

Helpdesk Research Report

Impact and implications of the Ebola crisis

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Question

What are the political, economic, social and security implications of the Ebola crisis, with a particular focus on Sierra Leone?

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1. Overview

The current Ebola outbreak is concentrated in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea: countries with limited state capacity which are recovering from political instability and conflict (Piot, 2014, p. 2; Muiderman, 2014, p. 2). The indirect consequences of the Ebola epidemic and its disruption of public and private services threaten the lives and livelihoods of more than 22 million people in Ebola-affected areas (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 1). As well as its immediate impact on people's health, the crisis is likely to have longer-term socio-economic and political consequences which present risks to the countries' development and stability (Piot, 2014, p. 2).

This rapid literature review looks at the available evidence on the impact of the Ebola crisis on four key areas: political, economic, social, and security. These impacts will have implications for post-Ebola development and stability. The review has a particular focus on Sierra Leone. The literature uncovered was primarily concerned with the current and possible impact of the ongoing crisis on the economic and health sectors, as well as food security. Less information is available about the impact on the political and security

situations (expert comment). The literature engaged more with the impact of the Ebola crisis rather than with its implications, and very little was concerned with the post-Ebola situation. One expert raised concerns with the data and methodology of some of the recent reports about the impact of the crisis, although they note that it is clear that Ebola and the response to it are having an impact on all these sectors (expert comment).

The extent of the Ebola crisis' impact on the political, economic, social, and security sectors will depend in part on how the crisis develops. Two future scenarios developed by the World Bank are outlined below. A rapid containment will have less of an impact than if the outbreak continues to grow in 2015.

- **Political impact and implications:** Initial analysis suggests that government's poor management of the Ebola crisis has generated frustrations and exposed citizens' lack of trust in their governments. The Ebola crisis is likely to play a very political role in the next election in Sierra Leone and there are predictions that the opposition will win as a result.
- **Economic impact and implications:** The economic impact of the Ebola crisis includes loss of gross domestic output, threat to food security, fall in employment and livelihoods, and decline in foreign investment. Growth has slowed in Sierra Leone and is likely to fall even further. Household income has fallen, financial reserves are being used up and large numbers of people are now food insecure. Some businesses are benefiting from the local procurement by the international Ebola response.
- **Social impact and implications:** Progress in human development is likely to be reversed due to the impact of the Ebola crisis on health, education and standard of living. Quarantines have had a disproportionate impact on the elderly, the poor, and people with chronic illness or disability. Those affected by Ebola or working to combat it (such as healthcare workers and burial teams) face stigmatisation. Social cohesion is also being weakened by 'do not touch' policies. Women and children are particularly affected by the crisis. Almost 2 million children have not been attending school in Sierra Leone due to school closures, which means loss of education and increased risks of drop-out, teen pregnancy and child labour. Health systems have collapsed and non-Ebola related mortality is increasing.
- **Security impact and implications:** Ebola poses a threat to the safety of the countries affected by the current outbreak. There have already been riots and tensions are rising. The diversion of development spending, especially for roads, energy, building schools and hospitals, to the Ebola response, could have a negative impact on peace dividends.

2. Future scenarios

The political, economic, social and security implications of the Ebola crisis will depend on the impact of the disease. The extent of the Ebola crisis's impact on these areas will depend in part on how the crisis develops. Welthungerhilfe (2014b, p. 3) outlines two medium term impact scenarios for Sierra Leone developed by the World Bank:

World Bank Scenario 1: Rapid Containment of the Ebola Virus Disease

The outbreak is contained by the end of 2014 and economic recovery is bolstered by government spending financed by revenues from the mining industry. However, other economic sectors are slower to recover, especially the agricultural sector. This results in many farmers suffering from hunger. The service sector

rebounds, manufacturing increases, and foreign visitors return. GDP grows by 8 per cent, three less than predicted before the outbreak of Ebola.

World Bank Scenario 2: Slow Containment of the Ebola Virus Disease

The outbreak worsens significantly into 2015. Rural deaths and abandoned farms mean that agricultural output falls dramatically. Inflation increases, the service sector contracts and major mines close for at least six months. GDP stagnates and the non-mining sectors shrink by 3 per cent. The post crisis recovery is extremely slow and widespread hunger poses a serious threat to social stability.

The Government of Sierra Leone and various partners have stressed the importance of developing a 'post-Ebola Agenda for Prosperity' or early recovery plan that is developed during the crisis to fight the social and economic impact (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 16, 78).

3. Political impact and implications

The political impact of the crisis has **not yet been assessed deeply** (expert comment). However, initial analysis suggests that as a result of the governments' poor management of the Ebola crisis, the epidemic **threatens to become a political crisis** in any or all of the affected countries because of the deep frustration it has generated and the gradual deterioration of the security situation (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 2; expert comment). There is a lot of fear and mistrust of authorities which is facilitating continued Ebola transmission (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 1; Muiderman, 2014, p. 2). The crisis has exposed citizens' lack of trust in their governments and exacerbated social tensions (expert comment).

Sierra Leone has introduced a number of new regulations designed to combat the epidemic (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 1). These include travel and transport restrictions; restrictions on the movement of individuals; and restrictions on the people's right of assembly, as well as community by laws which have led to a 'do not touch' policy (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 1). These measures have had negative impacts on people's livelihoods, food security and social cohesion (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 1; Welthungerhilfe, 2014c, p. 3). The Sierra Leonean government has stopped spending money on services not directly related to combatting Ebola and **service provision has largely broken down** (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 3; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 43). There has been at least one case in Sierra Leone, where a journalist was arrested under emergency measures introduced to fight the Ebola epidemic, after a guest on his show criticised the President's handling of the Ebola outbreak (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 3).

One expert suggests that the success of **decentralised councils** in combatting Ebola in their districts, and the problems in districts with centralised management, could lead to further decentralisation in post-Ebola Sierra Leone (expert comment). They also suggest that Ebola is likely to play a very political role in the next election and the opposition is likely to make good use of the fact that rates of Ebola are lower in their areas than in areas where the President draws his support (expert comment). A win for the opposition is predicted in the next elections (expert comment).

4. Economic impact and implications

The Ebola crisis has had a negative impact on the economies of the countries it has affected and its impact can be felt in many different sectors (Muiderman, 2014, p. 2). The economic impacts include loss of gross domestic output, threat to food security, fall in employment and livelihoods, and decline in foreign investment (UNDP, 2014, p. 9). The agricultural, mining and service sectors have been particularly hard hit, especially agriculture (Muiderman, 2014, p. 2; Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 2). The crisis has impacted on

macroeconomic activity and budgetary resources and has negative consequences for the livelihood and food security of the population (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 1, 2).

The Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone has resulted in **slower economic growth** as a result of disruptions to activities in agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing, trade, tourism and transport (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 12, 34; UNDP, 2014). The World Bank's recalculated GDP growth estimates for 2014 is now 4.0 per cent, compared with 11.3 per cent before the crisis, and 8.0 per cent in October (World Bank, 2014, p. 2). There are worrying signals for future growth from the drop in sales in the manufacturing and construction sectors – which are important parts of Sierra Leone's formal economy and sources of capital investment and foreign spending (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 2; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 32-33). In December 2014, the World Bank estimated Sierra Leone's 2015 growth as -2.0 per cent down from pre-Ebola estimates of 8.9 per cent (World Bank, 2014, p. 2). This is a drop from what they estimated in October (World Bank, 2014, p. 2). The crisis has resulted in increasing unemployment, especially among the youth (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13). The government and donors have diverted financing for different sectors to combat Ebola. This has created a critical funding gap for non-Ebola related government services (expert comment).

Rural and urban households are experiencing significant declines in income from most sources, including agricultural labour, petty trade, and the sale of forestry products, bush meat, and crops as a result of the effects of a general economic slowdown and major market disruptions (ACAPS, 2014c, p. 3; UNDP, 2014, p. 14). As of October 2014, household income has dropped by 29.7 per cent in Sierra Leone as a result of the Ebola outbreak (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 5). Research carried out in September 2014 indicates that 97 per cent of surveyed households' income had dropped since May 2014 (Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 1). Rural areas have a decreasing amount of cash and it is not clear what impact this will have in the next few months (expert comment).

An International Growth Centre (IGC) report has found that **fewer traders are selling basic food items** in all districts in Sierra Leone (Glennerster and Suri, 2014, p. 2). They did not observe a significant increase in market prices, with the exception of some outliers (Glennerster and Suri, 2014, p. 5). However, there are single case examples of price increases. One evaluation found that, on average, the price of rice had risen by 30 per cent since May 2014 (Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 3; UNDP, 2014, p. 31). The reduction in traders is a concern as it means farmers and other participants in the informal economy may see a reduction in income (Glennerster and Suri, 2014, p. 6-7; Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 2).

The government of Sierra Leone faces a **high fiscal burden** it cannot deal with alone as a result of the cost of fighting the Ebola outbreak, plus the costs of reduced productivity and tax revenues as a result of it (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 3; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 12, 39; UNDP, 2014, p. 19; World Bank, 2014). The overall deficit rose by 31.79 per cent between April and September 2014 (UNDP, 2014, p. 23). In addition, there has been a depreciation of the local currency and disruption to regional trade (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 12-13).

While some foreign investors have left the country or suspended their operations, other more risk friendly investors see this as a time to make good deals (expert comment). Some sectors have benefited from local procurement by the international Ebola response (expert comment).

The cocoa sector in Sierra Leone

Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (DWHH) have looked into the impact of Ebola on the important cocoa sector in Sierra Leone (Welthungerhilfe, 2014c). Shortage of labour has been a problem for many farmers, although it did not have a serious effect on this year's harvest due to the timing of the outbreak (Welthungerhilfe, 2014c, p. 2). However, the travel restrictions, closure of markets, and refusal of buying agents to enter Ebola hotspots, has made it harder for farmers to sell their harvest (Welthungerhilfe, 2014c, p. 2-3). On the

other hand, the consolidation of the cocoa sector in the wake of the Ebola outbreak has had very positive effects on cocoa production (Welthungerhilfe, 2014c, p. 3). DWHH recommend leaving in place the by-laws introduced to contain Ebola even once the epidemic is over as they have proven to safeguard farmers' interests (Welthungerhilfe, 2014c, p. 4).

Food security

Rising prices, reduced food trade, restrictions on movement, and expected reductions in domestic harvests are having a **negative impact on a fragile food security situation** (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 1; Piot, 2014, p. 4; Welthungerhilfe, 2014a; Ragosini and Maiette, 2014, p. 5; Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 2; ACAPS, 2014c, p. 1, 2; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 12). The most affected areas within each country were also the most agriculturally productive and some farmers have abandoned their farms in fear (ACAPS, 2014c, p. 1; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 29). The most vulnerable groups include those directly affected by Ebola, pregnant women, people with disabilities, chronically ill, and the elderly (ACAPS, 2014c, p. 1). Lack of food in quarantined areas has led to violence and food insecurity is increasing community tensions (ACAPS, 2014c, p. 1, 3). ACAPS (2014c, p. 2) warns that emergency food assistance needs are likely to significantly exceed levels currently funded and planned for.

In Sierra Leone, over 600,000 people are in need of food assistance as a result of increased inflation and reduced household income due to quarantine measures and a slowing of trade and agricultural activities (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 5). Over a million people (between 1.55 – 1.79 million) are likely to be exposed to undernourishment as a result of the crisis (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 5; Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 3). Deutsche Welthungerhilfe thus expects **serious food shortages** to hit the country in early 2015, especially affecting rural communities (Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 4; ACAPS, 2014c, p. 1). There is a risk that the rice harvests will be delayed which, along with decreases in income, will have a negative impact on food security (Glennerster and Suri, 2014, p. 2, 8). There has also been a decrease in the farming of other key crops such as cassava, cocoa, palm oil and coffee (Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 2). Farmers are able to find less labour to work their land as the youth gangs who used to do this work are restricted from moving or have migrated to urban centres (Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 2). This represents a loss of income for both the farmers and the young people (Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 2).

Food security estimates

Although ACAPS (2014c, p. 2) warns that the numbers of affected are difficult to confirm, the World Food Programme (WFP) (2014) has made a low estimate of 2.3 million food insecure people in March 2015; 750,000 of them being as a result of Ebola (WFP, 2014, p. 1, 9). Their high estimate reaches 3 million food insecure people, with 1.4 million resulting from the Ebola crisis (WFP, 2014, p. 1, 10). Provinces which had been relatively food secure before the outbreak are amongst the worst affected (WFP, 2014, p. 2). Their report suggests that some provinces in central Sierra Leone are likely to become highly food insecure (WFP, 2014, p. 10).

Action Contre la Faim and the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Naples Federico II have also provided some **forecasts** of the number of people likely to be exposed to undernourishment in 2015, depending on different scenarios of how the Ebola crisis plays out (Ragosini and Maiette, 2014). In the Low Level Ebola Crisis scenario, they predict that the economic growth of the three countries will dramatically decrease and the expected improvements in terms of forecasted reductions in undernourishment will not be achieved (Ragosini and Maiette, 2014, p. 3). In case of a High Level Ebola Crisis scenario, the percentage of people exposed to undernourishment in the three countries, will regress to levels last seen to five or six years ago (Ragosini and Maiette, 2014, p. 3). This would mean a lower estimate than the WFP of more than

seven hundred thousand additional people suffering from undernourishment in 2015 in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Ragosini and Maiette, 2014, p. 3).

5. Social impact and implications

The Government of Sierra Leone and its partners predict that progress in human development is likely to be reversed due to the impact of the Ebola crisis on health, education and standard of living (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 72; UNDP, 2014, p. 15). One expert speaking about the consequences of the Ebola crisis suggested that the crisis will have a bigger impact on certain communities as Ebola is not evenly distributed (Piot, 2014, p. 4). Many development organisations have suspended their operations, leaving their target groups without any input (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 2).

The poor in Sierra Leone have become increasingly **vulnerable** and their access to food and services has worsened (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 3). Quarantines have had a disproportionate impact on the elderly, the poor, and people with chronic illness or disability (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 2; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 70). The provision of social security support services is likely to be negatively affected by reallocations of resources and disruptions to programme implementation (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 71).

Ebola survivors are being rejected by their communities and **community cohesion has weakened** (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 1; Child Protection Working Group, 2014, p. 1; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13). In Sierra Leone, a survey found that 96 per cent of Ebola survivors have experienced some form of discrimination and over three-quarters of respondents would not welcome an Ebola survivor back into their community (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 6). As a result, some survivors have had to relocate (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 4; Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 2). Burial teams and health care workers have also faced stigmatisation (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13). Past experience from the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2003 indicates that frontline health workers have faced stigmatisation long after the outbreak had ended (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 8). New by-laws enforcing a 'do not touch' policy are also damaging social cohesion in rural villages (Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 2).

Due to their more common role as care givers, **women** have been hit harder by Ebola (Muiderman, 2014, p. 1; ACAPS, 2014b, p. 1; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13, 69; UNDP, 2014, p. 34). In addition, the sectors of the economy which have been most adversely affected (trade, agriculture and tourism) are dominated by women (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13, 69; UNDP, 2014, p. 34). Women are using their business capital and savings as a strategy to cope with the hardship imposed by Ebola, which depletes their informal loans schemes (UNDP, 2014, p. 34).

Ebola has also resulted in **increased displacement** as people have migrated as a result of lack of access to basic services and markets, or for fear of contracting Ebola (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 4, 5; Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 2; ACAPS, 2014b, p. 4). However, migration is not a mass phenomenon in Sierra Leone (Welthungerhilfe, 2014a, p. 2).

Water and sanitation services have suffered as a result of staff abandoning Ebola affected areas where they had been carrying out water projects (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13, 67). This means there is an increased risk that a water-borne epidemic may break out (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 67).

Environmental protection has been harmed by the travel restrictions and negative coping mechanisms reverse gains made in protecting water catchment areas, forest and animal reserves (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 71-72).

Health system collapse

As a result of the pressures of the Ebola crisis, **already weak health systems have collapsed** and non-Ebola related mortality is increasing (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 1, 4, 5; Piot, 2014, p. 4; ACAPS, 2014b, p. 8). Healthcare workers have been particularly vulnerable to contracting Ebola (Piot, 2014, p. 3). Pregnant women are no longer giving birth in health facilities (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 4; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 59). Eighty per cent of people with HIV living in the three most affected countries have been unable to access treatment (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 4). There are also worries that cases of malaria and Lassa fever will rise as people are too scared to access treatment (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 4).

In Sierra Leone, many health centres and hospitals have closed due to the death or desertion of staff (Welthungerhilfe, 2014b, p. 2; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13). Health workers and burial workers have gone on strike in Sierra Leone over hazard payment (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 3). There has been a reversal to the gains made in the health sector in relation to child mortality, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases as a result of the closure of health services and the diversion of resources to combatting Ebola (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13, 58-59).

Impact on children

Children have been adversely affected by the Ebola crisis (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 14). According to UNICEF, at least 7,000 children in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have been orphaned or lost one parent as a result of Ebola, and many are rejected by their relatives for fear of infection (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 4; Child Protection Working Group, 2014, p. 1; ACAPS, 2014b, p. 1).

Global Education Cluster (2014) identifies five issues of particular concern in relation to child protection and education in the affected countries:

- There are **increasing numbers of unaccompanied and separated children** and communal responsibility for children appears to have weakened or even disappeared (Child Protection Working Group, 2014, p. 1).
- Children in affected communities are suffering from **increased mental health problems and psychological distress** as a result of the crisis. They live in fear, confined to their homes, away from their friends and school, often having lost family members and friends in distressing circumstances (Child Protection Working Group, 2014, p. 1).
- Children and adults who survive Ebola are also often **excluded and socially isolated** as a result of fear and discrimination from their communities (Child Protection Working Group, 2014, p. 1).
- There is a **lack of education and development opportunities** as schools are closed and activities restricted due to fear of contamination (Child Protection Working Group, 2014, p. 1). Often the closure of schools means more than the loss of education, as many also provide children with meals and social care (Child Protection Working Group, 2014, p. 1).
- As a result of disruption to economic activities and the closure of markets and travel restrictions, **more children are engaging in child labour** in order to supplement their family income (Child Protection Working Group, 2014, p. 1).

In Sierra Leone, almost 2 million children have not been attending school due to school closures which are likely to remain in place until March 2015 (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 5). UNICEF warns of an increase in vulnerability of children as a result, which could lead to increases in child labour and teen pregnancy (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 6; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13, 66). Another report from the Government of Sierra Leone warns that school

drop-outs are likely to increase and teachers are not being paid (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 13, 66). The school feeding programme which provided almost 1.6 million children with much needed nourishment has been stopped as a result of school closures (ACAPS, 2014c, p. 6).

6. Security impact and implications

UN and national officials have warned that **Ebola poses a threat to the safety of the countries affected** by the current outbreak (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 1). The population of the various countries are deeply frustrated with their governments' poor response to the epidemic (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 1). Security forces have played a central role in the crisis response, especially in relation to enforcing quarantines (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 2). Extortions and bribes have been reported (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 2). UNDP (2014, p. 24) warns that the diversion of development spending, especially for roads, energy, building schools and hospitals, to the Ebola response, could have a **negative impact on peace dividends**. There is a risk that growing food insecurity will lead to unrest and threaten stability in the region (Muiderman, 2014, p. 2). Lack of food in quarantined areas has already led to violence (ACAPS, 2014c, p. 1). Citizens lack trust in their governments and social tensions have been exacerbated, which raises the possibility of deep unrest in these fragile countries (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 1; expert comment).

In Sierra Leone, fear and anger is rising among the population (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 6). More than 7,000 police and soldiers have been mobilised to enforce the quarantine and security measures (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 4; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 73). This has strengthened fear among the population and generated a high risk of civil unrest in Sierra Leone (ACAPS, 2014b, p. 4). A number of riots and clashes have occurred in relation to suspected cases of Ebola (ACAPS, 2014a, p. 6; ACAPS, 2014b, p. 4; GoSL et al, 2014, p. 73). The progress made in peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts in the country is likely to be reversed by the diversion of resources to fight Ebola (GoSL et al, 2014, p. 73).

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Key websites

- Ebola Needs Analysis:
<http://acaps.org/en/pages/ebola>
- Information about African Countries – 2014 Ebola (EVD, Ebola Virus Disease) outbreak in Africa:
<http://countryportal.ascleiden.nl/2014-ebola-outbreak>
- Ebola Response Anthropology Platform:
<http://www.ebola-anthropology.net/>

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