

POLICY BRIEF: STRENGTHENING UGANDA'S PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO EBOLA OUTBREAKS

Introduction

Uganda continues to face significant threats from Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), highlighting persistent gaps in surveillance, diagnostics, community engagement, and stigma reduction. The IDEA Fellowship Program at Busitema University convened a global conference to address these issues, recommending strategic actions for improved epidemic management.

Key Issues Identified:

- 1. Disease Nomenclature and Stigma:**
 - Geographical naming of Ebola contributes to stigma, impacting public perception and policy effectiveness.
 - Neutral terms such as "Filoviral Hemorrhagic Fever" (FHF) or "Severe Viral Hemorrhagic Fever" (SVHF) were recommended.
- 2. Surveillance and Diagnostics:**
 - Strengthening real-time surveillance and diagnostics is crucial, including community-based and mobile health solutions.
 - Improved laboratory capacity and rapid diagnostic capabilities can significantly reduce outbreak severity.
- 3. Community Engagement:**
 - Active community participation is essential in managing misinformation and stigma.
 - Strategies include targeted awareness campaigns and involving local leadership to enhance public trust and response compliance.
- 4. Technology and Innovation:**
 - Digital health technologies such as GIS mapping, mobile health tools, and real-time data tracking can improve outbreak monitoring and response efficiency.
- 5. Research and Collaboration:**
 - Sustained investment in research, vaccine development, and clinical trials is critical.
 - The establishment of the Global Viral Haemorrhagic Fever Research Network (GLOVIRN) is recommended for coordinated global research and response.

Policy Recommendations:

- Adopt neutral disease terminology to mitigate stigma and enhance public health messaging.
- Strengthen early-warning systems and real-time surveillance capacities nationwide.
- Enhance laboratory diagnostic capabilities and training to facilitate rapid outbreak detection and containment.
- Expand community-based programs focused on behavioral change, public education, and active participation.
- Integrate digital health technologies to improve epidemic preparedness and response.
- Support global collaborative research initiatives through the operationalization of GLOVIRN.

Conclusion

Implementing these strategic actions will significantly enhance Uganda's capacity to manage Ebola outbreaks effectively, minimize socio-economic impacts, and strengthen resilience against future public health threats.