

Extra Life: A Short History of Living Longer
Episode 4 - Human Behavior
Lessons and the Future



In the fourth episode of *Extra Life*, science author Steven Johnson and historian David Olusoga discuss the role that human behavior has played in extending human life spans across the globe.

Warm-up:

1. What steps do you take every day to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases? Which steps are easy for you, and which are more difficult? Why?
2. What are the ways that your community has worked together to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases?
3. In this lesson, you will explore ways that people worked together in West Africa to prevent the spread of the Ebola virus in 2014 and 2015. Discuss:
 - What is Ebola?
 - What have you heard about Ebola in the news?
 - What do you think led to the end of the Ebola crisis?

Key Vocabulary:

Ebola

For more curricular materials connected to *Extra Life* and "The Living Century" by Steven Johnson, visit www.pulitzercenter.org/extralife

Personal protective equipment (PPE)
World Health Organization

Introducing the Video Clip: [Extra Life | Episode 4: Lessons and the Future](#)

[In this video clip](#), historian David Olusoga speaks with OB Sisay, former director of Sierra Leone’s Ebola Response Centre, about the ways that Sisay worked with communities throughout the country to prevent the spread of Ebola in 2014. Sierra Leone was declared free of Ebola by the World Health Organization (WHO) in November 2015.

[According to the WHO](#), “Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a rare but severe, often fatal illness in humans.” Ebola spread rapidly among three countries in West Africa from March 2014-April 2016. The disease also spread to several other countries throughout the world.

[According to the Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), “Over two years, a total of 28,616 cases of EVD and 11,310 deaths were reported in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. An additional 36 cases and 15 deaths occurred when the outbreak spread outside these three countries.”

As they analyze the ways that Sierra Leone decentralized power and engaged communities to prevent the spread of Ebola, Olusoga and Sisay also discuss what can be learned from the ways that West Africa worked to eradicate Ebola as the world continues to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

Watch the clip (7 minutes and 48 seconds) and answer the comprehension questions below.

Comprehension Questions:

Why does OB Sisay, former director of Sierra Leone’s Ebola Response Centre, refer to the Ebola crisis as “a war”?	
In what ways did Sisay engage the public in Sierra Leone to combat Ebola? Why?	
How did Sisay engage traditional healers to combat the spread of Ebola, and why?	

How long did it take for Sierra Leone to be declared Ebola free?	
According to Sisay, how has Sierra Leone employed practices they learned while dealing with Ebola to the COVID-19 pandemic?	

Discussion Questions:

1. What does historian David Olusoga mean when he says, “Ebola was defeated by Africans in Africa”? In what ways did the public help prevent the spread of Ebola in Sierra Leone? What connections do you see between practices employed during the Ebola crisis and the way that your community has navigated the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What does Sisay mean when he says, “If the world had learned its lessons from Ebola, we would have managed COVID very very well”? In times of crisis in your community, whose voices are heard and whose voices are not heard? Why?
3. What other medical innovations do you think should be more celebrated, and why? What could be the impact of increasingly acknowledging the practices and innovations that have saved lives worldwide?

Extension Activity:
Create a tribute to a medical innovation.

Johnson closes the episode by wondering how global health could be impacted by increased teaching about the medical innovations that have saved lives. What are some of the practices and innovations that are currently saving lives in your community? Create a presentation, visual art piece, or other creative work that pays tribute to one of those innovations or practices.