

EBOLA: BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Questioning a crisis

Introduction

On 18 October 2014 Oxfam called for determined action to prevent the Ebola outbreak in West Africa from becoming the “definitive humanitarian disaster of our generation” and took the rare step of advocating for military intervention to help control the outbreak. US Secretary of State, John Kerry, stated that Ebola threatened to become “a scourge like HIV or polio”.¹ Meanwhile, newspaper headlines around the world focused on the testimonies of the courageous doctors and nurses who volunteered to travel to West Africa and treat Ebola victims.²



Community health worker Marrison Thomson teaches children how to wash their hands at an Oxfam Hand Washing Point in Congo Town, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Photo: Tommy Trenchard/Oxfam

This resource helps pupils to understand how Ebola, a deadly but historically relatively rare disease³, became the defining public health emergency of 2014. It looks behind the headlines to explore how the Ebola outbreak developed as a ‘perfect storm’, where a number of factors combined at the same time to create an unprecedented crisis. It examines the longer term

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/18/Ebola-world-must-do-more-stop-disaster-generation-oxfam>

² For example see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-29456849>

³ http://www.bu.edu/bostonia/files/2014/08/h_past_Ebola_outbreaks.jpg Also see the Observer 26.10.2014

impacts of the crisis on the affected countries. Finally, it describes the measures being taken to control the outbreak.

Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) was first identified by doctors in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) in 1976. The symptoms, treatment and control of Ebola are well described elsewhere⁴ and this resource will not dwell on the purely medical dimensions of the outbreak. However, it is not inevitable that all outbreaks of Ebola create large-scale public health emergencies. Indeed, several previous outbreaks have been controlled with relatively small numbers of fatalities.⁵ For example, in 2014 alone, Nigeria took speedy action to control an outbreak of Ebola introduced to the country by an infected traveller from Liberia⁶ and a separate outbreak of the disease in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was curbed thanks to similar determined action but with virtually no media attention⁷



Chlorine and water, essential for controlling Ebola
Photo: Tommy Trenchard/Oxfam

However, this outbreak, which is believed to have begun in Gueckedou, Guinea, in December 2013 with the infection of a single child, has been tragically and uniquely different. A combination of fragile governance, weak and unprepared public health systems, lack of knowledge of the disease in West Africa and – some would say - global inertia created a 'perfect storm.' As of 25 October 2015, 10,141 people had been infected with Ebola and 4,922 had died.⁸ These figures stand as a stark reminder of the adage that prevention is better than a cure and throw light on the massive inequalities in global health provision. When crises strike, the poorest suffer most.⁹ Oxfam warns that what the world does during

⁴ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/>

⁵ Observer 26.10.2014

⁶ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/Ebola/20-october-2014/en/>

⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/15/Ebola-outbreak-central-africa-contained>

⁸ http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/137185/1/roadmapupdate25Oct14_eng.pdf?ua=1

⁹ <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/blogs/2014/10/the-inequality-of-crises>

November and early December 2014 will decide just how serious this unfolding Ebola crisis becomes.¹⁰

How to use this resource

This resource consists of a PowerPoint presentation, a lesson activity and materials for further curriculum making.

The PowerPoint presentation consists of 25 slides and teachers may wish to edit or compress it depending on the time available and the age group being taught.

- Slides 1 – 4: Briefly describe the Ebola virus and the spread of the outbreak.
- Slides 5 – 14: Explore the ‘perfect storm’ that transformed the outbreak into a crisis
- Slides 15 – 19: Examine some of the longer term social and economic impacts of the outbreak
- Slides 20 – 25: Describe how the outbreak is being controlled

The classroom activity uses the content of the PowerPoint presentation to construct an *issue tree*¹¹ exploring the causes and consequences of the Ebola outbreak, along with solutions. The supplementary *Ebola recap sheet* may be used as a prompt to constructing the *issue tree* or as a guide to taking notes.

Additional primary audio and visual materials are provided for teachers to develop their own classroom resources. Please share your resources with us by emailing education@oxfam.org.uk

Curriculum making

News about the Ebola outbreak goes out of date very quickly. The World Health Organisation produces regular situation reports:

<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/Ebola/situation-reports/en/>

United Nations situation reports

<http://www.un.org/Ebolaresponse/mission.shtml>

Catholic Relief Services & United Nations Children’s Fund – ‘Study on Public Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Relating to Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). Prevention and Medical Care in Sierra Leone’ (2014)

<http://reliefweb.int/report/sierra-leone/study-public-knowledge-attitudes-and-practices-relating-ebola-virus-disease-evd>

¹⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/18/Ebola-world-must-do-more-stop-disaster-generation-oxfam>

¹¹ <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/Education/Global%20Citizenship/GCNewTeacherENGLAND.ashx> pg 9

Much media coverage of the Ebola outbreak has focused on the possible impact on western countries. The BBC Africa page has comprehensive coverage of the crisis from West Africa <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-28754546>

The Guardian has comprehensive coverage of the crisis <http://www.theguardian.com/world/Ebola>

Oxfam's Holly Taylor is in Sierra Leone and has been blogging regularly. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/blogs/author/holly-taylor>

Oxfam's Holly Taylor is interviewed on Radio 1 Newsbeat (audio – 1:07) <https://audioboom.com/boos/2584716-oxfam-s-holly-taylor-reports-from-the-frontline-on-Ebola>

Oxfam's Chris Worrall is interviewed on CBBC Newsround (video – 1:25) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/29687339>

Background reading

The Ebola crisis has attracted daily media attention. Here are some pieces that explore the issues in greater depth and take different perspectives.

Leigh Phillips - 'The political economy of Ebola.' ZNet, 21.10.2014 <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/the-political-economy-of-Ebola/>

Fraser Nelson - 'Ebola may be gruesome but it's not the biggest threat to Africa' Daily Telegraph, 17.10.2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/Ebola/11167158/Ebola-may-be-gruesome-but-its-not-the-biggest-threat-to-Africa.html>

David Heymann - 'The Ebola outbreak this year you won't have heard about.' The Guardian, 16.10.2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/15/Ebola-outbreak-central-africa-contained>

Alexandra Sifferlin – 'Nigeria is Ebola-free: here's what they did right.' Time, 19.10.2014 <http://time.com/3522984/Ebola-nigeria-who/>

Sarah Bosely - 'Nigeria's Ebola crackdown is an example to the world.' Guardian, 20.10.2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/20/nigeria-Ebola-crackdown-example-to-world>

Nicholas Kristof – 'How to defeat Ebola' New York Times, 22.10.2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/23/opinion/nicholas-kristof-how-to-defeat-Ebola.html?_r=2#

Gary Younge – ‘Ebola has exposed America's fear, and Barack Obama's vulnerability.’
Guardian, 19.10.2014

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/19/Ebola-america-fear-barack-obama-virus>

Lenny Bernstein – ‘.With Ebola crippling the health system, Liberians die of routine medical problems.’ Washington Post, 20.09.2014.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/with-Ebola-crippling-the-health-system-liberians-die-of-routine-medical-problems/2014/09/20/727dcfbc-400b-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f_story.html

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