

EBOLA HEMORRHAGIC FEVER EPIDEMIC OUTBREAK, 2007

Government of Uganda Task Force Intervention

A multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary National Task Force (NTF) chaired by the Ministry of Health and co-chaired by WHO coordinated the response at national level. The NTF members included UN agencies, national and international NGOs and Centre for Disease Control (CDC), ICRC and Uganda Red Cross Society. Five sub-committees with clear terms of reference were formed by the NTF based on the key interventions (Coordination and surveillance, Case Management, Social Mobilisation, Epidemiology & laboratory and Logistics & supplies).

At the field level, a parallel District Task Force (DTF) chaired by the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) was established with similar sub committees and terms of reference. The DTF coordinated the local response activities in Bundibugyo district in close collaboration with the NTF and met daily to review the progress and strategize on the way forward. The DTF daily progress reports informed the daily situation reports issued by the NTF.

The membership of the committees at both the National and District levels was based on expertise required. Both the DTF and the NTF held daily meetings at the onset of the epidemic but were later reduced to once a week when the epidemic was brought under control.

Activities of the NTF:

- Coordination of the activities of sub committees through daily meetings. The NTF was responsible for the development of the overall and implementation of response strategy. The reports from the five sub-committees (Coordination and surveillance, Case Management, Social Mobilisation, Epidemiology & laboratory and Logistics & supplies) on key developments in the field further shaped the response and interventions in the field.
- Technical guidance and support to the DTF: the NTF maintained daily communication with the DTF and other districts with alert cases to ensure consistency in implementation, follow up and monitoring of the response in the field in accordance with national and international guidelines for Ebola response. The NTF also provided technical guidance and support to the DTF as required such as collecting and transferring samples from Bundibugyo to Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) in Entebbe for lab testing and confirmation. Through the NTF a number of technical staff was seconded to Bundibugyo district by the partner organizations, while some organizations opened up temporary field offices in Bundibugyo. Members of the NTF made weekly field visits to the affected areas to review the response and to boost the morale of the health workers (confidence building; supervision; trouble shooting; assessment of situation on ground and identification of gaps and urgent needs). This also included advocacy for compensation for health workers who were involved in the risky response and also those who lost their lives. A certificate of recognition was awarded by the NTF on behalf of the GoU to all partners and staff involved in the response.

- Reporting and donor and media briefings: the NTF reviewed progress reports from the field and consolidated and disseminated daily/weekly situation reports. The NTF was also responsible for all official communication on the outbreak and the situation in the affected district through press releases and briefings, such as the official confirmation of the outbreak in November 2007 and then the declaration of the end of the outbreak in February 2008 after the mandatory 42 days count down after the last patient was discharged from the health units.
- Needs analysis, gap identification and resource mobilization: the NTF monitored availability of required resources and mobilized additional resources as needed. In total, about Uganda Shillings 8.5 billion was mobilized for the response, of which about 6.3 billion was from the Government. Other non-financial contributions were also made by members of the NTF. Other supplies such as medicines and health supplies were procured and distributed directly to the National and all Regional Referral hospitals, general hospitals and Health Centre Grade IVs as part of preparedness.
- Information management: the NTF analysed and cleared all data and information on the related to the number of cases and impact of the disease in the district.
- Exit strategy: the NTF oversaw the development and implementation of an exit strategy by the DTF. The exit strategy was budgeted at 230 million shillings of which the MoH provided 150m shillings. Activities included capacity building of the Bundibugyo district (procurement of medical supplies and training of personnel), closing and handing back the medical faculties used for the response such as the isolation units at Kityo and Bundibugyo hospitals.