



OPERATION STOP EBOLA IN LOFA

1ST MARCH TO 30TH, MAY 2015

FINAL REPORT

**SUBMITTED TO: United Nations Mission on Ebola
Emergency Response (UNMEER) BY:**

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JUNE 6TH, 2015

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

As the deadly Ebola Virus continue to claimed lives in Lofa, Liberia, Peace Link Liberia with the funding from United Nations Mission on Emergency Ebola Response (UNMEER) increased her social mobilization and Community Engagement Activities to reactive and established sustainable social structures (Peer Educators, Health clubs etc.) involving Women groups, traditional/religious leaders, Youth groups in Social Mobilization activities to Immediately stop Ebola aggressive transmission . The Empowered groups of stakeholders and youths were tasked with the responsibilities to take the lead in all Ebola awareness activities and as well undertaking some health and hygiene initiatives to prevent further spread of the disease.

The project was implemented from March to May 2015 in three main affected districts in Lofa county (Kolahun, Quardu Gboni and Voinjama) targeting youths, stakeholders and the community at large.

2. THE COUNTY BACKGROUND:

Lofa County, located in the north of Liberia, bordering Guinea and Sierra Leone was the worst Ebola affected county in Liberia. The uncontrollable migration of people from Guinea to Liberia through Voinjama, Quardu-Gboni, Kolahun districts made these communities more vulnerable to Ebola outbreak. The issues of poor health system as a result of road inaccessibility, Denial, traditional practices such as burial, funeral ceremonies etc) are also contributing to the spread of the disease made the situation worst.

Other issues such as sharing border with Guinea and Sierra Leone, made it difficult to cortile the illegal migration of people from the outbreak communities in Guinea and Sierra Leone to Liberia. The people living along the border are sharing the same language, families with that of those in Guinea and Sierra Leone. As a result there are lots of interactions between them including inter-marriage, festival etc.

After the Government of Liberia declared closing of the border and entry points as a means of containing the spread of the virus, those community members living along the border couldn't abide by the regulation. Instead they continue to receive and host



The burial of Ebola patient (Varlee Kamara) who escaped from going to the treatment and died in the bush. Peace link staff along with CG burial

people from the neighboring countries without further examination of their condition. Within a short possible time, most the communities living along the border or within these districts such as Barkedu, Gbaygbaydu, Kolahun etc. begin to experience lots of people getting sick but they still continue to deny the existence of the virus. They also refused to expose their sick people to the Government or Aid worker, carried out unsafe burial and while some communities like Mamekonedu in Quardu Gboni district rejected health workers.

Media continue to report high increased in the outbreak in Guinea and Sierra Leone because people were not abiding by the safety practices and as well rejecting health workers. Those Guinean and Sierra Leonean communities sharing border with the three districts in Liberia still continue to interact with the their counterparts in Liberia. The chance of suspect smuggling to Liberia was very broad.

After the tireless efforts of Government and Aid workers, another form of denial was created. Myth was circulated that Ebola was a Biological weapon invented to reduce the Africa population. Aid worker and health practitioners were the pay agents to execute the rapid the transmission of the virus. Instead of abiding by the safety rules, community members began to dwell more on the root causes of the Virus.

3. PROJECT DISCRIPTION:

To address the stated problems, Peace Link Liberia seeks to bolster the effectiveness of social mobilization and community engagement techniques to reactivate and established sustainable social structures (Peer Educators, Health clubs etc.) involving Women groups, traditional/religious leaders, Youth groups in Social Mobilization activities . These Groups will take the lead in all Ebola awareness activities and as well undertaking some health and hygiene initiatives to prevent further spread of the disease.

Main interventions

- a. Stop Ebola transmission through community based awareness campaign (focus groups discussion, house to house visit, large scale community mobilization event, Radio program etc.)
- b. Training of Youth and stakeholders in targeted communities as change agents to take the lead in Ebola response activities
- c. Distribution of Hygiene kits to additional distant and marginalized communities, less affordable families for hygiene practices and health promotion.
- d. Recruitment and training of Volunteers youth as Animators to carry out community based awareness campaign, monitoring of movements in inaccessible communities (No motor road).

The three months project was focused on the achieving the below results:

- ✓ Decreased in the spread of Ebola Virus, stigma and misconceptions are erased as a result of more Women, youths, traditional and religious leaders are provided

with adequate information's on the mode of transmission and prevention of Ebola Virus to serve as catalyst of change for their respective communities in Quardu-Gboni, Voinjama, Kolahun and Vahun districts in Lofa County.

- ✓ 120 community stakeholders (Women groups, Traditional leaders, Youth groups , Religious leaders etc.) with (50% females) are trained and provided with adequate information about Ebola, hygiene promotion ; leading in all community health and sanitation activities in their respective communities in Voinjama, Kolahun and Quadu-Gobndi districts (40prs in each).

4. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

a. PROJECT START-UP AND PLANNING STAFFING

In-order to ensure the smooth startup of the Project, The Executive Director took over the entire management of the project. This includes recruitments of technical team (Social Mobilizers-6, Training Supervisor-1 and the Project Lead -1 person), preparing of concrete work plan, training concepts and setting up performance indicator for each staff. His international mission to Malawi to support the Guidance Counseling and Youth Development Center for Africa in Malawi was postponed.

Two Social Mobilizers (Male: 1, Females:1) were assigned in each districts (Kolahun, Voinjama and Quradu-Gboni) to recruit and work with Ten (10) Animators in each districts. These animators are strategically assigned in towns and villages according to distance and proximity to carry out sensitization and other social mobilization activities in their assigned communities.

Mr. Kamara finally left for Malawi April 25th , 2015 after setting up the project and implemented all major activities such as recruitments of volunteers, trainings etc. The Project Lead (Mamadee S. Kamara) took over the training rest of management task while receiving distance / online support from Executive Director.



Figure 3 Project Launching (Peace Links Volunteers)



Figure 2 Peace Links Social Mobilization Team in Voinjama

Stop Ebola project.

b. GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS

While the so intension of the project was to take Lofa County and maintain ZERO case, Peace Links concentrated her project resources on three of the worst affected districts (Voinjama, Quardu-Gbnoni and Kolahun) where cross related outbreak was alarming. Although the rest of the four districts of concern in Lofa also experienced outbreak as spelled out in the project proposal. For Administrative and Logistical efficiency, the three districts were prioritized for the project with the hope of reaching the rest indirectly and as well with future program for possible expansion.

c. PROJECT LAUNCHING

The project started with holding three introductory meetings with the key stakeholders and local authorities of the three districts by explain the aim of the object of the project. Targeted communities, beneficiaries and the strategies and approaches to address the stated problem was jointly discussed along with these stakeholders and authorities. Separate focus groups sessions were held with local chiefs, traditional leaders, religious leaders, Youth and women groups etc. of safelight communities and major outbreak communities.

d. BASELINE/ NEED ASSESSEMENT

Peace Links conducted a base line need assessment (sampling) in the three districts. Some villages and towns like Gbaygbaydu, Nyamakamandu, Noikoitahun etc. were recommended to be the highly prioritized project communities due to the nature of their vulnerability to further outbreak, status and level of interaction/ exposure to outbreak communities in Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Other approaches to tackle the issue were also recommended such as:

- a. Training and providing ledger to secretary and chiefs of the border communities
- b. Providing large water barrel with sufficient hand washing materials to reinforce sanitation activities at the check points. Border entry points should be prioritize since the government of Liberia has declared reopening of border.
- c. One of the most effective ways of eradicating the spread of Ebola is to target distant and marginalized communities with providing adequate information through training, large skills mobilization events etc. for Youth groups, women groups and traditional/ religious leaders.

5.0. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

5.1. RECRUITMENT OF YOUTH AS VOLUNTEERS ANIMATORS

A set of three Volunteers (10 in each) with Gender Balance were recruited and trained as Animator for the three districts to carry out awareness creation on Ebola

to their communities and no motor road communities. These (30) Animators were trained by an Expert from Ministry of Health (District Health officer) who is also an Ebola survivor. Intellectual capacity building training was conducted for these youth on Ebola, community mobilization, border monitoring.

The purpose of the training was to build the technical skills of these youth as Active Community Animators to be able to create awareness on Ebola, recruit and establish peer groups (boys and girls) in their communities for peer to peer counselling and house to house sensitization, organize health and sanitation initiatives for disease prevention and carry out cross border monitoring initiatives by registering strangers and travelers coming from Guinea, Sierra Leone and other part of the country for short or long stay.

Many ideas were generated during the training to enable us tackle cross border related outbreak and targeting denial communities. At the end of their training, a legal framework was developed for religious, traditional and other stakeholder's forums, mass sensitization and radio programs.



Post Training Photo of Voinjama and Quardu -Gboni Animators



Animators training in Kolahun (Demonstrating Helping skills for Ebola suspect to prevent contact)

5.2. Stakeholders Training:

Three stakeholder trainings (one in each district) was conducted during the entire project. The total of 110 people including Muslim, Christian, Traditional leaders, Local chiefs, Women Leadership and Youth groups etc. from towns and villages around the border and within the district participated into the two days intensive training on Ebola Information Awareness and Community Engagement Trainings.

The Goal of the workshops was to empower these batch of stakeholders with adequate information on Ebola, Cross Border Monitoring, and self-assessment and design a unique strategies and approaches to engage them in Ebola response activities at community level. These trained stakeholders serves as agent of change for their communities and will apply all their effort to take their communities to Zero Ebola case and maintain their status (at Zero case) and as well work with their fellow stakeholders in their respective towns and villages to undertake some health and sanitation initiatives that will cortile further outbreak of Ebola and other disease.

At the end of each of each of the training (Kolaun, Sarmodu and Voinjama) a community Acton Plan was developed by participants to carry out community initiatives

including border monitoring activities which is to be closely monitored by Social workers. The town chiefs and Secretaries of the various border towns attended the training were issued with the general Ledger, pen, rulers to carry out effective registration of travelers from illegal entry points and strangers coming for short and long stay.



Figure 5 Quardu-Gboni Stakeholders Workshop in Sarmodu town (Traditional leaders, Town chiefs, Women Leaders and Youth leaders) of Quard Gboni the worst affected district in Lofa



Figure 4 Post Training Photo for Voinjama District (Local chiefs, women leader, traditional and religious leaders

5.3. AWARENESS CREATION (Focus group Discussion, House to House awareness and Peer to Peer Sensitization)

Approximately 10,000 people were reached were reached with Ebola awareness message in the three districts through Animators, youth groups and Social Mobilizer mobilization activities. The social mobilization activities includes peer to peer counseling/ Awareness, focus group discussions, Radio , mass sensitization activities in schools, market places, town and villages in Kolahun, Voinjama and Quardu-Gboni Districts.

During the sensitization, the animators and social workers were reach to break through and reached three main denial communities (Mamekonedu, Tusu and Bulor). These communities reached and peer education activities was established and stakeholders were invited to attend the stakeholder workshop after series of visit with lots of controversy and



Awareness creation in border community (Nyamakamadu, Quardu-Gboni)

challenges in reaching them with Ebola Awareness activities. These communities block road and damaged bridges to stop heath worker and social mobilizers from coming to their town and villages because of the myths associated to Ebola outbreak that “Health workers and NGOs are paid agent to facilitate the rapid spread of Ebola to eliminate African population”.



5.4. HYGIENCE KITS DISTRIIBUTION:

Approximately 350 less affordable families, distant and marginalized communities were served with basic hygiene kits (Rubber buckets, soap and Chloral) followed hand washing sessions and constant follow up to strengthen sanitation activities to prevent Ebola transmission.

In order to strengthen sanitation practices at the various check points and border after declaring the reopening of the border, sixty (60) Check points are served with sufficient chloral, soaps and sixty litters barrel for sufficient water storage. Security officers ensure that travelers wash their hands before crossing or passing through the check points.

After the reopening of the schools, approximately 20 distant and marginalized schools in the three districts were served with Rubber barrels, soaps and chloral to strengthen sanitation practices in their schools.



Using Motor bike to reach marginalized and bad road communities with awareness and hygiene kits distribution (The road Bakanda, Kolahun) Mohammed Kamara (front) Peace Link Director with Staff



Donation of large hygiene kits to Check points and border crossing points to reinforce hygiene practices

- a. Based on the ideas that the stakeholders conceived during the group session at the workshop, they have been able to carry out series of community lead initiatives to stop the Ebola transmission such as establishing observation room for strangers for one week (Marvekonedu town) , religious crusade on Ebola in churches and mosques, community awareness etc.
- b. The community stakeholders are now active in cross border monitoring actives that has resulted into decrease in uncontrollable movement of people from neighboring countries to Liberia through illegal entry points. People coming from another country or other parts of Liberia for short or long stay including travelers are screened by the community themselves.
- c. The total of 30 peer groups (at least 10 in each) were established by the Animators to join the animators to carry out sensitization campaign in their communities and as well organizing sanitation initiatives.



Getting community leaders ready for border monitoring. These leaders take the

6.0. SUCCESS STORIES:

- a. Seneh Kamara (Bolongoidu): After attending the stakeholders training for Quardu-Gboni as town chief of Bolongoidu, Mr. Kamara organized youths of Bolongoidu to support community lead bordering initiatives. Bologoidu is a town very closed to Guinea with many illegal entry points to various towns and villages in Guinea. These volunteer youth groups are taking record of all travelers using illegal entry points and strangers.
- b. Marvekonedu: Marvekonedu have established an observation room to travelers and strangers coming in their town for short or long stay. Strangers stay in the observation room for one week while assessing the condition. While in the observation house, the community members provide food, water and other basic needs.
- c. Mamekonedu: The social workers of peace link Liberia were able to reach Mamekondu and Tusu the most denial communities after series of meetings and engagement of religious leaders that seems to have influence over the decision of the chiefs. In Mamaekondu, the Youth Animator have established strong and functional peer groups that comprises of male and females youth that are currently carrying out some health and sanitation initiatives. The movement of people from the neighboring towns in Guinea with illegal entry points are well monitored by the animators and peer groups.
- d.

7.0. CHALLENGES AND LESSON LEARNED:

Challenges: Hierarchical influence on Community decision and acceptance of change.

Lesson Learned: communicating with the opinion leaders and stakeholders to explain the aim and objective of project and get their involvement early and often in project planning and implementation yield sustainable result.

In almost all of the communities in Lofa, the decision making body comprises of retired elders. They are very much adamant to social change as a result they always compare things to their days not present. These elders and religious leaders' authorities influence the action of the two chiefs and other chiefs. As a result, carrying out social change or sensitization project like Ebola, Reproductive Health, SGBV etc. requires a great deal of ground work and relationship building with these elders and religious leaders. Once they are convinced, they give approval for intervention and other community members will not hesitate in participating in the project.

Additionally, religious leaders are accomplished and highly respected in these communities. Outside the development workers must be sure to communicate with senior religious leaders early and often in the project planning and implementation.

One of the strong success of Operation Stop Ebola Project in Lofa was its cordial relationship and engagement of these religious and stakeholders whose decisions oversees community members reaction and participation. Through this approaches we were able to identified and work with key stakeholders and potential youth as direct beneficiaries and volunteers of the program.

Challenges: Sustainable project activities

Lesson Learned: Supporting existing groups (youth, women, stakeholders etc.) rather than creating new social groups creates more sustainable impact.

In the communities where Peace Links intended to work, there were already some social structures established by other organizations (e.g. gCHV, Peer Educators etc.) that have previously carried or are volunteering carrying out some development initiatives. These volunteers are well familiar with the community and strategies to use to get the involvement of the community. Leaving these groups of volunteers and social groups to establish new one will creates more obstacle to achieving the result. The community built confidence in their skills and are willing to listen to them as compare to someone else who they have never interacted with before.

During the recruitment of the thirty (30) Youth Animators and 115 stakeholders for the workshop, preference was given to those who have been engaged or participating in community driven initiatives. Recruitment was based on your engagement in the community. As a result most of the Youth Animators were trained volunteers (Peer Educators and g

General Community Health Volunteers) who have been volunteering in their communities. These talented youth helped the project to break more barriers in dealing with the denial communities. They have worked in these communities, share the common language and cultures and have interacted with the community members on different community development projects. Seeing these individual or groups of people of trust working with Peace Links in her Social Mobilization activities made the community to fully accept the project and participated fully. E.g. Overcoming the

challenge in entering Mamekonedu was due to one of the former gCHV who we recruited as Animator and the town secretary who attended the training. The main reason of the project succeeding in Kolahun district especially along the border communities was working with the Social Mobilizer (Augustine Heneh) who have been working and living with community members. He is very much familiar with the community, leadership structures and strategies to engage the community leaders.

Challenges: Bad Road to Project Locations

Lesson Learned: To implement successful project in the marginalized communities required timely planning and mobilization of local resources.

The bad road to the distant and marginalized communities especially along the border make it difficult for health workers and Awareness creation team to reach these communities. As a result, these communities never received hygiene kits and were not practicing basic hygiene practice to prevent Ebola outbreak. In these communities, illegal movement of people from Guinea, Sierra Leone to Liberia without screening was very common. This contributed to rapid spread of the virus in towns like Popalahun Gbaygbaydu etc.

Peace Links staffs and volunteers succeeded reaching these communities by using motorbikes and as well walking. Community radio stations like (Halenge, Voice of Lofa etc.) were used to create public sensitization.

The chiefs and secretary of these communities were invited for training and served with general ledger to carry out enumeration of people entering the country through illegal entry points.

This is strategies, Peace Link was able to covered the marginalized and distant communities and get their active participation in Operation Stop Ebola project.

Challenges: poor Corporation as a resulting tribal and Religious Discrimination

Lesson Learned: address the conflicts and disputes among and within the various tribes of Lofa will make sustainable impact on development initiatives and ensure future peace and security.

1. As the result of the fourteen years Liberia Civil crisis, the sentiment of war still exist between communities, tribes and religions. This contributed greatly to community stakeholders' inability to unite to combat the spread of Ebola. Communities that experienced the outbreak were paid less attentions to others. Local authorities were not able to stop movement of people simply because the tribes of Lofa are not united come out with concrete action plan. They prefers establishing relationship with their tribe members in Guinea or Sierra Leone rather than the other tribes in Lofa.
2. As the deadly Ebola continue to claimed lives in the various communities, stigma and decimation the survivors and affected communities became high. Other families and individuals were accused of being the importer of the virus. Survivors and Victims' families were rejected by community members. This has increased tension and gross within the communities of Lofa County.

Peace Link- Liberia as Peace Building organization, included anti stigma and discrimination of Ebola survivors and victims as part of our sensitization activities.

Therefore, Peace Link prospered in their Operation Stop Ebola by ensuring cross section of all tribes and religious groups into our project. Social workers and Animators were assigned to communities of their tribes for effective communication, while different believed groups (Islamic, Christian and traditions) leaders included used their influence to sensitize their religious/ believes groups.

8.0. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Develop and implement project with focus on stakeholder's engagement, cross border monitoring and Peace building.
2. Implement community engagement project that bring stakeholders together for conference, training and organizing initiative with their counterparts in the bordering communities in neighboring countries. Project should focus on establish network of stakeholders that enable effective information sharing and networking to address social issues at community level.
3. Livelihood project that will empower Ebola outbreak affected women (widows, single mothers etc.) and girls (orphan and child headed household).

9.0. STATISTIC

No	Training Category	Voinjama District		Kolahun District		Quardu-Gboni District		TOTAL	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	Males	Females
1	Stakeholders Community Engagement and Ebola Information	25	14	23	12	24	12	72	38
2	Animators ToT Training	5	5	5	5	6	4	16	14
		30	19	28	17	30	16	88	52