person, but as a suggestion 2 weeks may be a good choice as this aligns with the current self-isolation guideline.
- ***Plan your time***. Think of pleasant and enjoyable activities or distractions and use these as a reward for the doing those tasks you deem as boring. You have plenty of time so don't squeeze too much in daily, give yourself enough time, there is always tomorrow.
- ***Communication is paramount***. As physical movement may become increasingly restricted, make use of the phone and internet. Keep close contact with family, friends and even some of your U3A members. Conversation with others can work wonders as sometimes our mind can play silly little tricks on us and we just need to be reminded we are all in the same boat and together we can conquer anything.
- ***Choose your News Media exposure wisely***. Try and avoid too much focus on items dwelling on sensationalism and emotional commentary, it is quite often only relevant to a very small microcosm and more aimed at boosting viewer ratings rather than disseminating a balanced assessment.
- ***An Opportunity to better appreciate life***. We live in a wonderful world and can take a lot of things for granted. Use this period to reflect on how going forward we may become a little more tolerant and appreciative of what we have.
- ***Don't forget to Exercise***. Outside if possible, even if is only walking around the perimeter of your home or sitting in your favour chair and moving your legs and arms. It's both physically and mentally rewarding. If you can enjoy our beautiful environment while working out, then even better.
- ***Don't place all your eggs (options) in the "electronic" basket***. "Spread your risk and have diversity in your option portfolio (metaphorically speaking)". If the internet slows or goes down for a time have some non-electronic options to pursue.