



FOOD SECURITY IMPACT OF 2014 EBOLA VIRUS EPIDEMIC POPULATION EXPOSED TO UNDERNOURISHMENT: FORECASTS IN GUINEA, LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE

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The Ebola epidemic in West Africa is taking a severe toll on the affected countries in terms of human deaths, crumbling health systems, an economic crisis, extensive commercial restrictions and, of course, food insecurity and an increase in the number of people exposed to food deprivation and undernourishment.

From the analysis of ACF documents as well as official datasets from FAO, UN and the World Bank, Action contre la Faim, in partnership with the University of Naples Federico II, has estimated that **in 2015 the Ebola crisis will lead to a significant increase of people suffering from undernourishment in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone**: from 56 000 (in case of “low Ebola” scenario) to 700 000 (in case of “high Ebola” scenario) **additional people** will suffer from undernourishment. Whereas the 3 countries had been on a good track to reduce the number of people suffering from undernourishment and malnutrition over the last decade, the epidemic will most probably reverse these hard-won gains.

Ebola is already having an impact on food security. In case of High level Ebola crisis, which is currently the most likely scenario according to WHO’s projections on the epidemic propagation and economic drivers, the health crisis could also become a food crisis, as 5,7 million people will be undernourished in 2015 in the 3 Ebola most-affected countries against 5 million before the Ebola epidemic.

Main drivers of undernourishment are the following:

- The first and most obvious driver is **income** that could be measured both at country level and at the individual level. Income levels directly affect the **purchasing power** of food on the domestic markets and of **food and commodity imports** on the international markets.
- Another relevant factor is **food price** dynamics that are related to the income level, **cereal and food productions** and the **food availability** and **variability**.
- The relationships between the level of food imports and food production and consumption provide an indication of the **dependency on imports** of the internal food security. Food availability depends also on the quality and quantity of **roads and transportations**.
- Food availability, especially related to crop production, depends on the amount of land that is **arable and devoted to food production**, the labour force employed in the agriculture sector and on a well-functioning agricultural production cycle, from sowing to harvest.

The analysis highlights that the Ebola epidemic will have the following effects:

- National and individual income will dramatically decrease and the economic growth observed in the three countries during the last few years will stall. Moreover, in the worst case scenario, an economic crisis due to a reduction in income at the national and individual level is highly probable.

- Imposing a quarantine area and the ensuing mobility limitations for people and goods, associated to the income reduction, will reduce the imports and will increase the food price levels and the fluctuations in price.
- The Ebola epidemic is affecting the sowing period of the agricultural production cycle. The imposition of quarantines, the increasing caseload of people sick from Ebola and the need for women (traditionally farm labourers) to become caregivers are directly reducing the labour force available to work in the fields. This driver will seriously reduce the harvests.

Is the current response enough to mitigate the immediate and long term effects of the Ebola crisis on the nutritional and food security?

Although the response to the Ebola crisis must primarily focus on stopping the epidemic and treating affected people (treatment, containment and prevention measures), it must also address the foreseen mid-term and long-term impact of the crisis.

The international community, governments from the affected countries, humanitarian actors and donors must act now to mitigate the effects of the Ebola epidemic on food security and to prevent million people from suffering from hunger.

- Government, NGOs and UN agencies (FAO and WFP) must keep conducting **rapid assessments surveys** of EVD impacts on agriculture, markets, food security and livelihoods to define the most urgent needs¹, both in rural and urban areas. Any assessment must be immediately widely shared between all stakeholders through efficient and inclusive coordination mechanisms, such as food security cluster. Furthermore, results must be used immediately to ensure that the best intervention modality is put in place and must be taken into account in funding and in the implementation of activities. Ministries of Agriculture, with the support of relevant UN agencies and NGOs should also implement comprehensive assessments to understand longer-term impacts of the crisis and to further adapt their intervention strategies.
- Despite WFP's response and food distribution², there is still an **urgent need for scale up short-term food security operations** to answer the immediate needs of the most vulnerable people in affected countries, and especially to address the direct effects of supply gaps, particularly in quarantined zones and rural inaccessible areas. However, this emergency response and food distribution should take into account the local context and potentially strengthen well-functioning coping mechanisms that might have been set by the community (for instance to deal with quarantine areas).
- Immediate measures must also be put in place **to improve the purchasing power** of most vulnerable populations in Ebola affected areas and assist them in accessing markets safely. Existing productive safety nets and social protection programs should be scaled up.

¹ For instance, FAO and ACF have recently conducted a joint rapid food security needs assessment in 15 counties of Liberia.

² WFP says it has already delivered more than 9.1 million tons of food to 534,000 people in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea since April. They plan to reach a total of nearly 1.4 million people by the end of February. Which is still far from the foreseen number of people who will suffer from undernourishment in 2015.

- Considering a typical seasonal calendar according to which the harvest season has already started, there is only a short window of opportunity to cope with the foreseen impact of the Ebola outbreak on the harvest and future agriculture production. Actions are needed in **assisting agricultural production operations** linked to harvesting and post-harvesting activities, transportation and storage of output to increase availability, facilitation of sales of produce.
- The overall (short, medium and long-term) impact on food security and the socio-economic level of the countries affected by the crisis, as well as the progress and the remaining bottlenecks, must be **continuously monitored with a maximum of field data, especially through “in situ” monitoring.**

Donors as well as implementing partners must rely on this monitoring to regularly adapt their strategies and especially long term assistance to evolving country needs, but must also take into consideration existing forecasts of the impact to prepare the response to the food and nutrition insecurity that will happen next year.

- While in general the emergency response still lacks coordination and leadership, the situation has started improving in Liberia with the setup of a Food Security Cluster (in September), and could also improve in Sierra Leone with the setup of a Food Security and Livelihood Working group (in October). **ACF is urging that similar coordination mechanisms are also put in place in Guinea.**

Food Security Clusters have a key role to play to meet the identified needs and answer current challenges and especially in:

- Setting up (or supporting the MoA to setup) a **strong and well-coordinated data collection (assessments) and monitoring mechanism**, to constantly measure and better understand the crisis effects on food security and livelihood, and ensure that the response answers the identified evolving needs in a short, middle and long term.
- Identifying the funding needs and current gaps to deal with both the present and forthcoming situation, and pushing donors to fill these gaps.
- Ensuring a constant flow of information between the different stakeholders, between the central and decentralized levels, but also between Food Security sectors and other sectors.