



## **PLAN LIBERIA EBOLA RESPONSE STRATEGY:**

### ***Reducing Mortality and Morbidity Related to Ebola Virus in Liberia and Minimising the Impact on Affected Children, Families and Communities through Social Mobilization***

**Budget:** 10,000,000 USD

**Duration:** April 2014 – July 2015

#### **1. Plan's Response: The 5-pillar Strategy**

Plan's response to fight against Ebola in Liberia consist of 5 pillars and is in line with the specific objectives of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Health Program (Promote health, prevent diseases, and foster supportive environments for healthy lifestyles; Protect citizens from serious cross-border health threats; Contribute to innovative, efficient and sustainable health systems). The Ebola response contributed to the identification of cases and limitation of the spread of Ebola. The multi-sector response was a very effective way for limiting the risk of cross-border spread of the Ebola virus.

- 1) Health and WASH. Plan strengthened the capacity of county health teams and communities for effective prevention, control, case management/investigation and disease surveillance, including running community care centers and isolation units for effective triage at community level with rapid isolation of suspected patients and providing appropriate care. Training of health staff and logistic support to the county health teams for improvement of case investigation, safe burial procedures and distribution of WASH kits in communities/schools.
- 2) Child Protection (CP) in emergency. Children affected by Ebola are protected from abuse and have access to psychosocial support. Plan established a community based CP system with referral mechanism to provide protection and care for affected children. Orphans and vulnerable children were identified, cared in interim care centres as well as transit centres and eventually reunified with their relatives or foster families. Affected children and their families received counselling and psychosocial services.
- 3) Education in Emergency. Girls and boys at school age were given opportunity to learn while being safe during the Ebola outbreak. Children were supported with educational materials; school authorities received trainings to support alternative learning through radio programs even. The most effective strategy for education was the Plan contribution to back to school protocol. Plan supported 487 schools and ensure that WASH kits are locally available for boys and girls to access education in a safe environment; this included training of teachers and community leaders on temperature check, early isolation of suspected students, referral to medical services and disinfection technics.
- 4) Food security and livelihood. Plan supported children and their families to access food and income opportunities to cope with the outbreak and recover from shocks. Affected families and communities were supported with basic needs including food and non-food items and Plan supported survivors with income opportunities to improve their economic security through cash transfer and vouchers. Plan is currently working with USAID to continue this approach using seeds distribution for improved agriculture and recovery.
- 5) Social mobilization. Communication is essential to every institution because it is the lifeline that drives the policies and plans as well as the impacts produced as the result of monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Communities were adequately informed, educated and well prepared to prevent the disease from further spread at the community level.

Plan Liberia was part of the first episode of the Ebola outbreak since April 2014. Plan was appointed by **Liberia's National Social Mobilization Committee** as chair of two subcommittees on: **1. Message & Materials Development** and **2. Media and Training**. This gave Plan the responsibility to coordinate



with other international organizations responding to the Ebola outbreak mainly on social mobilization. Plan engaged the Ministry of Health's department of health promotion and community services (MOHSW), Association of Liberia Community Radios (ALICOR), UNICEF and Liberia's Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Journalism. Plan led the development of several revised messages including: DOs and Don'ts of Ebola, telling Survival Stories and Safe Burial Practices which were used as content for the various radio talk-shows and programs that were aired on Plan's community radio partners stations.

Apart from the management of interim cared centers to cater for Ebola-affected children and communities, the training of health care workers and community health volunteers, the provision of WASH and health delivery materials to Ebola Treatment Units; Plan's interventions also focused on using radio as a primary medium to educate the population on how to prevent Ebola and stop further spread. Plan provided training for 30 community radio journalists, mainly youths across 15 community radio stations in Liberia. Plan's training modules developed particularly for radio talk-show hosts and program producers captured topics that were gender sensitive and encouraged women participation. Radio, more than any other medium, speaks the language of the children and community people. They count on radio to provide the information they need, at the specific point in time they need it. Plan used the radio to include the communities and children in discussions of how best to fight Ebola, protect themselves, sustain the gains and keep safe.

## **2. Results of the Ebola Response**

Plan was able to deliver the following results with the 5-pillar strategy to fight Ebola:

- 2 community care centers for Ebola were managed and 67 potential cases were rapidly isolated and provided with appropriate care
- 171 community health workers were trained and actively working on case investigation and contact tracing.
- 2.8 million long lasting bed nets were distributed to more than 3.5 million Liberians across the 15 counties
- 20,811 hygiene kits were distributed
- 650 families (5,073 members) were supported with cash vouchers for the immediate need of the families
- 7,270 families affected by Ebola received food and non-food items
- 1,214 families who received Ebola orphans were supported in the process of reunification or relocation
- 54,830 students resumed school in a safe environment as a result of Plan's support to the back to school program.
- 30 Liberian youth journalists from 15 community radio stations across three of Liberia's 15 counties Lofa, Nimba and Bomi were trained; they received hands-on training on how to gather, write and produce news packages on Ebola and stories relating to child protection, education, human rights and gender equality
- 75 stories were produced by the trained journalists and published in national and international media
- 6 video documentaries on the Ebola response were produced
- 15 community radio stations Plan partnered with have two ongoing radio talk-shows each related to Ebola and education. More than 365 communities now listen to the radio and phone-in on talk-shows to share ideas and general knowledge on issues of concerns. The audience based of these community radio stations have increased based on the call-in and geographic localities
- 6 triage units for disease surveillance in case of new outbreaks are still under rehabilitation



### 3. Cross-Sector Work

Given fever is a primary clinical symptom of Ebola, many malaria cases were suspected to be Ebola, thus preventing access to appropriate care. It was essential to scale-up the distribution of 2.8 million long lasting bed nets in the entire country; which Plan completed in June 2015. Plan in addition supported the Liberian Government to reactivate its Birth Registration with specific emphasis to upgrading the Birth Registration facilities and decentralization of the registration process to rural communities leading to a significant increase in the number of children registered across the country (increased from 4% in 2012 to 24% in 2014; thanks to the significant contributions from Plan Liberia and UNICEF).

### 4. Coordination and Cooperation

Plan Liberia was part of the first episode of the Ebola outbreak since April 2014; our offices remained opened even when some international NGO were leaving the country. Plan was appointed by **Liberia's National Social Mobilization Committee** as chair of two subcommittees on: **1. Message & Materials Development, and 2. Media and Training**. This gave Plan the responsibility to coordinate with other international organizations responding to the Ebola outbreak mainly on social mobilization. Plan engaged the Ministry of Health's department of health promotion and community services, (MOHSW), Association of Liberia Community Radios (ALICOR), UNICEF and Liberia's Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism to facilitate some of the training sessions with the young reporters. Plan took part in various coordination mechanisms on the national level. This included health partners meeting led by WHO, child protection cluster, Education, Food Security cluster and social mobilization clusters. Plan worked closely with Superintendent Offices in Montserrado, Lofa, Bomi and Nimba Counties. Each cluster was made up of sub clusters or technical working groups.

### 5. National Recognition

Plan's efforts were lauded by the Government of Liberia making Plan to receive three certificates of achievement and recognition from the County Health Team in Nimba, Lofa and Bomi respectively. Plan's dedication and commitment to support the Ebola outbreak through vast awareness campaign won us more accolades. Plan is present in the National Taskforce on Ebola Prevention and sends regular updates through Situation Reports and success stories of children and communities affected by Ebola informing Plan's National Offices and donors, something which immensely supported Plan's resources mobilization and fundraising efforts.

### 6. Plan's Recovery Strategy

Plan's Post Ebola Recovery Strategy aims to strengthen the health system to become more resilient, to monitor children in communities after their relocation and continue to ensure they are protected from abuse, to support families with improved agricultural technics and community-based financing schemes while setting up structures for disaster risk reduction. This plan is a continuation of the Ebola response in line with the early Stabilization and Recovery Plan of the Government of Liberia including the Agenda for Transformation, building on lessons learnt and best practices. In this line, Plan is an active member of the early recovery Meeting sitting every 2 weeks on Thursday and chaired by UNDP. Plan is working closely with other NGOs to coordinate efforts for greater impact. As an example, Plan and Oxfam are the beneficiaries of the EC-WASH project for improving access to safe drinking water in schools through well rehabilitation and constructions as part of the post emergency program.

## 7. Lessons Learnt and Best Practices

- Setup isolation units very quickly and invest more on contact tracing and case investigation especially for diseases that are transmitted through direct contact should be done in a decentralized way through local health services to avoid transfer of patients which is costly because of logistics and risky in such an epidemic context. Isolation units are cheaper, easy to setup and easy to undergo decommissioning through a clear discharge guidelines to support other health related activities.
- At the beginning of the Ebola outbreak many communities, villages and towns were not reached by the information on Ebola. This was one of many reasons for denial because the community people did not see a video clip, hear an actual story or heard a report from their leaders, relatives or a survivor of the Ebola virus disease either on a local television or a community radio station. The target group oriented media work especially with radio stations is therefore best way to inform population subgroups in remote areas. The involvement of youth journalists has been pioneered by Plan.
- Plan worked with several community based organizations and civil society groups to help disseminate Ebola messages throughout Plan's counties of operations. These Community Based Organizations (CBOs) were used as guests and panelists during the different radio programs, talk-shows and media engagements. Since this project was community-based with total involvement of the locals, Plan partnered with the local government structures in the counties where Plan works, engaging the Ministry of Health County Teams, Internal Affairs, ministries of Education & Gender to select representatives from their various institutions to serve as panelists and guests on various radio talk-shows. Most of the discussions on these programs from the community radio stations were on several occasions used as background information for National government during the regular "Ebola Press Briefing" managed by Liberia's Information Ministry. Community involvement has turned out to be the best way for a double-way communication strategy.
- The involvement of communities in the response through behavior change communication and social mobilization reduces denial and discrimination. The added value of Plan as a child centered organization has been the investment in Child Protection and Education Sectors. To prevent many cases of potential child abuse, Plan learnt lessons from post-war report in Liberia where many orphanages were opened, enrolling children that still had their parents. Plan worked closely with Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to encourage transit homes where Ebola orphans were taken care of for 2 weeks maximum while processing their reunification with families and foster families when needed; this prevented institutionalization of children and limited harmful practices.
- Plan also learnt that in a post conflict country like Liberia with limited education capacity closing schools was premature and it will be more effective and efficient to ensure safe school protocol (school disinfection, provision of WASH kits, medical kits, training of teachers and youth health clubs) and built the capacity of communities to understand school is part of the community and part of their daily environment.
- In addition, setting-up a comprehensive information management system to inform decision making is essential while strengthening the health system to be able to manage non-Ebola related sickness is essential.