



Ebola Virus Disease (EVD)

5 September 2014 – N 1

HIGHLIGHTS

- Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are struggling to contain the world's deadliest recorded outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). Some cases have also been reported in Nigeria and one case was reported in Senegal. The West African epidemic is thought to have started when the virus crossed over from infected wildlife into the human population and subsequently began spreading between people.
- The outbreak has an acute impact in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone's agriculture and food security. Farmers in affected areas are abandoning their farms and food stocks. Reduced food trade, consequent rising prices and expected reductions in domestic harvests is anticipated to further undermine the fragile state of food insecurity.
- FAO's immediate response includes food security assessments in affected areas and increased efforts to improve awareness in West Africa about the risks of contracting the Ebola virus. Measures to assist affected farmers are urgently required to mitigate the impact of labour shortages during harvesting period and for related post-harvest activities (e.g. provision of key agricultural inputs for the upcoming cropping season, support to post-harvest activities, animal/fishery production, income generating activities and cash transfer).

BACKGROUND

The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak has severely affected Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone and is having acute repercussions on the food security of affected populations. The outbreak is reducing households' ability to produce food as movement restrictions and fear of contagion are preventing communities from working in their fields. Movement of traders in rural communities is also very limited which means that even if harvested, agriculture products may not be marketed. In addition, the ban on bush meat is expected to deprive some households of an important source of nutrition and income. Border closure measures adopted may affect food market supply as all three countries are net cereal importers.

CHALLENGES FACING AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

- ❖ Disruption of market linkages due to travel restrictions, leading to sharp price hikes;
- ❖ The likely labour shortages on farms would have severe implications for food and cash crop production in the affected areas, with the peak of the crop harvesting, mainly cereals, due in a few weeks' time;
- ❖ Reduced production forecasts reported in areas with high incidences of Ebola, which constitute some of the most productive regions of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

AFFECTED COUNTRIES UPDATE

The following information on Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone is taken from the Special Alert n°333 issued by FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) on 2 September 2014.

Guinea

Reports indicate a reduction in agricultural produce entering the markets of the capital, Conakry. This has resulted in upward pressure on food prices. However, import inflationary pressure is estimated to be less significant compared to Liberia and Sierra Leone, given the stable exchange rate and the relative low import dependency ratio (16 per cent). However, Guinea exports small volumes of rice, maize and millet, and the border closures is

expected to negatively impact on export opportunities and therefore farmers' incomes, while concurrently reducing available supplies for Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Liberia

In Liberia, quarantine and contamination measures in several parts of the country, including Barkedu (Lofa County – a main food producing area), West Point (Monrovia) and Dolo Town (Margibi County), have led to a sharp decline in market food supplies. Reports also indicate that the distribution of imported food from Monrovia's seaport to rural markets has been reduced; this is a key source of rice supplies for rural areas. These abnormal supply shortages have contributed to driving food prices higher. A recently conducted rapid market assessment indicates that prices of some food items have increased rapidly (for instance, cassava increased by up to 150 percent within the first two weeks of August in Monrovia). In addition, increasing transportation costs have added further upward price pressure. The country retains a high dependency on cereal imports, with an average import dependency ratio of 66 percent. Given the heavy reliance on external cereal supplies, and the depreciation of the Liberian dollar, upward pressure is expected to be exerted on domestic food prices. However, lower year-on-year quotations of parboiled rice (the most consumed rice) and continued suspension of import tariffs; have helped to partly mitigate import inflationary pressure. As of August, according to the Government of Liberia, national rice stocks were estimated at about 36 000 tonnes, sufficient to cover just over one month's food requirements.

Nigeria

The new spread of EVD in Port Harcourt is under close surveillance and raises concern.

Senegal

One EVD case was official confirmed and reported in Senegal on 29 August 2014. The public health authorities are closely monitoring the infected patient and his contacts.

Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, the outbreak erupted at the beginning of the rice and cocoa harvest season (July/August) when traders are expected to reach the plots to exchange food and other items with cocoa. Restrictions of movements have therefore negatively impacted household income. The closure of markets, internal travel restrictions and fear of infection has curtailed food trade and caused supply shortages. Although price data is not available, reports have indicated food price spikes. Although the country's dependency on imported rice has been decreasing, it still remains a net-importer, with a cereal import dependency ratio of about 18 percent. The depreciation of the currency, which has quickened since June, is expected to add inflationary pressure.

Some countries have closed their border with affected countries, which may slowdown commercial flows and disrupt cross-border trade.

FAO'S RESPONSE

Preventing further loss of human life and stopping the spread of the virus is top priority at this time. FAO has **joined the coordinated UN effort** to support humanitarian relief and emergency response.

FAO's proposed response activities include:

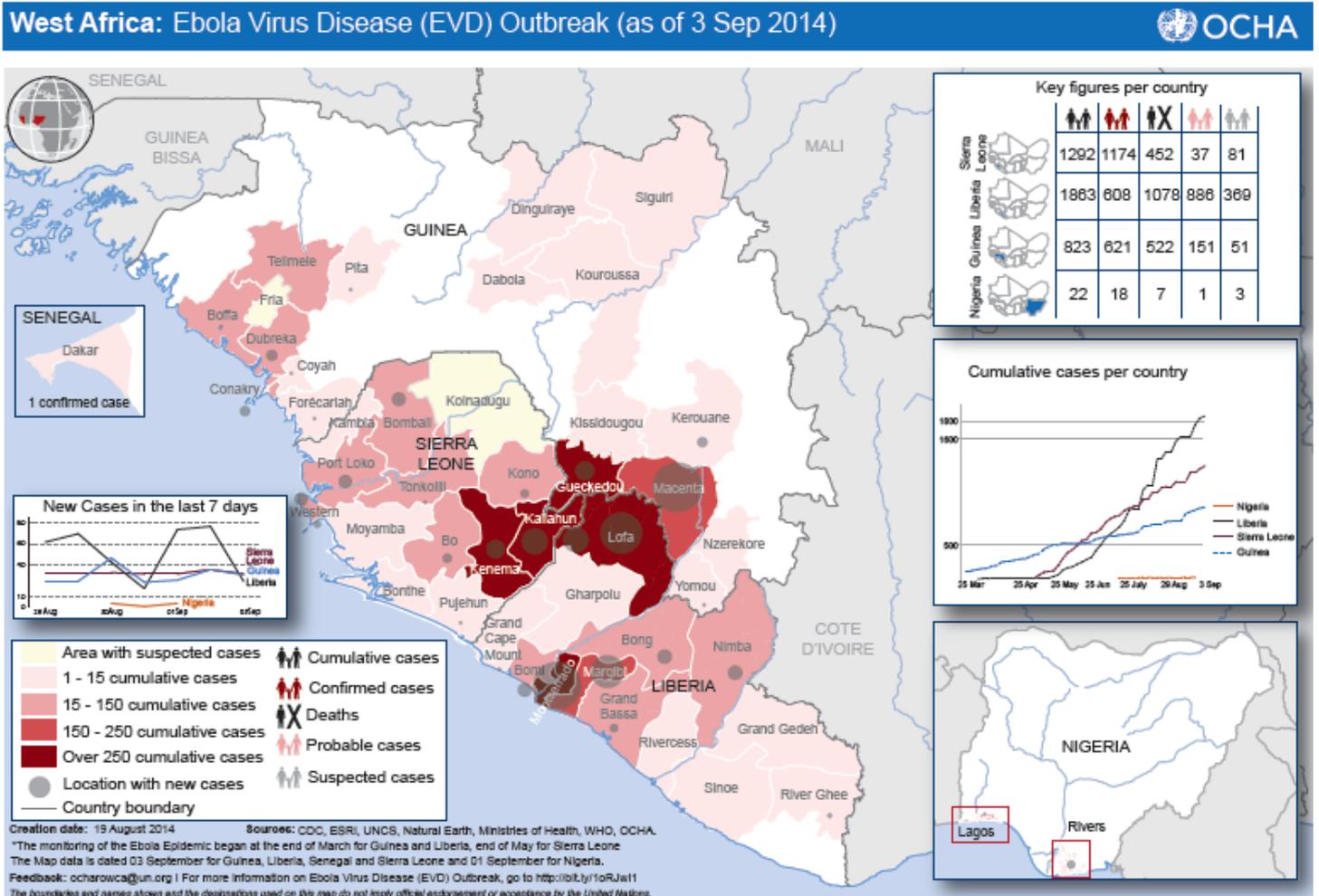
- **Agriculture and food security assessments** in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone
The Organization will work with governments, partners and regional institutions to set up rapid assessments on the impact of the outbreak on agriculture, food security and livelihood to inform the global response planning;
- **Immediate support** to farmers and livestock producers affected by the outbreak
With the provision of key agricultural inputs for the upcoming cropping season (October-December 2014), support to post-harvest activities, animal/fishery production, income generating activities, youth employment and cash transfer;
- **Strengthening** zoo sanitary surveillance and support awareness-raising and social mobilization on preventative measures in Nigeria and Senegal;
- **Prevention and preparation** to disaster in neighboring at-risk countries;
- Resilience and post disaster **twin-track approach** in affected and non-affected countries.

To date, FAO has performed an initial rapid assessment on food and nutrition security in Kailahun District in Sierra Leone. Initial results indicate that at least 40 per cent of farmers may have abandoned their farms. The report also confirms that about 90 per cent of the plots in the Inland Valley Swamps have not been cultivated. Increase in food prices due to reduced access to markets and lack of planting materials for the next planting season were also reported. Further assessments are required to assess to what extent this situation exists in the other part of the country and in Guinea and Liberia.

FAO'S FUNDING NEEDS

In September 2014, FAO funding needs are estimated at **USD 20 million** for immediate response in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and neighboring at-risk countries (September 2014 - February 2015). This figure will be updated in the coming weeks according to the results of the upcoming assessments on the ground.

FAO has already committed resources (USD 1.2 million) through its Emergency Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone to **strengthen EVD response capacities at the human-wildlife ecosystem interface**. The Organization has started to work with governments, WHO, UNICEF and other partners to improve information about the virus and raise awareness among rural communities who rely on bush meat for their livelihood and to supplement their diets. The information and awareness campaign is aimed at reducing the risk of transmission of forest products mainly bush meat will be sensitized using existing networks such as rural radio, producer organizations and agricultural extension services. Support will also be provided to wildlife surveillance systems through collaboration with wildlife rangers, veterinarians and local universities to support early detection of the virus.



Resources:

[West Africa: Ebola outbreak puts harvests at risk, sends food prices shooting up](#), 2 September 2014

[FAO GIEWS Special Alert: “Grave food security concerns following the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea”](#), 2 September 2014

[“Serious Food Security Concerns” in Liberia, Urgent actions required](#), FAO Liberia news release, 25 August 2014

[FAO warns of fruit bat risk in West African Ebola epidemic](#), FAO news release, 21 July 2014

[OCHA regional Ebola Crisis web page](#)

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