

# UNDP's Support to Uganda's National Ebola Response



Strengthening Resilience To Public Health Emergencies in Uganda



*The Minister of State for Health (Primary Healthcare) Hon. Margaret Muhanga (3rd from left), His Eminence Sheikh Shaban R. Mubaje (Co- President Inter-Religious Council of Uganda) and officials from UNDP, KCCA, Buganda Kingdom and WHO during a high-level partnership engagement on public health emergencies held at UNDP offices.*

Following the declaration of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in Uganda on 20 September 2022, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) repurposed core resources and secured additional funding from the UNDP Crisis Bureau to contribute \$1,300,000 USD (about 4.85bn UGX) to the national response to curb transmission of the virus, minimize mortality and disruption of socio-economic and health systems, improve standards of care for affected persons and safeguard development gains.

UNDP support was directed at the following priority areas: (a) Risk Communication and Community Engagement; (b) Strengthening EVD Response Coordination at National and Sub-national Levels; (c) Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) with a focus on EVD Waste Management; (d) Human Resource Support; and (e) Socio-economic Impact Assessment and Early Recovery.

Central to this support was intensified community engagement, robust public health risk communications, and mass production and distribution of Information, Education and Communications (IEC) materials through the Ministry of Health, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU), Buganda Kingdom and Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) structures which triggered positive behavioral changes necessary to deal with Ebola. Partnership with Buganda kingdom was very critical because Mubende and Kassanda districts—the epicenter's of the EVD outbreak are all within Buganda kingdom. Collaboration with KCCA was also important to deprive the virus of a stronghold in the country's capital city and limit transmission to other parts of the country. Highlights of this support include:

## 1. Deployment of health specialists to improve standards of care

UNDP recruited 20 United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Volunteers Programme. These UNVs were then deployed through WHO to improve standards of care for Ebola patients, suspects and survivors and minimize transmission in healthcare settings and communities in high-risk areas. They included eight Infection Prevention Officers, two Psychosocial Support Officers, four Case Management Officers and six Nurses.



The UNDP Resident Representative Ms. Elsie Attafuah with the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Representative to Uganda, Dr Yonas Tegegn Woldemariam on the occasion of signing the UN to UN Agreement for the deployment of 20 specialists to support the National Ebola Response. Looking on is UNDP Deputy Representative Ms. Sheila Ngatia and UNV Country Coordinator Mr. Moses Mubiru.

## 2. Mass production and distribution of EVD awareness messages

A total of **436,000** EVD awareness materials have been printed and distributed through the Ministry of Health, the media, IRCU and Buganda Kingdom structures. These include **265,000** EVD posters in eight languages – English, Luganda, Runyankore-Rukiga, Runyoro-Rutooro, Lukhonzu, Acholi, Ateso and Lumasaba.

An additional 146,000 EVD posters and statements by IRCU and Buganda Kingdom were also printed in English and local languages and distributed as inserts in Bukedde, New Vision and Daily Monitor

newspapers with an estimated readership of 10 people per newspaper which translates into a reach of 1,460,000 people.

Similarly, UNDP produced **25,000 reflector jackets** with EVD awareness messages that were distributed through the Ministry of Health and KCCA structures to boda boda riders across the country.

Transporters like boda boda riders were identified as having a heightened risk of contracting Ebola and yet their occupation offers effective avenues for spreading EVD awareness messages to the public.



His Eminence Sheikh Shaban R. Mubaje – IRCU Co-President receives EVD posters from UNDP Resident Representative Ms. Elsie Attafuah and the Minister of State for Health (Primary Healthcare) Hon. Margaret Muhanga

These interventions increased knowledge and awareness about EVD, debunked rumors, myths and misconceptions and triggered a public response to EVD prevention and control measures. They also enabled cultural, religious, political and community leaders to provide leadership and ownership of risk communication and community engagement response interventions.

## 3. National public campaign on Ebola awareness, control and prevention

Working with partners, UNDP started extensive mass public awareness campaigns on Ebola. This entailed recording and dissemination of radio and TV awareness, prevention and control messages from religious and cultural leaders which aired on close to 10 television stations and 30 radio stations across the country.



*IRCU Leaders during an EVD awareness radio talk show*

#### 4. Unleashing the power of faith communities against Ebola

With UNDP support, the IRCU issued a statement under the theme, “**Unleashing the power of faith communities against Ebola**”, and a Pastoral Letter to the nation on Ebola which were instrumental in mobilizing the members of the eight religious denominations that constitute over 90% of Uganda’s population to support EVD prevention, early detection and referral and control measures. The IRCU comprises the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Province of the Church of Uganda, the Uganda Orthodox Church, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, the Seventh-day Adventist Church-Uganda Union Mission, the Born-Again Faith in Uganda (BAF) and the National Alliance of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in Uganda.



*The Katikkiro of Buganda Charles Peter Mayiga during an EVD awareness session*

by capitalising on their position and platforms to inspire action against Ebola. UNDP supported the two institutions to effectively deliver messages on prevention, early detection and referral of EVD focusing on the nine districts with confirmed cases, neighboring communities and other hotspot areas with a heightened risk of contracting Ebola. The nine affected districts were Mubende, Kassanda, Kyegegwa, Bunyangabu, Kagadi, Wakiso, Masaka, Kampala and Jinja.

UNDP strengthened the capacity and coordination of religious leaders to prepare and respond to public health emergencies. To this end, a total of 360 senior leaders from each of the eight religious denominations under IRCU were sensitised on prevention, early detection and referral of EVD affected individuals and communities. These were instrumental in cascading EVD messages to their followers.

Similarly, a total of 150 clan heads and county chiefs from 18 counties of Buganda Kingdom were sensitized on EVD and other public health disruptions, turning them into champions to influence others and foster EVD prevention and control behaviors.

In Buganda, the kingdom held Ebyoto community engagements (fireplace conversations) on prevention of EVD attended by 17,500 participants who were equipped to disseminate correct information to the communities and sensitise them on the signs and symptoms of disease and prevention measures. A key outcome of the fireplace conversations was the formation of sub-county task forces for managing public health emergencies.



*UNDP Resident Representative Ms. Elsie Attafuah being driven on motorcycle wearing a reflector jacket with EVD awareness messages*

#### 5. Strengthening community engagement to end Ebola

UNDP supported Buganda Kingdom and the IRCU to mobilize faith and cultural leaders to play a significant role in community social mobilization

## 6. Supporting infection prevention and control in hospitals

UNDP procured five heavy-duty washing machines to support infection prevention and control. Efforts are ongoing to have these installed at Mulago National Referral Hospital, Entebbe Regional Referral Hospital, and Mubende Regional Referral Hospital.

## 7. Strengthening the media's capacity to report public health emergencies

In a bid to strengthen media's understanding and accurate reporting on public health emergencies, Buganda Kingdom, with support from UNDP, trained journalists on prevention and reporting on EVD. Participants were also trained on self-protection and prevention of EVD. Topics covered include EVD prevention and control measures which the journalists also communicated to their audiences.

## 8. Strengthening EVD response coordination at national and sub-national levels

Leveraging on its convening power, UNDP organised a high-level engagement to promote new partnerships for public health emergencies. This was attended by the Minister of State for Health in Charge of Primary Health Care, Hon. Margaret Muhanga, and officials from the World Health Organisation, IRCU, Buganda Kingdom and Kampala Capital City Authority. The function also served as a formal launch of the partnership and ceremonial handover of EVD equipment such as heavy-duty washing machines, posters and reflector jackets to the partners.

EVD taskforces within the Buganda Kingdom cultural structures were launched to coordinate,

monitor and inform on the epidemic to the communities and to the higher authorities. Communities were sensitized about the signs and symptoms of EVD and encouraged to be more vigilant and report any suspicious cases.

## Moving forward

UNDP is working on the socio-economic impact assessment of the EVD outbreak alongside the Government of Uganda as a means of identifying pathways to support those most severely impacted by this crisis. UNDP will dedicate resources to counterbalance negative disruptive impacts on long-term socio-economic development that are too often inadvertently caused by the inflow of short-term emergency aid.

More than ever, this crisis confirms that there can be no development where there is no robust health system for the population. UNDP Uganda will, therefore, further deepen its ongoing collaboration and cooperation with both the Ministry Health and the World Health Organization to strengthen resilience and response to public health emergencies.

UNDP Uganda will focus on promoting effective and inclusive governance for health for the populations with a view to increasing resilience and better anticipating and preventing epidemiological risk. On this front, as a first initiative, UNDP has launched an assessment process on biohazards waste management on a "systemic" approach and will assist the Ministry of Health in its effort to increase safety of its frontline health workforce and diminish the risk of transmission.

On a more global approach, UNDP will support National Authorities in designing a more holistic and integrated approach to risk reduction at the multisectoral level.

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