

## DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

**The DRC and four priority 1 countries and partners meet for two days in DRC to enhance cross border preparedness for and tighten response measures against Ebola  
14th – 15th August 2019, Goma, DRC.**

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### **Background**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak has been ongoing in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in North Kivu and Ituri provinces for the past one year. The outbreak was recently declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the WHO/DG, on the advice of the IHR Emergency Committee, following a confirmation of a case in Goma in July 2019. The risk of the disease spreading to other non-affected provinces in DRC and the countries neighboring DRC is very high due to cross-border movements of people, goods and services. Uganda already experienced an outbreak with cases imported from DRC and getting confirmed while in Uganda. The countries neighboring DRC are being supported by WHO and partners to implement preparedness and readiness measures to ensure optimal capacity for early detection of EVD and rapid outbreak containment. Movements of contacts across the porous borders between DRC and neighboring countries, especially priority 1 countries including Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and South Sudan, pose a threat of cross-border transmission of EVD. This necessitates cross-border collaboration and information sharing between the countries to strengthen capacity for preparedness, early detection, and effective response. Timely and effective response is critical for saving lives, reducing the economic impact, and mitigating the increased burden on fragile health systems. There are ongoing efforts between DRC and some of the countries to strengthen cross border collaboration.

### **Cross-border meeting**

In this context, from 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> August, a two-day cross border meeting between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and four of the priority 1 countries presented above dealing with the Ebola virus disease outbreak, was held in Goma, DRC. The meeting was officially opened by His Excellency the Provincial Health Minister of North Kivu district in the presence of the Secretary General for Health, the Coordinator Ebola Response in Goma, the Representative of the WHO Director-General in DRC, Dr Peter Graaff.

The meeting was attended by government and WHO staff from the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda, as well as WHO staff from the WHO DRC Office, the Regional Office for Africa and Headquarters. Supporting partners included: UN-OCHA, US-CDC, Africa CDC, MSF Intersectional, IOM and UNICEF.

## General Objective

The main purpose of this cross-border meeting was to discuss measures to enhance cross-border collaboration between DRC and all four Priority 1 countries on Ebola preparedness and response. At the beginning of August, the Ebola outbreak had its first-year anniversary. Despite great efforts and support to contain and control the disease, it is crucial that bordering countries are ready and prepared to handle effectively potential Ebola cases and other health emergencies.

## Outputs Achieved

The participants discussed the following key issues:

- Status of the EVD outbreak in the DRC
- The status of emergency preparedness activities and capacities in districts bordering the DRC.
- Overview of the Strategic Response Plan 4<sup>th</sup> edition (SRP4)
- Overview of the IHR (2005), re-enforcing the Mandatory and Optional IHR National Focal Point (NFP) Functions and Operational Framework and Improving Cross Border Collaboration in the Context of the EVD Outbreak in the DRC
- How to address gaps and build consensus on the collaborative activities such as:
  - Cross border real time surveillance
  - Mechanisms for cross-border collaboration between the countries for emergency preparedness and response
  - Establishment of a functional mechanism for coordination between the countries (district, provincial and national levels), including modalities for coordination and collaboration for preparedness when cross-border transmission occurs.
- Regular and rapid sharing of information between counties and districts in the cross-border surveillance zones was addressed to facilitate early detection, investigation, confirmation and response.
- Development of a draft joint action plan with identified cross-border public health interventions to be implemented during preparedness and immediately following notification of a case.
- A draft joint monitoring and evaluation mechanism to track progress in the implementation of cross-border public health interventions is in the pipeline.
- UNHCR and other agencies and International NGOs should be involved in cross border collaborative activities with agencies like customs, Immigration.
- Information should be shared in relevant official languages, among the partners and relevant government agencies and ministries.

The meeting made the following recommendations

1. All countries should establish bilateral collaboration with DRC. Multilateral collaboration should be considered in the near future.

2. MOUs, protocols and SOPs should be developed to guide the areas for bilateral collaboration, including how coordination will be conducted at national, intermediate and local levels;
3. Mechanisms for formal and informal communication and information sharing should be established between and amongst countries, especially for cross border districts and health zones;
4. Joint cross border surveillance, including surveillance zones and joint response should be established between DRC and neighboring countries;
5. Countries should regularly conduct exchange visits to share best practices and experiences;
6. Countries should conduct regular joint "mixed<sup>1</sup>" trainings and cross border quarterly meetings to build trust and strengthen collaboration;
7. Countries should standardize case definitions, including the list of events that must be reported at the local level, from one country to another as part of the EVD response. More specifically, the criteria or triggers, to signal an "alert", taking into account: the definitions of an alert from each country, the geographical location (e.g. the distance from the border where the alert is located), the level of investigation required before reporting an alert (e.g. simple alert, validated alert, suspect case, confirmed case, rumor, etc.), and if necessary to define who contacts who at different administrative levels, and define the mechanisms / obligations in relation to the retro-information after having reported an alert (e.g. who confirms to whom if the alert finally constituted a confirmed case or not case?). Further countries should define the minimum package of interventions for ground crossings including Infections prevention and control and isolation facilities;
8. Countries should conduct period activities involving the media on cross border events;
9. Countries should conduct joint monitoring and evaluation, including joint simulation exercises and joint after action reviews (AARs) to test functionality of systems in place and share lessons learnt;
10. Countries should conduct joint and After Action reviews at the end of the EVD epidemic to consolidate lessons learn and generate recommendations as per IHR.
11. Countries should share capacity in terms of personnel deployment and medical countermeasures.
12. Travel of health experts when there is an emergency should be expedited.

## Next Steps

### Countries

1. Develop/Finalize bilateral road maps for the implementation of the above recommendations with concrete timelines and required resources.
2. Organize a high level political meeting to foster political buy in and for domestic resource mobilization

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<sup>1</sup> Multidisciplinary and multisectoral

## **WHO and Partners**

1. Support the countries technically and financially to implement the above recommendations.
2. Support countries technically and financially to organize the high level political meeting.
3. Support Countries to monitor and implement the recommendations
4. Support coordination and information sharing across the countries, both at the national and at the local levels.