

INTRODUCTION



On 14 January, a woman helps a young boy wash his hands in disinfecting chlorine solution at their home in Conakry, the capital of Guinea. Photo: UNMEER/Martine Perret

INTRODUCTION: At the end of 2014, the number of people being infected each week with Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone was still more than 300. That number plateaued at around 100–150 for several weeks in early 2015 before decreasing. By the end of April 2015, less than 30 people were reported as infected each week—the lowest number since May last year. It is expected that—if efforts are focused, sustained, aligned and effective - the outbreak will end in 2015.

PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE OF THE RESPONSE: People in the affected countries are at the centre of efforts to contain and mitigate the outbreak. They have been supported by their social organizations, faith-based groups, local and national governments, and then by hundreds of individuals and organizations from elsewhere. Once people who were exposed to Ebola became convinced that if they behaved differently, they could mitigate the consequences of the disease, they started to make their lives safer by changing the way they live. The report explores how these changes happened and shows the importance of ensuring that all the required elements of the response are brought together in the right sequence to support communities in fighting the virus.

STRONG PROGRESS TO DATE: Progress has been remarkable and impressive results have been achieved so far—not only in terms of fewer people being infected, but also in terms of behavioural change, bed supply in treatment centres, and burial provision. Communities have engaged and the many contributors have worked together in an exemplary way.

MANY REMARKABLE CONTRIBUTORS: Behind the results is a remarkable story of individual and joint endeavour. The primary responders have come from within communities, supported by national healthcare workers. The Governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone coordinated the response, through the strong leadership of their Presidents, and the senior officials they appointed to key positions. They have been assisted by technical experts, funds and logistical support from the international community. People have recognized the urgency of tackling Ebola, and are setting aside traditional divides so as to work together with one aim: to stop the outbreak.

PROFOUND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT: This Ebola outbreak has been large, complex and long-lasting. The broader effects of Ebola—beyond its impact on people’s health—have been dramatic, with substantial economic and social damage that impacts more than 20 million people in the region. Continued efforts are needed to ensure that societies can combat further outbreaks and that life in the affected countries not only returns to normal but also is better than before.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY COME TOGETHER: As the multiple efforts required for recovery become apparent, it is clear that response and recovery should reinforce each other and must be pursued in tandem. Flexible donor funding, accelerated research and development efforts will continue to be valuable as we seek to accelerate recovery. For now, achieving zero transmission and ending the outbreak, while ensuring that people have access to essential services that are safe, remains the top priority.

ANALYSIS TO BETTER PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE: The Secretary-General appointed a High-level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises on 2 April 2015. Several other efforts are underway to analyse action and identify possible lessons that can be applied in preparation for (and response to) future crises. These analyses will ask if the response could have been quicker and better. The question will be “How to make this happen given that the nature of the next crisis cannot be predicted with any certainty?”

A REPORT TO SUSTAIN MOMENTUM AND ENCOURAGE ALIGNMENT: Here is a view of progress since the beginning of the outbreak. It is designed for those who seek to understand the progress of the response, the results and ways in which the results have been achieved. Its purpose is to galvanize the momentum needed for sustained efforts to end the outbreak. It has deliberately been kept short and is not designed to offer a comprehensive account of the response.

POTENTIAL FOR REVISION: Given that the outbreak has not yet ended and many involved in the response are still collating information about their contributions there may be a need for this report to be revised in the coming weeks: any revisions will be posted on the Global Ebola response website.

THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL: Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General, has provided consistent leadership. The Secretary-General and Jan Eliasson, the Deputy Secretary-General, together with H.E. Sam Kutesa, the current President of the UN General Assembly, and Susana Malcorra, the Chef de Cabinet, have been deeply engaged: encouraging world leaders to become involved and contribute, establishing the first ever health UN system Mission for Emergency Ebola Response (UNMEER), and convening regular meetings where progress is debated and reviewed by UN Member States. The Secretary-General has visited the region, meeting with people affected by Ebola, Governments, responders and partners, and reviewed the work of UNMEER. His Special Representatives responsible for UNMEER—Anthony Banbury, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, and now Peter Graaff (acting)—have worked tirelessly and made exemplary contributions.

POWERFUL COMMITMENT FROM WITHIN THE UN SYSTEM AND BEYOND:

Guided by the strong leadership of the UN Secretary-General, the Senior Management of the UN system has been actively engaged in and committed to the response from its outset. There have been strong responses from all parts of the UN including from the World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank Group, World Food Programme (WFP), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The effort has gone beyond the UN system and has been truly multi-lateral and multi-stakeholder—engaging Foreign Medical Teams from the African Union, the Red Cross Movement, many Non-Governmental Organisations, military groups, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and contributions from national governments and regional bodies the world over. This intense collective effort is reflected in numerous meetings, appeals, documentaries, and reflections. It is also regularly showcased in the weekly information and coordination meetings of the informal Global Ebola Response Coalition.

PRODUCTION OF THIS REPORT: The core team responsible for this report, consists of Jo Nickolls, Anders Nordstrom, Trygve Ottersen, Vannina Maestracci, Hampus Holmer, Sophie Farigoul and Paddy Ilos. Many others have contributed and commented. Responsibility for the contents rests with David Nabarro who serves as the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Ebola.