

Global Ebola Response Coalition Meeting
13th March 2015
Issues Discussed and Next Steps

The twenty second meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group took place on 13 March. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

2. Participants discussed the **status of the outbreak**. The cumulative number of people who have been diagnosed with Ebola in the current outbreak is now 24,350. The number who have died is now over 10,000. The number of people newly diagnosed with Ebola in the 7 days to 8 March, is 116; the figure was 132 in the preceding 7 days. This week's total reflects an increase in Guinea (51 to 58) and a fall in Sierra Leone (81 to 58). There have been no new cases in Liberia now for the last 14 days. All people newly infected with Ebola are coming from a total of eleven districts, counties and prefectures in Guinea (6) and Sierra Leone (5); the smallest number seen for many months.

3. Although there have been no new cases in Liberia, there have been 90 suspected cases which have all proved negative following tests. This suggests surveillance is working well. The majority of those potential cases are all concentrated in Montserrado County, indicating surveillance coverage is not evenly distributed. In Guinea there have been no people newly infected with Ebola in the Forest region in the last 7 days; the majority of new cases continue to be reported in the Ba Guinea area. However the proportion of people newly diagnosed with Ebola, who have been identified as contacts of persons already known to have the disease, remains low at 28%. The number of people who have died in their communities and who have been confirmed as suffering from Ebola disease through samples taken at the time of death, is over 50% in Guinea. In Sierra Leone the number of cases continues to oscillate between around 60 and 80 new infections per week. The proportion of people newly diagnosed with Ebola, who have been identified as contacts of persons already known to have the disease, is higher at over 60%.

4. Participants discussed the **status of the response**. The importance of strong integration between community engagement and contact tracing/case investigation activities is extremely important. Also important is a very focused approach to these activities at village and even household level. Community sensitisation activities are best undertaken without any coercion. A measles outbreak in Liberia continues to cause great concern and discussions are ongoing about initiating measles vaccination campaigns in the three affected countries and to do so quickly.

5. The response capability in Liberia remains fully functional and surveillance is strong. The 21 day period following the second negative test on the last case will fall on March 24. The country could be declared Ebola free, consistent with WHO guidelines, a further 21 days later, on April 14. Partnerships remain strong in Liberia and cross border issues are a high priority. Vigilance continues to be key and strong engagement with communities and their representatives extremely important; small grants made to communities is helping to maintain momentum.

6. In Sierra Leone, political leadership continues to be strong, with the President fully committed. A 60 day plan to get to zero is being finalised by the National Ebola Response Centre and is being endorsed by Cabinet. This plan will contain a proposal for a 3 day targeted campaign between 27 and 29 March, for an active case search to identify people with Ebola in communities who have not sought care; this is a key challenge particularly in the Western Rural area and indicates hidden transmission continues. Social mobilisation and community engagement, alongside support to quarantined communities, is a key part of an effective response. Hazard pay policy in Sierra Leone is being refined.

7. In Guinea, an important meeting under the name “Force Vives” took place on 12 March in Conakry. This was arranged by UNMEER to bring together senior political and religious representatives and community leaders, to agree a national pact on the approach to Ebola in Guinea. This was attended by the UNMEER SRSG and UN Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa. The communique from the meeting recognised the issue of Ebola was paramount and all political constituencies stood behind it together. President Conde has expressed his support for its conclusions. Enhanced communications via radio in areas of intense transmission is being rolled out in e.g. Forecariah. The focus of the response is now firmly on the areas of Ba Guinea from where the vast majority of people newly infected with Ebola are coming. In response to continuing instances of unsafe infection prevention and control in non-Ebola facilities in Guinea, which are leading to new infections, stronger communications efforts are being put in place in those facilities. The US CDC is supporting set up of strengthened emergency operations centres at the prefecture level in Guinea with rapid response capability.

8. Participants discussed plans for the transition from response to recovery. The affected countries are preparing their own national plans as well as an integrated plan for the sub-region. The Ebola Recovery Assessment, coordinated by UNDP, is at an advanced stage and the hope is the products of this exercise can inform the national planning processes of the affected countries and assist them in defining their priorities. It is hoped it will also provide useful information to the series of international meetings following the 3 March Brussels Conference. The World Bank’s Spring Meetings (April 17 to 19) will build on the outcomes agreed in Brussels. Although this meeting will play particular attention to the importance to get to zero, it will look also to the reestablishment of essential services and the full spectrum of development needs. These will link closely to the plans being developed by the Governments of the affected countries. Regional activities are being actively considered in this context.

9. Engagement of the private sector with the response continues to be extremely important. The role of the EPSMG in facilitating a dialogue between the response and the private sector is continuing; the EPSMG stands ready to be guided by the GERC on where and how to take account of the evolving Ebola response. The World Economic Forum is continuing preparations for its lessons learning work to consider the role of the private sector in the response and how to strengthen

public/private partnerships. There is an important data need in supporting the Ebola response and a need for close coordination of the efforts in this area.

10. WFP have signed a partnership agreement with WHO and developed an operational framework for that partnership, which sets out the detail on how the two organisations will work together closely to enhance their respective and collective impacts on getting to zero. This arrangement will marry WHO's technical capacity to WFP's operational capability, with a view to enhancing their partnership for now and for the future. WFP are also working closely with UNMEER to transition the assets currently under UNMEER oversight to WFP, as UNMEER's footprint in the region begins to reduce. WFP's own Special Operation in support of the logistical component of the Ebola effort, has been extended to end 2015 and within that operation they will also support the provision of essential services.

11. The IFRC is considering how it can repurpose resources allocated for e.g. the response in Liberia, and to transfer assets to where they are needed most acutely. The recent evaluation of the work of the IFRC is available on their website. They have also initiated an anti-stigma campaign.

12 **In summary**, the following issues were highlighted: i) the situation in affected countries continues to be challenging in a number of respects, which confirms that intense efforts need to continue; ii) as the response improves in both breadth and depth, the number of new infections may actually increase; iii) getting the response better focused on the outbreak remains of paramount importance in getting to zero; iv) the measles outbreak reinforces the importance to remain vigilant in dealing with problems associated with Ebola; v) a better understanding of chains of transmission and efforts to strengthen contact tracing are both priority activities; vi) understanding of the political challenges inherent in the response is improving but work on that continues; vii) transition to recovery remains a topic of wide interest to many stakeholders and how the phases of the strategy will dovetail together; viii) strong integration of the currently planned international meetings is important to maximise the collective impact of those meetings; ix) continuing clarity on how the various elements of the lessons learned work underway will fit together is necessary and the GERC can provide an important means to coordinate this work and disseminate the expanding knowledge; and x) work is ongoing on resource mobilisation in order to ensure the UN system can continue to maintain its intense contribution to the response.
