



EBOLA IN SIERRA LEONE

The impacts of the 'Ebola Virus Disease' on the livelihoods of rural communities, agricultural production and food security

Introduction

In August 2014 *Deutsche Welthungerhilfe* (DWHH) in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS), the FAO (Sierra Leone) and key partners in the food security and livelihoods sector conducted a rapid assessment of the impacts of the EVD on the livelihoods of rural communities, agricultural production and food security in the hardest hit regions of Sierra Leone. The survey focused on the epicenters of the epidemic, the two eastern districts of Kailahun and Kenema: Within seven days trained enumerators interviewed 110 rural households, 79 vendors at the major markets of the area, 64 traditional leaders and three private sector enterprises operating in the respective districts.

Key Findings

1. The people's main sources of livelihood have changed due to the outbreak of the EVD. 97% of the surveyed households indicate that their income has dropped between May and August 2014.
2. The EVD is a driver of migration. Half of the people who have left their communities within the past four months, did so because of the epidemic.
3. In the epicenters of the Ebola outbreak the food production is decreasing: 80% of the surveyed households expect lower returns than last year. By-laws have discouraged many farmers from harvesting their fields. 71% of the interviewed households struggle to find laborers for their farms.
4. The EVD limits the availability and increases the costs of food. Certain foods have become scarce. The price of rice has - in average - risen by 30% since May 2014.

5. The Ebola epidemic has effects on community members' access to financial services: For 77% of the interviewed market vendors the access to credits has decreased since May 2014. In 5% of the surveyed communities banks and microfinance institutions have even halted operations.
6. Market prospects have deteriorated in the wake of the continuing spread of the EVD. Two thirds of the interviewed traders remark that the volume of traded commodities has dropped significantly.
7. Awareness among rural communities of the dangers of the EVD has increased considerably: 83% of the interviewed households claim to know details about the disease and its transmission.

Survey Results

2.1 Impacts of the EVD on Rural Livelihoods

Key Statement: The people's main sources of livelihood have changed due to the outbreak of the EVD. 97% of the surveyed households indicate that their income has dropped between May and August 2014.

88% of the surveyed households in the districts of Kailahun and Kenema sustain their livelihoods with agriculture. 49% provide services to make a living and 23% are engaged in petty trading. For 13% of the surveyed households regular employment is also an important source of livelihood. 74% of households own small livestock such as poultry and goats. Most community members

are subsistence farmers who produce food crops for own consumption.

97% of the surveyed households confirm that their main sources of livelihood have changed between May and August 2014: The farmers' income from agriculture has dropped. 67% of the surveyed households attribute this to the outbreak and rapid spread of the EVD in Sierra Leone. Other reasons include the sudden death of family members, the unavailability of farm inputs as well as the lack of labor (see 'Section 2.3: Impacts of the EVD on Agricultural Production').

2.2 Impacts of the EVD on Migration

Key Statement: The EVD is a driver of migration. Half of the people who have left their communities within the past four months, did so because of the epidemic.

Between May and August 2014 many people have left their home communities because of Ebola: 15% of the surveyed households indicate that members of their family have migrated to other communities. In 50% of these cases the EVD was the main driver. The fear of contracting the EV or being quarantined against their will, has prompted many people to leave their homes. Some survivors had to relocate because they faced strong stigmatization after their return from hospital.

2.3 Impacts of the EVD on Agricultural Production

Key Statement: In the epicenters of the Ebola outbreak the food production is decreasing: 80% of the surveyed households expect lower returns than last year. By-laws have discouraged many farmers from harvesting their fields. 71% of the interviewed households struggle to find laborers for their farms.

Crop farming forms the main agricultural activity of the rural population: 98% of the surveyed communities produce cash and food crops. In 51% of the communities livestock rearing is practiced and in 27% fishing is of relevance. The five most important crops are rice, cassava, cocoa, palm oil and coffee: This year 79% of the surveyed households produced rice, 55% cassava, 45% cocoa, 30% palm oil and 23% coffee.

80% of the surveyed households expect a lower yield this year than last year. This is congruent with 73% of the interviewed community leaders who state that community households have not farmed as much this year as they did last year.

The agricultural workforce has decreased in 91% of the surveyed communities. The sourcing of labor for agricultural work has thus become a problem for farmers. 71% of the surveyed households have problems finding laborers for their farms. Especially youth gangs who normally perform farm work for little money do not work anymore. 56% of the interviewed market vendors believe that this is due to the restricted movement of people, the prohibition to gather in groups and the migration of young people to urban centers.

The outbreak of the EVD also has effects on the operations of the private sector: One trader states that staff members have

been unable to come to work because they were quarantined. All traders are currently operating below capacity: Two of the three interviewed traders downsized their workforce and reduced the working hours of their staff. The traders complain that their total operational costs have increased and their profitability has decreased due to the outbreak of the EVD.

The supervision of farmers is difficult for the traders since many buying agents who usually source agricultural produce from their small-scale suppliers refuse to enter certain operational areas for fear of Ebola. Police check points have been established at various locations. As a result the evacuation of fresh produce from the field is jeopardized. There are alleged incidents of corruption. This also makes it difficult to bring in new supplies from other regions. Quarantined areas are not accessible at all. The number of customers has decreased. The interviewed traders struggle to monitor field activities. In the hotspot areas of the EVD farmers have been discouraged from harvesting their crops as a result of strict by-laws.

On the major markets the impacts of the EVD are also visible: The number of functioning stalls has changed dramatically between May and August 2014. Especially the number of stalls selling cocoa, coffee, palm oil, rice, groundnuts and cassava has dropped.

Product	No of stalls has risen (in % of respondents)	No of stall is stable (in % of respondents)	No of stalls has dropped (in % of respondents)
Cocoa	18	21	61
Coffee	20	20	60
Palm Oil	27	15	58
Rice	31	11	58
Groundnut	29	15	56
Cassava	38	15	47

2.4 Impacts of the EVD on Food Security

Key Statement: The EVD limits the availability and increases the costs of food. Certain foods have become scarce. The price of rice has - in average - risen by 30% since May 2014.

95% of the surveyed households in the districts of Kailahun and Kenema source their food from their own farm. Other commodities are bought at small local or district markets. In contrast, 56% of the interviewed market vendors source their food and other household commodities from local markets. Only 14% of them produce food themselves.

99% of the surveyed households indicate that the availability of food has been limited during the past four months. 71% of the community leaders attribute this fact to the season (i.e. the hunger period). But 38% also indicate that the transport of food supplies has been a problem. This is an indirect consequence of the government policies for containing the EVD.

Since May 2014 the access to food has been difficult for 95% of the surveyed communities. 98% of the interviewed community

leaders stress that food has become scarce. 96% of them have received complaints by community members over the low availability and high costs of food. Imported rice, palm oil, cassava, vegetables and fish are the five most consumed food items. It is thus alarming that more than 40% of all interviewed households consider fish, palm oil and local rice to be scarce on the market. The table below lists the nine most consumed and currently scarcest food items.

Product	Consumed by HHs (in %)	Products considered to be scarce (in % of respondents)
Imported Rice	86	22
Palm Oil	80	54
Cassava	65	15
Vegetables	63	6
Fish	58	42
Local Rice	27	76
Fruits	8	38
Ruminants	6	46
Bush Meat	4	55

52% of the surveyed households state that they have had to limit their food intake since May 2014. 11% of the respondents eat staple foods twice per day, the remaining 89% only once. Maybe this is due to the increased prices of fresh produce: 87% of the interviewed market vendors stress that the prices of commodities have increased. The two most important reasons include transport restrictions (mentioned by 64%) and quarantine measures (54%). At the surveyed markets the prices of groundnuts have - in average - increased by 39%, vegetables and cocoa by 32% and rice and cassava by 30% and 29% between March and August 2014. The five most consumed products have increased by 10%-30% in average.

Product	Unit	Average Price Mar-May (in SLL)	Average Price Jun-Aug (in SLL)	Price Increase (in SLL)	Price Increase in % (min/max)
Groundnut	cup	1.528	2.131	603	39 (-6/67)
Vegetables	pile	1.000	1.322	322	32 (-50/400)
Cocoa	kg	6.135	8.070	1.935	32 (17/60)
Rice	cup	969	1.260	291	30 (6/50)
Cassava	pile	1.529	1.976	447	29 (0/300)
Palm Oil	pint	6.722	8.193	1.471	22 (-12/80)
Fish	pile	2.000	2.196	196	10 (0/100)

2.5 Impacts of the EVD on the Access to Financial Services

Key Statement: The Ebola epidemic has effects on community members' access to financial services: For 77% of the interviewed market vendors the access to credits has decreased since May 2014. In 5% of the surveyed communities banks and microfinance institutions have even halted operations.

Although 55% of the interviewed market vendors have access to financial services from institutions such as 'Village Savings and Loan Associations', banks and microfinance institutes, 77% of them believe that their access to financial services has decreased due to the outbreak of the EVD. Similarly, farmers struggle to raise credits for their livelihoods: In 35% of the surveyed communities the 'Village Savings and Loan Associations' play an important role as financing bodies. Community banks and traders who pre-finance farmers are of relevance in 16% and 15% of the surveyed communities. However, since the beginning of the Ebola epidemic community banks in 5% of the surveyed communities have halted operations.

2.6 Impacts of the EVD on the Markets / Business Prospects

Key Statement: Market prospects have deteriorated in the wake of the continuing spread of the EVD. Two thirds of the interviewed traders remark that the volume of traded commodities has dropped significantly.

87% of the interviewed market vendors state that the current market situation is worse than before the outbreak of the EVD. Only 2% feel that it has improved. A rather gloomy sentiment prevails also among the traders: For two companies the volume of traded commodities has dropped significantly. Likewise, the commodity flows between rural areas and the urban agglomerations have decreased. However, all three enterprises assess their future business prospects differently: While one trader expects business to worsen, one is certain that business prospects will remain unchanged in the medium term and one insists that business prospects will improve once the check points have been removed.

2.7 Awareness among Community Members of the EVD

Key Statement: Awareness among rural communities of the dangers of the EVD has increased considerably: 83% of the interviewed households claim to know details about the disease and its transmission.

In March, April and May 2014 only very few community members understood the risks and dangers of the EVD and knew how to protect themselves from transmission. However, due to massive efforts of the government and its partners, awareness among rural communities has been heightened considerably: Because of the risks involved in the consumption of bush meat, only 15% of the surveyed households admit to hunt and eat rodents, bats or monkeys. 83% claim to know details about the EVD and 17% have heard of it. Only 2% of the interviewed traditional leaders state that the members of their community are not knowledgeable about the disease.

Conclusion

The study reveals that the outbreak and spread of the EVD in Sierra Leone has a multitude of impacts on the livelihoods of rural communities, agricultural production and food security in the epicenters of the epidemic. As trends indicate, the situation is likely to worsen in the course of the next months: *Deutsche Welthungerhilfe* (DWHH) thus expects serious food shortages to

hit the country in early 2015: As most households in rural areas depend on agriculture and grow their own food, the declining agricultural production and bad harvests might force many community members to source food from local markets or traders. However, as food is not only becoming scarce, but also increasingly expensive most farmers will not have the means to finance their needs. Their access to financial institutions is limited. Even traders will be reluctant to pre-finance their farmers. Many international traders have indeed left the country. As a result, more people will leave their villages and move to urban centers in search of a better life. The availability of labor will thus become a pressing issue in rural areas. International investments will not compensate for the loss of agricultural productivity and provide relief for the ailing economy.

In view of this situation it is necessary to start preparing for the large scale distribution of food aid, further strengthen the health system and establish an early-warning-system.

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Cover Photograph: Police and army help to enforce the quarantine measure declared by the government of Sierra Leone. Photo: Deutsche Welthungerhilfe

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