

Remarks by WFP Regional Director for West Africa, Denise Brown

HIGH LEVEL MEETING EBOLA
BRUSSELS 3 MARCH, 2015

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

This intervention is about working differently.

By the summer of 2014 as transmission rates were escalating, WHO requested the World Food Programme to step in to support what was a fast moving crisis. But WFP's role in a health emergency was not entirely clear. We do conflict, earthquakes, and famine, not health.

There was no WFP blueprint to guide us; though eventually, our role as an enabler developed. A slightly different role than we are used to. Flexibility and adaptation became key drivers for us.

To move forward, two operations were designed.

The first essentially allowed food to follow the virus. If people affected by the virus cannot count on getting food, this becomes a weak link in the ability to effectively monitor the routes of transmission and for the follow up contact tracing. People won't stay put if their basic needs are not met. This remains the case today.

And, at the request of UNMEER, we developed the logistics backbone for the response – we have built Ebola treatment centres, transported blood samples, built logistics bases, ensured last mile transportation, and transported 8,000 people on our planes and this support will continue until we get to zero.

But looking back over the past seven months, of utmost importance has been strategic and operational partnerships.

Partnerships have been essential to the launching of our logistics platform.

The Governments of Senegal and Ghana have been critical allies – supporting the establishment of a dedicated humanitarian air-bridge for the movement of first line responders to the crisis as some airlines stopped flying to the three countries.

And the private sector stepped in to support our work. Moving forward we need to invest even more in those relationships.

Partnerships with national and regional bodies have also allowed the successful implementation of the food support to the virus.

Under the leadership of national coordination bodies, modalities were put in place to ensure that as soon as a new Ebola hotspot arose, food was dispatched so as to reduce unnecessary movements.

We are also now working under Government leadership to provide livelihood and nutrition support to survivors and with UNICEF to orphaned children.

And in recognition of the negative impact of the virus on food security and in coordination with the Ministries of Agriculture, local procurement has increased as a means to support local production purchases from the small farmers and we need to do more.

And under the leadership of ECOWAS, comprehensive market assessments have been conducted – while trade is picking up in urban areas as borders open, we are very concerned about the upcoming lean season in rural areas as food stocks are lower than usual against a backdrop of economic disruptions.

And lastly, with WHO we have just signed an operational framework in the fight against Ebola, which combines our joint technical and operational expertise to allow for a district level approach. It is also an opportunity to learn how to more effectively work together.

We are working differently.

Thank you.