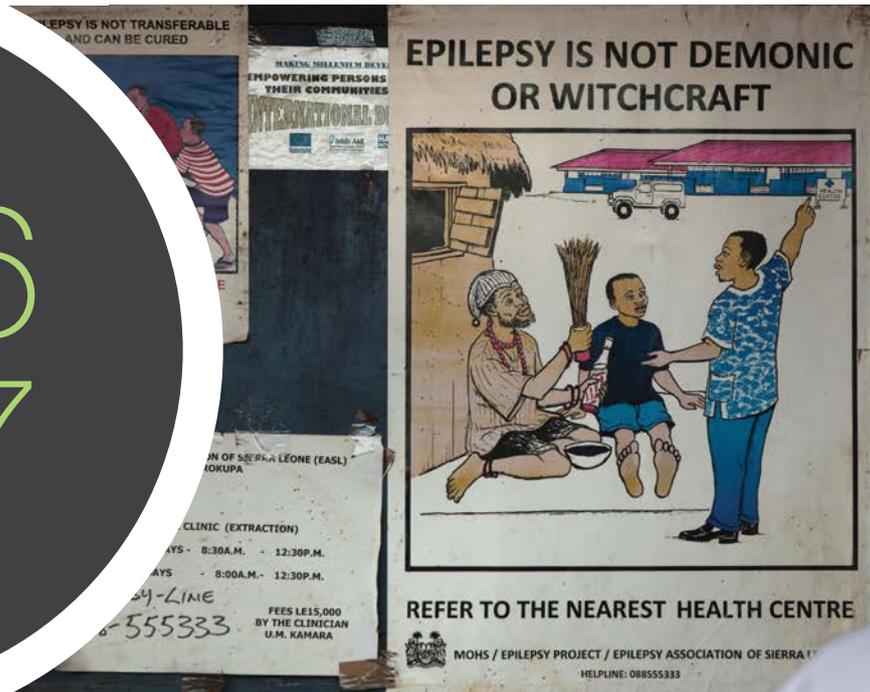


2016  
2017



# ANNUAL REPORT

## MEDICAL ASSISTANCE SIERRA LEONE

supporting access to health care and  
urgent medical treatment for communities  
and individuals in Sierra Leone.



Medical Assistance  
Sierra Leone

Action on maternal & child health and specialist care

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2016 – 2017

**Medical Assistance Sierra Leone supports access to health care and urgent medical treatment for communities and individuals in Sierra Leone.**

**The organisation works with others to raise awareness of the key health and development issues facing communities in Sierra Leone – and to generate interest and support in meeting the health needs of the country.**

**Working with local partners in the government health service and with a range of local NGOs, Medical Assistance Sierra Leone supports training for health workers, awareness-raising around health issues, and provides a range of medication and equipment to under-resourced services.**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

**Sierra Leone remains one of the poorest countries in the world and life expectancy in 2016 was the worst globally at 50.8 years for women and 49.3 years for men.**

Those with rare and complex conditions face little prospect of getting treatment in Sierra Leone. Working with Consultant Neurologist Dr Lisk at Connaught Hospital and the Epilepsy Association of Sierra Leone, we have now established 22 epilepsy clinics in the country and trained over 2,000 health workers. We have 5,000 patients on treatment programmes, but there is still an estimated 95% epilepsy treatment gap in Sierra Leone. Uncontrolled epilepsy directly affects health and social and economic capacity and negatively impacts families and communities in poverty.

The main focus of our work continues to be on increasing the numbers of people accessing epilepsy treatment. The report below details MASL activities from October 2016 to September 2017.

### 2. KEY ACTIVITIES

#### 2.1 Reaching People with Epilepsy in Sierra Leone

The team marked International Epilepsy Day in February with a Town Hall meeting in Freetown, attended by the Deputy Minister of Health Hon. Madina Rahman. Over 150 people attended this lively session which included testimonies from people with epilepsy and information about the services available.

A major awareness-raising and training initiative aimed at bringing more people forward for epilepsy treatment began this year with support from Pro-Victimis Foundation. Led

by the Epilepsy Association and with technical assistance provided by Dr Lisk, the project will establish three Centres across the country - one in the capital, Freetown, one in Kabala in the far north of the country and one in Bo in the south of the country. In the image (right) the Centres are shown as green triangles and the 22 clinics as red triangles.

Three Epilepsy Support Workers (ESWs) will be based at each Centre, delivering a comprehensive programme of outreach work – collaborating with health clinics, schools, places of worship and with community leaders. This model will create a more supportive and professional environment for delivery, with the team working together to deliver the programme of activities and meet targets, supported by adequate IT and communication equipment and access to transport in the form of a motorbike.

Dr Virginia George talks about her work supporting pregnant women with epilepsy





Corresponding awareness-raising amongst the public through newspapers, radio and TV adverts and campaigns will improve the quality of life for people with epilepsy by challenging misunderstandings about the condition and promoting the rights of those affected.

ensure that health workers are supported in their delivery of best practice in epilepsy treatment and diagnosis. The project work funded by Pro-Victimis Foundation includes training at 12 centres across the country, reaching over 600 health workers. In addition the clinic will also be facilitating epilepsy training as a module within nursing education and within the formal training of medical doctors.

## 2.2 Building Clinical Epilepsy Capacity

The health worker capacity-building project taking place through the Clinical Epilepsy Hub, under the leadership of Consultant Neurologist Dr Lisk, continued its work this year with a small grant from the Tropical Health & Education Trust. Dr Lisk and the clinical team delivered a training programme for the newly qualified Mental Health Nurses - the first such nurses in Sierra Leone and a Ministry of Health initiative.

Ongoing training is essential to ensure that new staff receive detailed epilepsy training and that other staff have refresher training, with the opportunity to share concerns, challenges and to clarify their understanding of epilepsy.

We are committed to continuing all aspects of epilepsy training to

Sharing best practice with peers and colleagues working on epilepsy in Africa is immensely valuable. The THET grant supported Dr Lisk and Dr Moses to present the findings of the country's first epilepsy prevalence survey at the 3rd African Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a co-morbidity with many other disabling conditions, such as cerebral palsy, Down's Syndrome and autism (around 25% of the latter also have epilepsy). However this reality is not currently reflected in the patients coming to clinic. As is the case in many countries, disabled children and adults in Sierra Leone are often living difficult lives, denied education, support and acceptance, and often prevented from participating in family and community life. In resource-poor settings in particular, the lack of opportunities for support and education, accompanied by the profound and isolating stigma that can accompany disability, can put individuals and families in intolerable and often dangerous situations. One of the roles of the ESWs will be to proactively identify disabled people in the community who also have epilepsy and help them to access the local clinics.

Dr Jalloh at the offices of the Epilepsy Association of Sierra Leone





Tina Senesie visiting rural communities as part of her MCH training.

Our sincere thanks to everyone who has supported our work this year.

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Congress in Dakar, Senegal in May 2017. The paper 'Prevalence of Active Convulsive Epilepsy in Bombali District Sierra Leone' highlighted that stigma continues to prevent identification, treatment and management of the condition.

### 2.3 Support to Rural Clinics and Urgent Surgeries

We continue to support selected Maternal Child Health aides (MCH) in rural posts with equipment and essential supplies. We responded to requests for support for medical treatment over the year including hospital fees for hernia operations, treatment for glaucoma and medication costs for malaria and other diseases.

We are supporting the fees of a trainee Maternal Child Health Aide and are

supporting another female student in her BSc in Public Health at Njala University College.

### 3 FUNDRAISING

Thank you to those people and companies who have supported us during this year.

Over 5,000 people rely on the epilepsy medication that we purchase and ship to Sierra Leone. We do not have a grant for these costs and the funds are generated from individual donations, cake sales and through other creative methods. Dr Lisk and the team distribute the medication purchased in the UK on a minimal cost-recovery basis (around £1 a month, regardless of the number or type of drugs required). Children and pregnant women and those with no financial capacity (assessed by discussions

with EASL staff) receive the drugs free of charge. We offer five different types of medication as the symptoms of epilepsy can vary greatly and people respond differently to medication.

We would be very grateful for donations to support this essential expenditure.

We continue to apply to Trusts and Foundations for ongoing project support and as usual we will be having a programme of events over the coming year to generate funds.

We would love to hear from anyone who would like to run a marathon, hold a cake sale or organise a fundraising event for Medical Assistance Sierra Leone. We can help with publicity, materials and other support required.



Medical Assistance  
Sierra Leone

*Action on maternal & child health and specialist care*

Registered Charity Number: 1105330

Tom Bradley Photography; Timur Bekir/THET 2013