

Ebola epidemic in West Africa

19 November 2014



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

Facts and figures

The 3 most affected countries:
Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea

Number of deaths: 5,165; number
of cases: 14,383

(Source: WHO, 14 November 2014)

SDC commitment since March 2014

CHF 1.5 million to Médecins Sans
Frontières Switzerland for their
emergency assistance programme
in northern Liberia

16 tonnes of protective equipment
to the Liberian Ministry of Health
plus CHF 400,000 for prevention
activities and for 9 vehicles for
patient and material transport and
for the safe recovery of dead
bodies

Financial support for the Ebola
research centre at the Hospitals of
the University of Geneva (HUG)

CHF 1.3 million contribution to the
International Federation of Red
Cross and Red Crescent Societies
(IFRC) and Swiss Red Cross (SRC)
for medical treatment of infected
and prevention campaigns

CHF 500,000 to the International
Committee of the Red Cross
(ICRC) in Liberia

CHF 2 million to the World Food
Programme (WFP) for improving
food security

CHF 1 million for logistic
operations of the WFP for
distribution of medical supplies

CHF 300,000 for United Nations
Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS)

CHF 300,000 for prevention
campaigns in countries potentially
at risk

**Total contribution to date:
CHF 9 million**

**Planned: additional
CHF 20 million**



Handover of emergency vehicles to the Liberia National Red Cross Society, Monrovia. ©SDC

Update: the current situation and SDC operations

- The situation remains critical in the three countries hardest hit – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The epidemic is having a grave impact on the entire health care system in the affected countries, with serious implications also for the overall security situation, food supplies and the local economies.
- The focus of assistance provided by SDC is on: 1) treatment and prevention operations to help contain the epidemic; 2) strengthening of the local health systems; 3) mitigating the adverse secondary effects of the crisis, including food shortages.
- The staff at the SDC programme office in Monrovia, Liberia is reinforced by an emergency coordinator and a logistics expert from the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA). Currently the number of staff totals 20 (4 members of the SHA, 16 local staff).
- Switzerland and other UN member states were asked by the United Nations to contribute to the *UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response* (UNMEER). A list of in-kind requirements was provided. The SDC has reviewed the request and made contact with the Swiss Army. A fact-finding mission has been carried out jointly by the Swiss Army and SDC to evaluate whether the army can play a role in providing air support for the transportation of humanitarian personnel and relief items in Liberia. The findings are currently being assessed by the Swiss Army.

Further aid plans

- On 29 October 2014, the Swiss Federal Council has decided to allocate a further CHF 20 million for combatting the Ebola crisis. Approval of the supplementary credit by the Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation is still pending.
- The majority of these funds will be made available to the Red Cross Movement and the UN aid organisations such as UNICEF and WFP for their regional programmes in accordance with the focus of assistance of the SDC. Additional funds will be used to support the Swiss partner organisation Terre des hommes in their child protection activities in Guinea while some of the money will be allocated for the continuous support of the Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.
- The definitive allocation of these additional funds will be adapted should the situation on the ground so require.

Context

The current Ebola epidemic in West Africa is the worst outbreak of the disease the world has seen to date, in terms of geographic distribution and in the number of infected persons and fatalities. Transmission occurs through direct contact with infected persons or animals, carried by the blood or other body fluids. Infection with the form of the virus strain (Zaire) currently in circulation causes death in 50 to 90 percent of the cases. The first cases occurred in December 2013 in south-east Guinea and were confirmed in March 2014 by health experts. The number of new infections and fatalities rose and the virus spread to Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The World Health Organisation, which coordinates the UN's emergency health response in crisis situations, stated on 8 August 2014 that it had declared the Ebola epidemic an international health emergency. On 18 September 2014, the UN Security Council passed a resolution establishing a special mission to deal with the Ebola crisis, the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER). This is the first time in its history that the UN has created a special mission in reaction to a public health crisis.

Years of violent conflicts in the affected countries have left their health care systems seriously weakened. There are shortages of logistical and financial resources and of professionally trained nursing and laboratory personnel. Given the dimensions of the epidemic, the measures thus far taken by the governments of the countries in question are not sufficient.

There is, at the current time, no cure and no reliable vaccine for the disease. Nonetheless, first test series for the development of a vaccine were initiated in several countries, including Switzerland at the end of October 2014. However, first results in the development of a vaccine cannot be expected before the first quarter of 2015.

SDC activities

Since the first cases became publicly known in March 2014, the SDC has been closely following the situation from its humanitarian programme office in Monrovia, Liberia. It immediately activated its network of partners in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone to support operations aimed at preventing and responding to the Ebola virus.

In September 2014, the SDC together with the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA) and in cooperation with Geneva University Hospitals (HUG) conducted a fact-finding mission in Liberia. The findings confirmed SDC's priorities in answer to the Ebola crisis:

- containment of the epidemic through proper treatment and preventive measures
- strengthening the health care systems of the affected countries
- mitigation of adverse secondary effects at the social and economic level.

Support for Swiss institutions and for local authorities

The SDC has stepped up its cooperation with Médecins Sans Frontières (Switzerland) in Liberia. For the emergency aid programme in the north of the country (Lofa County), Switzerland has allocated a total of CHF 1.5 million.

During July and August 2014, the SDC delivered overall 16 tonnes of protective material in response to a request by the Liberian government. Distribution of the material to Ebola treatment centres was carried out by the country's Ministry of Health. In addition, Liberia is receiving assistance in the amount of CHF 400,000 in the field of 'infection, prevention & control' (IPC) and for the purchase of 9 vehicles for patient and material transport and for the safe recovery of dead bodies.

The SDC is providing the Hospitals of the University of Geneva (HUG) with support for the expansion of their existing centre for Ebola research. The centre will engage with partners in Liberia in prevention activities and training projects.

Support for the Red Cross movement

The Swiss Red Cross (SRC), and its umbrella organisation, the Geneva-based International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, have received CHF 1.3 million in support of their efforts to contain the spread of the disease. The SRC has launched prevention campaigns in cooperation with the national Red Cross societies in Togo and Ghana. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has received financial support in the amount of CHF 500,000 to be used for setting up two health centres in Liberia.

Support for UN Partners

The SDC has made CHF 2 million available to the regional emergency relief programme of the WFP. The funds are to be used for supplying food to the population groups most at risk in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The WFP is receiving further support in the amount of CHF 1 million for its logistical services, to be used for the distribution of medical relief material and securing the supply chain. A contribution of CHF 300,000 has been made to the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), which has set up numerous flight routes, making it possible for humanitarian workers to move about in the region and ensuring that relief supplies can be delivered to where they are needed.

An engineer from the SHA has been seconded to the WFP for the construction of Ebola Treatment Units in Sierra Leone.

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