



MEETING REPORT
UN-BUSINESS COLLABORATION FOR GLOBAL EBOLA RESPONSE

UN Foundation & UN Global Compact
Together with the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER)

11 December 2014
United Nations Headquarters

Overview:

Leaders from the private sector, UN, government, and civil society convened on 11 December to highlight successful interventions by business in support of Ebola response, identify lessons learned, and explore how success can be replicated. Participants also discussed the role of business in long-term regional recovery, and considered how lessons learned in the current emergency can help foster more effective collaboration across sectors to face future global public health challenges. The meeting aimed to identify specific new partnership and engagement opportunities for participants to take forward as a result of the day's discussion and exchange, strengthen existing collaboration and contribute to an emerging framework for stronger cross-sector partnership in response to global emergencies.

Executive Summary: Key themes, outcomes, and action opportunities

An unprecedented coalition has emerged to fight Ebola – and businesses are important coalition players

Affected governments and communities, the international community, the entire UN system, non-governmental organizations and the private sector have formed an unprecedented coalition to end the Ebola outbreak and support long-term recovery. Businesses can and should be treated as strategic partners in Ebola response. Companies are bringing vital knowledge and expertise to bear on Ebola response efforts, and are eager to leverage these strengths to help the communities where they operate in partnership with other sectors.

UN-business collaboration is scaling up, with important impact

The global community cannot respond effectively to disasters or public emergencies in silos. Cross-sector approaches involving the UN, governments, civil society and the private sector must be adopted.

Local markets must be strengthened and supported

The public sector must preserve enabling environments to ensure businesses can continue operating and contributing to the fight against Ebola and long-term recovery.

Businesses in affected countries are playing a crucial role in response efforts

One of the most important contributions businesses can make to fight Ebola is maintaining operations in affected countries, protecting livelihoods and ensuring quick recovery. Rising business costs and economic pressures make this increasingly difficult.

Current collaboration is shaping partnerships for the future and will help prepare for future global health emergencies

Businesses mobilizing resources in this crisis recognize the benefit of creating mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration in advance of future emergencies. Collaboration underway is enhancing emergency preparedness while laying the groundwork for long-term integrated strengthening of health systems, markets and society.

New and innovative approaches are emerging to financing Ebola response

In addition to operational contributions, the private sector is providing essential financing for Ebola response and recovery. A number of sources cite the private sector as the third-largest donor in this crisis. Major financial contributions of a number of African business leaders are particularly noteworthy.

Governments are counting on cross-sector collaboration to deliver an effective, multi-dimensional response effort

Businesses are urged to have confidence that their investment in Ebola response will yield important economic returns by helping economies and communities recover. In turn, government actors must preserve and strengthen enabling environments to allow market stability and continuity. Supporting resumption of commercial flights and greater openness in transport are key priorities.

Meeting Summary

An unprecedented coalition has emerged to fight Ebola – and businesses are important coalition players

Affected governments and communities, the international community, the entire UN system, non-governmental organizations and the private sector have formed an unprecedented coalition to end the Ebola outbreak and support long-term recovery. Many businesses have risen to the occasion by committing funds, supplies, equipment and expertise to the Ebola response. As David Nabarro, UN Special Envoy on Ebola, stated in his keynote address, “The United Nations system has hugely benefited from the pro bono services of many companies.” This contribution will remain critical, as the international community looks to stem the outbreak and eventually move into a recovery phase, where restarting the stalled economies of these countries will be imperative.

However, businesses are also making it clear that their contributions should not be perceived of as simply an afterthought by other responders. Businesses can and should be treated as strategic partners; they are not simply sources of cash and assets. Companies with major footprints in Western Africa can bring vital knowledge and expertise to bear on Ebola response efforts, and are eager to leverage these strengths to help the communities where they operate in partnership with responders from other sectors.

An example of business leadership for Ebola response is the Ebola Private Sector Mobilization Group (EPSMG), a coalition of companies with interests and operations in Western Africa that now includes over 100 companies and many other participating stakeholders from other sectors. Created as a means for companies to share information on Ebola to protect employees and their families and communities, EPSMG has expanded its activities to advocacy on issues like travel restrictions and coordination with responding agencies on the ground to maximize private sector impact.

EPSMG members and other meeting participants highlighted the need for businesses to collaborate with each other in times of crisis, not just with the UN and civil society. Exceptional circumstances sometimes call for unconventional partners, and the Ebola outbreak has demonstrated that even the fiercest of competitors can and should come together to collaborate for the greater good.

UN-business collaboration is scaling up, with important impact

The UN stands ready and eager to work with the private sector – not only on Ebola but also on long-term, meaningful partnerships. The global community can no longer rely on responding to disasters or public emergencies in silos. Rather, these responses require a cross-sector approach that involves the UN, governments, civil society and the private sector. The Ebola outbreak should serve as an opportunity for business to “rediscover the UN as an indispensable, long-term strategic partner,” in the words of Georg Kell, Executive Director of the UN Global Compact.

Throughout the day, high-level participants from UN agencies emphasized the tremendous importance of involving the private sector in the response, underlining that the UN cannot hope to beat the outbreak without considerable cross-sector support. During the first panel, Partnerships in Progress, panelists from the UN and private sector shared examples of collaboration already under way and the early impact it is having. Representatives from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Better than Cash Alliance highlighted innovative mobile banking practices to ensure payments to health workers on the frontlines; the UN’s Special Envoy for Malaria and GlaxoSmithKline shared the unprecedented speed of collaboration underway in the development and testing of Ebola vaccines and treatments; and the UN Children’s Fund and UPS spoke on the need for partnership on innovation and logistics to respond to the outbreak.

Local markets must be strengthened and supported

Numerous participants travelled from Western Africa to take part in the meeting, sharing important insight on how keeping local markets healthy is integral to Ebola response and recovery. In the first lightning round “Local Contributions from the Private Sector”, representatives from Timis Mining, First Consultant Hospital, and Building Markets shared their perspective on the challenges and opportunities they are facing to continue operating in the region. Economies of the three most affected countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have experienced significant setbacks, and need urgent global attention beyond the treatment of the last Ebola case. All three economies had been vibrant and growing rapidly in recent years. Growth rates in all affected countries have slowed drastically as a result of the Ebola

outbreak. Declining fiscal revenues, increasing expenditures, decrease in exports, withdrawal of investors, disruptions during the planting season, and lack of connectivity resulting from border closures and airline bans affect livelihoods and impede the private sector from contributing to response and recovery efforts. Ebola is having a particularly heavy impact on small and medium enterprise. Small businesses, who are naturally oriented to solve problems and serve as early responders in crisis situations, are failing at an alarming rate and need larger firms to continue investing in them to promote market stability.

Businesses in affected countries are playing a crucial role in response efforts

In the face of these economic pressures, one of the most important contributions major businesses can make to fight Ebola is to maintain operations in the region, protecting livelihoods and ensuring quick recovery. As the cost of business rises and economic pressures mount, business continuity is increasingly difficult to manage. The public sector must ensure that enabling environments are preserved and strengthened to enable business to continue operating, which will in turn allow business to continue playing a positive role in the fight against Ebola.

In his keynote on “The Role of the Private Sector,” EPSMG Chair Alan Knight shared AcerolMittal’s efforts to keep their operations functioning while also screening and educating their employees on how to detect and prevent Ebola.

Current collaboration is shaping partnerships for the future and will help prepare for future global health emergencies

Partnerships have developed extraordinarily quickly in this crisis, leveraging the complementary capacities of the public and private sectors and highlighting how great challenges can be addressed when interests converge. Private sector partners quick to mobilize resources in this crisis are recognizing the benefit of creating mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration in advance of future emergencies. Many of the collaborations underway are laying the groundwork for integrated strengthening of health systems, markets, and society.

In the second panel “Partnerships for the Future,” representatives from GE Foundation, Facebook, United Bank for Africa, and UNFPA reflected on the early lessons learned from the Ebola outbreak and looked ahead to opportunities for all sectors to collaborate on long-term redevelopment and preparation for future humanitarian and health emergency response efforts.

A range of social mobilization tools have been developed to help advance awareness-raising, speed up Ebola response and prevent further transmission of the disease. Diversion of limited health resources in the region to fighting Ebola has rolled back good progress being made to improve health systems and services; treatable illnesses and routine events like giving birth become life threatening when there is no access to skilled staff, medicines or health facilities. However, lessons currently being learned through public-private collaboration to fight Ebola can be leveraged in the long term to strengthen overall public-private collaboration in the health space, particularly when it comes to galvanizing businesses to take a more proactive role in health promotion, prevention and care for employees. Businesses have experienced first-hand how employees look to them to provide health advice and services in a crisis. The level of health knowledge and support a company can provides to its employees directly affects company operations and provides a compelling argument for increased occupational health, for crises preparedness and even for the longer term as an adjunct to overloaded public sector.

New and innovative approaches are emerging to financing Ebola response

In addition to operational contributions to the international Ebola response, the private sector is providing essential financing for relief and recovery efforts. According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which has been tracking private sector donations for the past several months, as of January 13, businesses have contributed or pledged nearly USD 400 million to the global Ebola response¹. As participants noted in the meeting, this makes the private sector the third-largest donor in this crisis. Funding is being provided through new and innovative approaches to financing emergency response. African business leaders, particularly in the financial sector, are recognizing the need for access to credit and liquidity to support economic rebuilding and are committing significant resources to immediate response and long-term recovery efforts.

As highlighted during the second lightning round “Global Partnerships and Financing,” companies such as Volvo have donated to the Secretary-General’s Ebola Response Fund, traditionally supported through government contributions, recognizing that their contributions will be wisely spent and carefully allocated to address urgent unmet needs. Google’s contributions and matching of public pledges for Ebola response amounted to over USD 32 million. Their investments are being directed in part to address the need for core business support in improving connectivity. The Paul G. Allen Foundation, the largest private sector donor to Ebola response, designed Ebola response funding programmes to draw on core business strengths, fill gaps, and build on technology, research and connectivity needs. The Foundation has also invested in boosting the numbers of medical staff on the ground in affected countries, including by funding medevac services and supporting public awareness campaigns to honor the heroism of front line health care workers.

Governments are counting on cross-sector collaboration to deliver an effective, multi-dimensional response effort

In a lunch dialogue moderated by CNN’s Isha Sesay and featuring representatives from governments of affected countries, as well as countries taking a leading role in the response, experts with first-hand experience reiterated that many lessons have been learned since the outbreak began and countries are increasingly better equipped to respond. Speakers underscored the hard work and tireless dedication of those managing the response – from high levels of government to the heroic corps of frontline health workers. Their messages emphasized the need for a multi-sector response and implored businesses to have confidence that their investment in stopping Ebola and helping economies recover would be matched by the unflagging efforts of those working in the affected countries from governments, UN organizations, and civil society. Business participants in turn urged government actors to preserve and strengthen enabling environments to allow market stability and continuity, with government support for resumption of commercial flights and greater openness in transport as key priorities.

¹ http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R24_E16506__1501130301.pdf