Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2015
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Forum: *African Union*
Issue: *Drafting an emergency response plan for future epidemics in Africa*

Position: *Chair*

Introduction

In December 2013, Guinea reported the outbreak of a mysterious disease in a small Southern Guianese village. Three months and dozens of deaths later, it was confirmed that the mysterious disease that had broken out in Guinea was the Ebola virus, in its most lethal form within the Ebola family.

According to the World Health Organization, the 2013 Ebola outbreak, that had spread through West Africa, had taken the lives of 11.311 people as of September 2015. The outbreak in West Africa adds up to the list of epidemics on the African continent, including the outbreaks of cholera in Zimbabwe and HIV/AIDS in the Congo Basin.

While debating this issue, delegates are encouraged to draft an African Union-wide emergency response plan for, possible, future epidemics on the continent.

Definition of Key Terms

Epidemic
An epidemic is an infectious disease spreading in a community, which is not permanently prevalent.

Outbreak
The sudden occurrence or breaking out of an unwelcome event, such as a disease.

Communicable disease
A communicable disease is a disease that spreads from one person to another, or from animal to person. The spread of communicable diseases often occurs via airborne viruses or bacteria or body fluids.

Noncommunicable disease
A noncommunicable disease is a disease that is not caused by an acute infection, and often results into long-term health consequences and treatment. Noncommunicable diseases are not spread from human to human, and are often inherited or afflicted by use of, examples given, alcohol and tobacco.

Public health

Public health is the health of a population as one entity, and is monitored, regulated and promoted by the stated or authorized body.

Universal health coverage

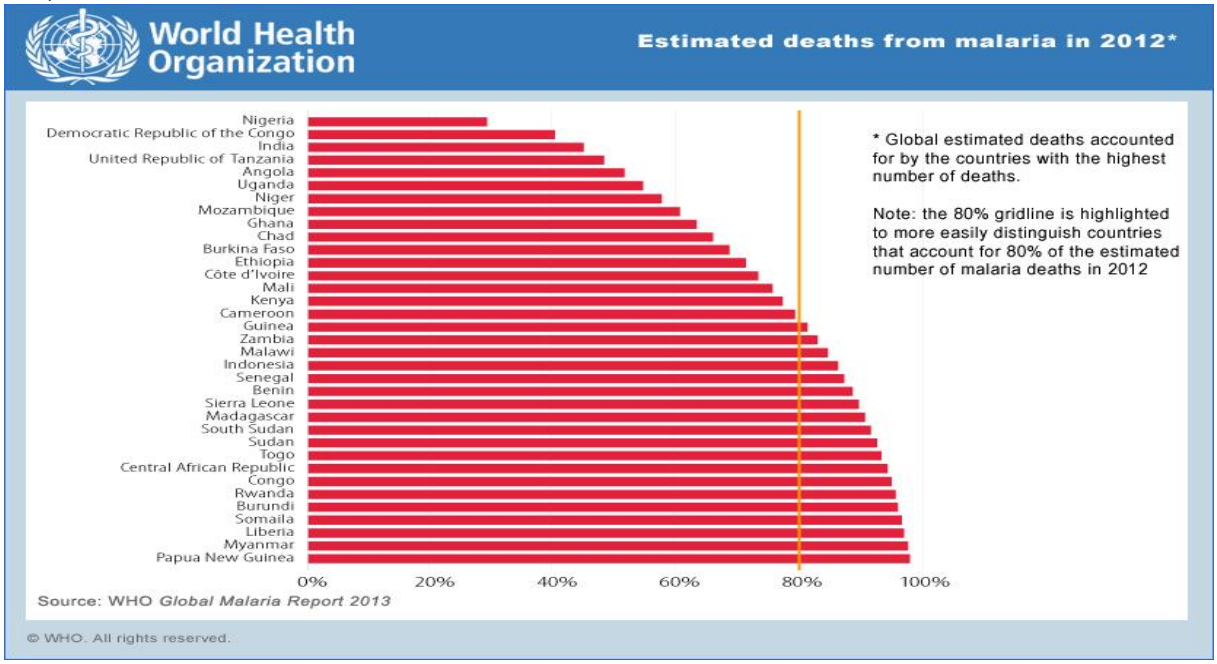
An universal health coverage system is a system that ensures that all people are able to obtain the health services they need without suffering from financial hardship when paying for them.

General Overview

In December 2013, the African continent witnessed the outbreak of Ebola in its most lethal form. By June 2015, the epidemic had taken the lives of over 11,000 people, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). It was one more out of many lethal epidemics that has struck the continent.

In response to the 2013 Ebola outbreak, the African Union established the African Union Support to EBOLA outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA), a strategic task force comprised of representatives from African Union (AU) departments and United Nations agencies. The ASEOWA envisaged having up to 1000 health workers deployed in Ebola-stricken countries.

While the African Union actively responded to the 2013 Ebola outbreak, many epidemics have ripped through the continent up to today. A notable example is Malaria, a disease transmitted by blood parasites. According to the WHO, 90% out of 627,000 deaths worldwide occurred in Africa.



Major Parties Involved

World Health Organization (WHO)
The World Health Organization is the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations. In order to fulfil this roll within the UN's system, the organization operates by;

I. "providing leadership on matters critical to health and engaging in partnerships where joint action is needed;
II. shaping the research agenda and stimulating the generation, translation and dissemination of valuable knowledge;
III. setting norms and standards and promoting and monitoring their implementation;
IV. articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options;
V. providing technical support, catalysing change, and building sustainable institutional capacity; and
VI. monitoring the health situation and assessing health trends"[1]

In April 2014, the WHO and the AU jointly organized the first meeting of African Ministers of Health, to discuss a variety of issues, including Universal Health Coverage in Africa, in response to the 2013 Ebola outbreak. The World Health Organization has a regional office for Africa, focused on combatting both communicable and noncommunicable diseases on the African continent.

African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (African CDC)
The establishment of the African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (African CDC) was accelerated by the AU after the 2013 Ebola epidemic in West Africa. The African CDC aims at effectively monitoring public health, responding to public health emergencies and to address complex health challenges. The African CDC Surveillance and Response United is established to provide technical expertise and response coordination in times of public health emergencies.

During the 2013 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the African CDC has intensively cooperated with ASEOWA through the African Union, by sharing over 800 volunteers in the combat against the 2013 Ebola outbreak.

African Union Support to EBOLA outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA)
The African Union Support to EBOLA outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA) is a task force established by the African Union. The ASEOWA deployment is divided into three cycles, covering the pre-deployment, deployment and exit phases of the deployment. The establishment of the ASEOWA was a response on two key decisions made by the African Union Peace and Security Council on 19 August 2014, that read;

"To authorize the immediate deployment of an AU-led Military-Civil Humanitarian

[1] "What We Do." World Health Organization. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Oct. 2015. <http://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/en/>.

Mission, comprising medical doctors, nurses and other medical and paramedical personnel, as well as military personnel, as required for the effectiveness and protection of the Mission and that the Commission (The African Union Commission) should take, without further delay, the necessary steps to develop a Concept of Operations for the AU Mission, including its logistical, financial and other relevant aspects."[2]

Timeline of Events

1960 - present	HIV/AIDS pandemic breaks out in the Congo Basin
2000 and 2006	African leaders commit to reducing Malaria at the 2000 and 2006 Abuja Summits
9 July 2002	African Union founded
2008-2009	Cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe
2012	Yellow fever outbreak in Darfur, Sudan
14-17 April 2014	The first meeting of African Ministers of Health jointly organized by the World Health Organization and the African Union Commission.
2015	African CDC established

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

There have been made many attempts to reduce the number of victims by epidemics in Africa. Notable examples include the 2000 and 2006 Abuja Summits. At the 2006 Abuja Summit, African leaders called for an accelerated action towards universal access to HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria services in Africa.

At the meeting of African Ministers of Health, jointly organized by the WHO and African Union Commission, delegates of AU member-states were expected to identify the key actions needed to progress towards Universal Health Coverage, reach key milestones on the establishment of an African Medicines Agency, and addressing mechanisms on risk factors for noncommunicable diseases.

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[2] "African Union." *Encyclopedia of Law and Religion* (2015): n. pag. *AFRICAN UNION: Support to EBOLA Outbreak in West Africa*. African Union. Web. 16 Oct. 2015.

Possible Solutions

Possible solutions have been reviewed and explored for decades now. However, with the relatively new African Union as main political organization for the continent, major steps have been made by establishing, example given, the African CDC. With the help of many non-governmental organizations (NGO's), Africa has come a long way on preventing major epidemic outbreaks on the continent.

During the debate on this issue, the heads of state of the African Union General Assembly are encouraged to further improve task forces, such as the ASEOWA, and to work on establishing one universal emergency response to burden a possible future epidemic outbreak as quickly and as efficiently possible. Think of ways of how to effectively cooperate with NGO's and to share knowledge and expertise between governments and NGO's on disease prevention and combat.

Useful documents

I. http://pages.au.int/ebola
II. http://pages.au.int/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET_as%20of%2026%20Jan%202015.pdf
III. http://www.afro.who.int/en/media-centre/events/min-health-meeting-auc-who.html
IV. http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Multinational_%E2%80%93_Strengthening_West_Africa%E2%80%99s_Public_Health_Systems_Response_to_the_Ebola_Crisis__SWAPHS__-_Appraisal_Report.pdf
V. http://www.un-influenza.org/sites/default/files/files/South_Africa_National_Plan.pdf
VI. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002311/231158e.pdf
VII. http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11566.doc.htm

Appendix/Appendices

"14 Lessons to Prepare for Future Health Emergencies from AU Support to the Ebola Outbreak in West Africa | African Union." *14 Lessons to Prepare for Future Health Emergencies from AU Support to the Ebola Outbreak in West Africa | African Union*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2015. <http://pages.au.int/ebola/events/14-lessons-prepare-future-health-emergencies-au-support-ebola-outbreak-west-africa>.

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"Communicable Diseases." GlobalHealth.gov. U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, n.d. Web. 10 Oct. 2015. <http://www.globalhealth.gov/global-health-topics/communicable-diseases/>.

"Ministerial Meeting Adopts Statute of the Africa CDC Urges Fast Tracking of the Establishment of the Continental Mechanism on Disease Control and Prevention | African Union." *Ministerial Meeting Adopts Statute of the Africa CDC Urges Fast Tracking of the Establishment of the Continental Mechanism on Disease Control and Prevention | African Union*. African Union Support to EBOLA Outbreak in West Africa, n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2015. <http://pages.au.int/ebola/events/ministerial-meeting-adopts-statute-africa-cdc-urges-fast-tracking-establishment-contine>.

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Okunogbe, Adeyemi. "What the Ebola Crisis Taught Us About Emergency Preparedness." *RAND*. Rand Cooperation, n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2015. <http://www.rand.org/blog/2015/06/what-the-ebola-crisis-taught-us-about-emergency-preparedness.html>.

"Origins of the 2014 Ebola Epidemic." *WHO*. World Health Organization, n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2015. <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/one-year-report/virus-origin/en/>.

Ventures Africa. "BUSINESS THE AFRICAN UNION HAS LAUNCHED ITS CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL TO TACKLE EPIDEMICS LIKE EBOLA." *Ventures Africa*. Ventures Africa, 23 Mar. 2015. Web. 16 Oct. 2015. <http://venturesafrica.com/the-african-union-has-launched-its-centre-for-disease-control-to-tackle-epidemics-like-ebola/>.