

Welbodi Partnership:

An Integrated Approach to Combat Ebola and Provide Long-Term Health Sector Support

The Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone is not only a tragic consequence of the country's weak health system, but has exacerbated the very weaknesses that allowed the outbreak to thrive. We consider our efforts to combat Ebola as an extension of our long-term support to improve the quality and accessibility of healthcare in Sierra Leone, and to ensure that women and children are able to access essential, life-saving services.

Sierra Leone's healthcare system is chronically under-resourced, resulting in weak healthcare systems, distrusted by the people they are designed to help. The system fails to help the estimated 28,000 (Tang 2014) children that die every year in Sierra Leone, largely from preventable or easily treatable diseases, and it similarly failed to contain the Ebola outbreak. Leading commentators are now calling for a concerted effort to strengthen the healthcare system as part of the response to the Ebola outbreak. (International Development Committee 2014; Gates 2014). Improvements are needed across existing healthcare facilities and at the community level to build knowledge, power and trust into the healthcare system.

Over the next 36 months, we plan to integrate our emergency response to the Ebola outbreak with long-term community engagement and health sector strengthening, particularly capacity building for health workers. This will include providing high-quality in-service training and mentorship to nursing staff in government hospitals and primary health units; supporting the delivery of Sierra Leone's first diploma course in Paediatric Nursing Management and Leadership in partnership with the University of Sierra Leone; and establishing postgraduate training for doctors who want to specialise in child health. All of these build upon our efforts prior to the outbreak. In addition, we will build on existing partnerships and expand our direct engagement with poor and vulnerable communities in Freetown in order to strengthen community-based health prevention, address mistrust and misinformation that lead families to delay or avoid seeking medical care, and support communities to identify and address what they see as the most important barriers to paediatric and maternal health.

This unique integrated approach allows a sustainable intervention at a time when Sierra Leone's healthcare system is at its greatest need.