Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak which began in Guinea in early 2014 is the largest ever recorded with a total 13,703 cases including 4,920 deaths as of 27 October (WHO Ebola Response Roadmap Situation Report, 29 Oct 2014). The EVD has not reached Cote d’Ivoire, with none of the 5 suspected cases of Ebola confirmed, yet, Cote d’Ivoire is a country at high risk since it borders and has strong trade and travel ties with Guinea and Liberia, neighbouring countries with widespread and intense transmission. The Country Office estimates the funding needs to be US$ 13 million for the prevention and preparedness for the EVD, the main activities for which include social mobilisation linking Communication for Development (C4D), WASH, Education, Health and Emergency coordination.

Leadership and Coordination

At the Government level, the Comité de Veille presided by the Prime Minister acts as a decision making body in regards to the EVD, with the Ministry of Health leading measures on prevention and preparedness for EVD, focusing on scaling up social mobilisation and preparedness for the care of infected persons. UNICEF is the focal agency for the EVD C4D/social mobilisation in Cote d’Ivoire, with the efforts closely coordinated with the Ministry of Health and the Fight against AIDS, and WHO, the lead agency for EVD crisis communication and the technical authority on the epidemiological and medical response.

Ebola Response Strategy

In Cote d’Ivoire, in line with the global and regional strategy outlined by WHO and national governments, UNICEF leads and supports social mobilisation linking C4D, WASH, Health and Emergency coordination to support containment and control efforts, including:

- Interpersonal communication for the general population, religious groups and students: door-to-door campaigning and community radio broadcasts with messages on risk reduction behaviours, and sensitization sessions for students in schools and for religious leaders
- Production and distribution of communications materials for use at key locations such as markets, schools, and health centres, etc., for sensitization of the population with focus on high risk groups
- Capacity building of key community influencers and mobilizers including religious leaders, boy and girl scouts, and community-based workers to promote healthy behaviours; and training journalists and the mass media
- Hygiene promotion and prepositioning of hygiene materials in health centres and other key sites
- Awareness raising on hygiene in schools with particular focus on those located in the border regions, and providing Support to social mobilisation in border areas and cross border coordination

Programme Response

In collaboration with the government and other partners, the Country Office has provided technical support for the drafting of the National Ebola Prevention Communication Plan and the production of communication tools such as posters, billboards,
leaflets, TV/radio spots, and flipcharts. Media professionals, religious leaders, and the communities including funeral companies have been sensitised and better equipped with information on Ebola. Radio spots have been broadcast on ONUCI FM Radio, reaching most big cities, and they have been translated into local languages and broadcast on 20 community radios. As the lead agency for the WASH sector, the Office supports the inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms in close collaboration with the relevant medical and health authorities and partners to provide water and sanitation services. Installation of hand washing facilities in schools and public places is underway in the border areas with Liberia and Guinea - an independent water supply system is being installed at the treatment centre within the Yopougon University Hospital (CHU), and the distribution of handwashing facilities will start in the first week of November for 600 schools and 50 health centres, with plans to reach more schools and health centres as supplies come in. The Office is supporting 200 health centres located in San Pedro, Cavally, Guémon, Tonkpi, Bafing, Kabadougou, Sud Comoe, Folon, and over 20 treatment centres in 20 different health regions. The Education sectoral group has been meeting regularly, identifying 1,030 schools along the borders as priority, with sensitization sessions in these schools planned to be rolled out starting first week of November. The Office is working on establishing a Standby Agreement with a partner to provide psychosocial support to affected families should the need arise. Information sharing and capacity building activities are being scaled up in the border areas.

Communication for Development (C4D)

On 16 October 2014, as part of the Muskoka C4D activity on essential family practices, the Country Office in collaboration with the departmental directorate of Health and the fight against AIDS in Yamousouko provided briefing to 22 community radio hosts on their role in promoting and sharing key messages on the prevention of EVD with the communities. The participants stated that through the session they had gained increased knowledge on the transmission methods of the EVD. The trained radio professionals developed an action plan for November 2014-March 2015 on supporting prevention of the EVD through their community radio networks. The facilitator went on to conduct awareness sessions in 3 primary schools for about 1,200 students.

The Country Office also actively participated in the communication subcommittee set up by the Prime Minister within the National Committee for the Fight against Ebola, meeting on 5 occasions between 26 September and 23 October 2014. The meetings provided the opportunity to discuss, develop and validate communication strategies to help prevent the entry and if the case may be, the spread of the EVD in Cote d’Ivoire.

The Country Office is under discussion with the government to support the organization of a new communication campaign aided by new audio-visual and print materials. For strengthened partnerships, cooperation agreements are being finalized with the alliance of religious leaders to support 6 communes within Abidjan and 16 localities in other parts of the country, most of which are located in border areas with Guinea, Liberia and Mali. The communities will be better equipped on issues related to traditional practices which may increase the risk of Ebola transmission. The Office will also provide support to the Ministry of Health to conduct a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) study on the EVD.

Supply and Logistics

For Ebola prevention and preparedness, to date, the Country Office has procured 5,000 33 litre buckets and lids, 5,000 taps, 3,600 cartons of bleach, 5,000 metal supports for hand washing facilities, and 5,000 boxes of 60 soap bars. The procurement and provision of basic medical equipment including thermometers and masks, and diarrheal diseases treatment kits for any potential suspected cases is planned. Additionally, 25 tents (9 in Abidjan and 16 in rural areas) have been provided to equip 12 treatment centres in Abidjan (Yopougon, Treichville) and in border regions (Man, Biankouman/Silpilou, Toulepleu, Korhogo, Touba, San Pedro, Zouan Hounien/Danané, Tabou, Guiglo, Odienné).

Media and External Communication

The Country Office produced a short 3-min video to feature the community sensitization work carried out in the border regions with Liberia and Guinea to prevent the spread of the EVD. The video also highlighted the use of mobile text messaging as a way to reach out to a large population with prevention messages. The video was posted on www.unicef.org and was picked up by AFP video which generated coverage about prevention in Cote d’Ivoire in the international news. The Communication Specialist did a phone interview with Sky News about Ebola prevention in Cote d’Ivoire.

Who to contact for further information:

Adele KHUDR
Representative
UNICEF Cote d’Ivoire
Tel: +225 2247 9921
Fax: +225 2247 9922
Email: akhudr@unicef.org

Christina de BRUIN
Deputy Representative
UNICEF Cote d’Ivoire
Tel: +225 2247 9930
Fax: +225 2247 9922
Email: cdebruin@unicef.org

Louis VIGNEAULT-DUBOIS
Communication Specialist
UNICEF Cote d’Ivoire
Tel: +225 2247 9925
Fax: +225 2247 9922
Email: lvigneault@unicef.org