



IMPACT STORY



# UN WOMEN ACTION TO CONFRONT THE EBOLA CRISIS

Photo © UN Women (Sierra Leone) / Emma Vincent.

On 8 August 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Ebola outbreak in West Africa an international public health emergency. As of 2 December 2014, the number of reported deaths had reached 6,055, with 17,111 cases of the disease reported cumulatively since the outbreak.

Women are on the front lines of this disease. In September, a Gender Alert created with the support of UN Women highlighted the heightened risk of exposure to the disease for women and girls through their traditional roles as caregivers at home and by the fact that many healthcare professionals and support staff are women. It also highlighted the need to address the wider economic impact of the Ebola outbreak on women and girls, their increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence, the breakdown of protection and essential health services and the stigmatization faced by survivors.

In Ebola-affected countries, many UN organizations have been working hand-in-hand to help those affected on the ground. To help curb the spread of Ebola and mitigate its impacts, UN Women has been supporting sensitization and advocacy on Ebola and its gender dimensions, primarily in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where it will soon be deploying gender in humanitarian action experts to support the ongoing response.

In Nigeria, UN Women is helping make relevant materials available in local languages, and in Mali, where a small number of cases have been reported, steps have been taken

to deploy an Ebola-experienced epidemiologist with a background in gender to support the Government's command centre and task force. At the regional level, UN Women is engaging closely with the Mano River Union and countries within (Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire) to harness women's leadership and social mobilization in containing the epidemic.

Our efforts and programmes in Liberia and Sierra Leone include, but are not limited to:

- Working with local radio stations and with traditional leaders to raise awareness and aid prevention;
- Producing educational materials to train health workers;
- Supporting orphaned children and stigmatized survivors;
- Ensuring that women's needs are reflected in all aspects of the UN's humanitarian response;
- Providing economic grants for hard-hit cross-border traders.

#### FOLLOW UN WOMEN AT:

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)  
[www.facebook.com/unwomen](https://www.facebook.com/unwomen)  
[www.twitter.com/un\\_women](https://www.twitter.com/un_women)  
[www.youtube.com/unwomen](https://www.youtube.com/unwomen)  
[www.instagram.com/unwomen](https://www.instagram.com/unwomen)  
[www.flickr.com/unwomen](https://www.flickr.com/unwomen)



## How We Make a Difference:

### A snapshot of UN Women's response to the Ebola crisis in Liberia and Sierra Leone

**IN LIBERIA**, the country most devastated by the Ebola outbreak (3,145 confirmed deaths as of 2 December 2014 according to the WHO) UN Women has helped train 50 representatives from partner institutions and the country's Gender and Development Ministry to raise awareness on the Ebola Virus Disease in various communities across Liberia. The participants—85 per cent of whom were women—learned how to provide Ebola prevention information to grass-roots women and the illiterate, proper hand-washing and cleaning methods, and how to interact with survivors.

UN Women is also supporting initiatives that facilitate dialogue and encourage re-integration. The UN Women-sponsored 12th Man radio talk-show—which normally focuses on addressing violence against women—modified its programming to provide psychosocial support in response to Ebola, targeting patients, health workers and the public, with a specific focus on the needs of women.

---

**“I found this training very helpful and educational especially in answering some of my doubts about Ebola. I have gained a lot of knowdge and I want to ask for more training about Ebola.”**

- Beatrice Joe, who took part in UN Women's Training of Trainers Ebola Workshop in Liberia

---

The Ebola crisis has taken a heavy toll on Liberia's economy. UN Women has long supported small business women in the Bobolu region through its Women in Cross Border Trade programme. Now that the Ebola prevention measures are having a drastic impact on their livelihoods and economic security, UN Women helps them to get them back on their feet. Thanks to UN Women approximately 2,500 women traders who have defaulted on small loan repayments have been provided with direct cash transfers via mobile banking.

**IN SIERRA LEONE**, where the WHO has accounted for 1,583 Ebola-related deaths and 7,312 cumulative cases of infection as of 2 December 2014, UN Women has been supporting education about the disease and tackling stigmatization.

Through the UN Women-supported door-to-door campaign in Kailahun in September, 29,000 young women and men volunteers in Sierra Leone underwent intensive training to learn about the disease and how to effectively deliver preventative community outreach messaging. They then travelled to remote villages to educate the communities about how to prevent the spread of the disease and what to do with suspected cases. In early October, the UN Country Team in Sierra Leone also launched an Ebola Gender Mainstreaming Strategy to ensure the needs of women and girls are addressed within the UN's overall response to Ebola. This includes promoting women's participation in all aspects of the Ebola response, building confidence among health workers, and re-establishing trust among communities to utilize public health facilities and services.

Because of the stigmatization and lack of trust in the health system, 367 Sierra Leonean children have been left orphaned as of 30 September 2014, many rejected by surviving community and family members. UN Women, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, is refurbishing former rehabilitation centres used during the country's civil war to accommodate abandoned children and nurses who are stigmatized because of their contact with patients.

UN Women continues to work with community groups and the Government on a number of education initiatives that promote gender equality in the Ebola response. These include developing a manual to train health workers across the country on prevention and control, a campaign encouraging pregnant women and lactating mothers to access healthcare, as well as better-targeted public health messages about the realities of the disease. Through the Office of the First Lady of Sierra Leone, UN Women's work has already supported 530 traditional leaders with information on the social and gender impacts of Ebola at the household level.

---

*Tribute: UN Women colleague Edmond Bangura-Sesay served with great dedication since 2005 as the driver for the Sierra Leone Country Office until his death from Ebola on 18 October 2014. UN Women continues to mourn his loss.*