

F1 Guy Saidi-Bilungi Namufakage

Speaker1: On the morning of March 3, 2019, I woke up in my apartment in Butembo with one of those weird hunches. I feel elsewhere. It's like something's not going my way. You know, but I have a very reluctant population to convince to get vaccinated against Ebola. And important planning meetings to be held. I take this mission to heart. That morning, my inner self said to me, "Okay, Guy, you have to go, you can do it. Go!" And so in my Toyota Prado jeep, I drive to the Ebola response emergency operations center in Butembo, North Kivu province. On my way there, I think to myself, "I may not be at my best, but I'm not going to miss out on indulging myself anyway." So I rush to the hypermarkets: I buy grape fruit. Once in the center, I take a seat at my work table and begin to enjoy one of my favorite fruits. And then, for the first time, I notice. "Oh! A metallic taste." Now I'm thinking that something unexpected might happen to me. And then I start to have a series of questions deep inside me. "...] O Lord, what is happening to me today? I'm thinking, is this in my head or what? Well, I don't know."

And then I say to myself Guy, "you have to pull yourself together. Don't you think you're overdoing it today? Don't you have a life-saving mission to accomplish these days?" Okay, I have to get out of this. I need to activate my inner comfort reset button. So I head to the meeting room to plan my outreach and vaccination activity in the Vuhovi health zone. Vuhovi is one of the health zones subject to insecurity in the province of North Kivu, but also with a strong circulation of the Mai-Mai armed group. On the road to Vuhovi, just at the Bashu chiefdom, the customary chief of this community stopped me and said, "Doctor, welcome to our chiefdom. Then he said to me, "As you can see, they are here. Bastion of the Mai-Mai armed group. You owe it to yourself to be careful, although the security situation is quiet these days." "Boom," I say to myself, "be prudent?". Does he mean he's warning me that the security situation can change at any time or what? Then I think to myself, "Hey Guy, you're overdoing it today. He just said you have to be careful." Okay, I continue on my way from Issonga. When I approach Issonga, all along my route, the children of these villages keep chanting "Ebola haiko, Ebola, ni bongo" to say Ebola did not exist, Ebola is a false story. I tell myself Guy, kids, is having fun messing with you, as always.

I arrive at Issonga center, the place where the vaccination against Ebola virus disease is to take place. I [...] with the attending nurse, Mr. Kakoule of the Issonga health area. He

said, "Doctor, welcome to our home. The security situation is calm today. With Kakoulé, I take the option of presenting my greetings to the village chief while the vaccination team begins to set up the tents for the vaccination. The lead immunization doctor says to me, "Doctor, are you going to be okay?" And I'm like, "What kind of question is that?" This guy has a suspicion about jeopardizing my mission in Issonga. Then my inner voice said to me: "But finally, Guy, what is going on with you today? Why do you interpret everything negatively today? Well, I said to myself, let's go ahead. And I said to the doctor in charge of the vaccination team: "Everything is going well doctor, start vaccinating those who are ready. I then head to Kakoulé, together we go to present my pleasantries to the chief of Issonga village. Kakoulé introduces me to the village chief: "Chief, he comes with a vaccination team to vaccinate our population. And the village chief replies: "Oh! Welcome doctor." Pleasantly surprised, I said in an inner voice, "I have the chief's blessing, everything will go well." And as if to confirm my thoughts in a low voice, the chief of Issonga village said, "Doctor, you have my full blessing to carry out this vaccination activity. Rest assured, I'll come by and deliver my message tomorrow."

Very relieved, I joined the vaccination team with Kakoulé. As I walk towards the [...], From the vaccination, I see young people with AK47 kalashnikovs. "What is it now?" I ask Kakoulé. He says to me, "Doctor, these are the kids from the Mai Mai armed group." And I'm like, "I knew it." What are we doing? He said, "Doctor, these kids are dangerous. I don't know what to tell you. "Bah, I tell him, I have a strong responsibility to protect my team. So I'm going to advance to the vaccination rings to talk with these young people." "And doctor," retorted Kakoulé, "be careful with these young people, they are ruthless." I said, "My dear, I will try to be careful, but it will be easy if you come with me." In short, although not convinced, Kakoulé agreed to come with me. Together, we headed to the vaccination rings. As we approached the ring, one of the young Maï-Maï saw Kakoulé and said "Who is this man? Kakoulé, stunned by the fear of being killed, answers: "Chief! He is a colleague who is coming to help us fight the Ebola virus disease." This young Mai-Mai says, "Have they bribed you too?" With an inner anger that I cannot show from the outside, for fear of being lynched, I watch as these youths who are not my size and age verbally terrorize Kakoulé. I'm like "okay, they're only five strong and only have two weapons, we can overpower them."

Speaker1: Then my insider says "Guy, didn't you take a safety course?" He continues "Guy, don't be a hero. You'll get your team killed. And you'll never forgive yourself." My inner self adds, "Guy, you're pretty good at negotiating. In addition, you speak the local language, Kiswahili. They are young like you. This is a major asset for you. I'm like, "Guy, it's now or never, you can save your team and convince these young people to let it go on with the vaccination of the population." Meanwhile, I look at my very tetchy vaccination colleagues. They are of different nationalities and some of them don't even speak French. I said Lord, I am counting on you to get me out of this situation. And I said: [Kiswahili] to say "Chief, I am your little brother. And my goal is to discuss with you why I came with my colleague from the vaccination. Phew, I said my piece. [...] either save us or get us killed. And like a stroke of fate, this young Mai-Mai with a stern face says to me: "you are one of us I see. And so I answer: "yes chief, I am a child of Kivu, that is why it bothers me to see my brothers and sisters [...] of the Ebola virus disease while we can avoid this carnage by vaccination.

He says "Doctor, have they already corrupted you too?" I answer "no chief, I cannot in any way betray my brothers and sisters." And he was "Ok, I see." Then I said "chief, is it possible to give me five minutes to explain how we operate?" A little surprised, against all odds, he said, "Okay." A few meters from the vaccination ring is a small bistro. I said, "Chief, can we sit next to you?" "Yes, doctor, let's go." I'm like, "Okay, Guy use your negotiation skills." With the young Mai-Mai we chat over the local drink Kasix, a drink I had never had but had to have to make the conversation friendly. And like many men over a beer, the reluctance starts to go away. And we suddenly make a connection. I'm like, "Okay, Guy, you've got a free hand to convince these young Mai Mai to let your team vaccinate the population." And I said, "Brothers, I've just done over four months in the response to this Ebola virus disease. So I can assure you that I have seen how Ebola can decimate an entire community." And they're surprised: "Really? Are you sure?" "Obviously yes, brothers." I take my time to explain to them how the Ebola outbreak began in Issonga by going into the smallest time frame, based on the chains of transmission of this disease, in this health area . I explain from the first case to 20^e how the disease was transmitted. With an air of conviction they tell me, "You at least explained it well and we understand that this disease is real." I'm like, "Guy, see, I always told you to trust yourself. Are they not convinced?" With a voice that overflows from within me, I said: "That is why, as your brother, I am fighting to bring you this vaccination team in order to save the maximum of the population and stop the spread of

the disease. With a guilty look on their faces they said, "But doctor, how can we help you to carry out your vaccination activities properly? And I answer: "My brothers, start by getting vaccinated and sensitize those who are still reluctant to be vaccinated. Like a gospel word, they tell me without hesitation, "Doctor, let's go! You can count on us from today on." My friend lodged in me, I mean my inner self, says to me, "Guy, it is better to ,make them aware of the side effects." So I say, "before you get vaccinated, brothers. Vaccines, like all medications has side effects and so some people may or may not develop them." I unroll the list of side effects, and one of them says, "I really appreciate your candor. Let's go, we'll be fine."

It is 11:30 a.m. when I head towards the vaccination ring with these young Maï-Maï whom I have been calling my brothers for a few minutes, smiling. My vaccination team, who were holding their breath and certainly praying for me that everything would go well, understood that these young people were convinced. And it is under clamors that everyone welcomes us to the vaccination ring. With an air of relief, I witnessed the vaccination of these five young Maï-Maï. My inner self says to me: "Guy, you see how life can turn upside down in a good way, in a bad way. Today, despite all the difficulties you've faced, life has finally smiled on you." And I'm like, "Yes, my friend. A crazy day." While I am talking with a colleague, the five young Mai-Mai say to me: "Doctor, as promised, we are going to help you to sensitize the population and the craze will be total. And they tell me: "Just make sure that you have a sufficient quantity of vaccines to contain this influx around the vaccination that you are now going to have hahaha." So the population flocks to the rings in your situation. And for the first time, these days, we manage to vaccinate 373 people with the total satisfaction of the team and the local community. And as this was not enough to end this day in beauty, we even list 255 people who want to be vaccinated the following days.

Speaker1: So it took me that day to understand how life hangs by a thread. And the strength of a conversation based on the truth although thrilling, this day had very positive moments with the vaccination of the young Mai-Mai and their commitment in raising awareness of the population. And I'm like, "Okay, that was so uplifting and terrifying. How can five young people, only two of whom are armed and full of false information about the Ebola virus disease, take an entire community hostage and put their lives in danger?" I still wonder what would have happened if I hadn't been able to convince those young Mai-Mai. And through this experience, I understood how

misinformation can doom the destiny of a community and especially the importance of good communication to ensure that the population has the right information in order to manage the abundance of information, good or bad, that circulates in this community. I understood above all that I must be in perfect communion with my inner self. And what is the antidote to this? I have this friend deep inside of me, very intelligent, patient and just plain awesome, who is there for me, who shows me and is willing to unconditionally give his resources and time to be with me when I need it . I may have had an exciting day, but my communion with my inner self has never been stronger.