KADIATU

**Kadiatu, 18
Sierra Leone**

Photo: Ben White/UK Creative (for Save the Children)

Sierra Leone is one of the world's poorest countries. At the end of August 2020, it had reported almost 2,000 cases of COVID-19 and 70 deaths. This may appear low, but the risk of the pandemic spreading rapidly in a country with a weak health system is great. Therefore, at the end of March 2020 Sierra Leone introduced a state of emergency and closed its schools. Schools remained closed at the end of July 2020.

Kadiatu, 18, lives in a community of makeshift homes built with mud and corrugated metal sheets. During the Ebola Virus outbreak in Sierra Leone between 2014- 2016, she became pregnant, aged just 13, with a boy from a better off family. Kadiatu dropped out of school and only recently returned to class before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. She says:

❝ I was going to school until form three. I was 13 years of age when I fell pregnant during Ebola. My family and I were desperate. We hardly had enough money for food. I even got blurred vision from the hunger. When I asked my mother for food, she would tell me that I'm a big girl, I am thirteen years of age, so I should find ways of bringing in money to feed the family. A lot of parents are still doing this in this community

Some girls are going through the same thing (during the COVID-19 pandemic). There is no food. Girls need money. What they do not get at home they will likely get from the 'big man' on a corner. For those coming up now, they should not make the same mistakes we made. And the parents who allowed us to make these mistakes, we need to tell them to stop it. I was lucky to give birth safely at such a young age. I worry for some of these children because they might not be so lucky.

When I go to school (before COVID-19), they give me lunch to eat. When I strain for anything, I tell them and they are able to provide it for me. **❞**