West Africa Ebola Crisis

Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia - Emergency Scale up

ICT Concept of Operations

UPDATED: OCTOBER 23, 2014

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster has not been activated in response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. As there are clear needs across the three affected countries for ICT services, the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) has mandated the World Food Programme (WFP), as global ET Cluster lead, to respond as if the cluster was activated. The ET Cluster, its partners and membership are responding together for a coordinated response.

In support of the West Africa Ebola emergency, ET Cluster will:

- Provide Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services to the humanitarian community ensuring gaps are filled and reducing duplication of efforts. Under three key pillars, the response includes ICT services at Ebola Treatment Units (ETU), Community Care Centres (CCC), ICT services in common operating areas and support to communications for affected communities.

- Operate in full cooperation with the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER). As agreed with UNMEER, the ET Cluster will ensure availability of last-mile ICT services to the humanitarian and NGO communities. UNMEER will provide ICT services at Logistics Bases, Mission Logistics Bases (MLB) and Forward Logistics Bases (FLB) only.

- Provide ICT support to Logistic Cluster and UNHAS operations, where required.

- Operate on a no-regret basis, building on locally-available, UNMEER and partners' capacity wherever possible and effective.

Response Pillars

Pillar 1: ETU Comms Support

- Provide internet connectivity services in 60x Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs). Voice communications will also be provided in these ETUs as well as up to 150x Community Care Centres (CCCs).

Pillar 2: Common Humanitarian IT Services

- Provide internet connectivity services and 24/7 security communications network in 15 common operational areas.

Pillar 3: Comms 4 Communities

- In cooperation with healthcare workers, support communications for affected populations in Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs).

- Support organisations responding in the Comms 4 Communities area with their activities where requested.

Situation Overview

1. An outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease was first reported in Guinea in March 2014. Since then, the virus has rapidly spread to neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone, causing a regional crisis. The epidemic is unprecedented in scale and geographical coverage and is already the worst outbreak of the virus in history.

2. The humanitarian community is scaling up response activities in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. UNMEER has mandated the World Food Programme (WFP), as global ET Cluster lead, to respond as if the cluster was activated.

3. Local ICT infrastructure and services relied on by the humanitarian community are likely to be affected in the region. To date, several service providers have refused to intervene in affected areas.

4. UNDSS has classified areas across Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia Security Level two (low) at the highest. In light of recent conflict as a result of this emergency, however, revision of the Security Levels for certain areas in Liberia and Guinea are being discussed.

5. The UNMEER mission has been established with the mandate to prioritise resources into the Ebola response operation for identification and maintenance of humanitarian needs. As agreed, UNMEER will provide ICT services at Logistics Bases, Mission Logistics Bases (MLB) and Forward Logistics Bases (FLB) only across the three affected countries and Ghana. The ET Cluster will ensure availability of last-mile ICT services to the humanitarian and NGO communities. The ICT roles and responsibilities of UNMEER and ET Cluster in this emergency are outlined in the *Ebola ICT Response Concept Note* which has been endorsed by both WFP (as lead of the ET Cluster) and UNMEER.

6. The overall budget is an estimated US$9.4 million for four months.

Scope of ICT Operations

Pillar 1: ETU Comms Support

1. Deploy internet connectivity – on a no-regrets basis – in 60x ETUs across the affected countries.
   a. *Phase 1:* use of Thuraya IP+, available VSAT kits and local ISPs where reliable:
      i. Locations with fewer than 20 users remain on Thuraya IP+ and local ISPs.
      ii. Locations with greater than 20 users, local ISP (where reliable) and phase 2 will apply.
   b. *Phase 2:* deploy satellite connectivity when equipment is available from supplier over the next 60 days. Where line of sight is available, microwave links will connect the main terminal to the ETUs and CCCs. Where line of sight is not available, VSATs will be deployed.

2. Provide voice communications services in 60x Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) for health workers and staff via repeater or simplex channels, depending on location and distances. Buffer zones between the ETU's logistics and clinic locations will also be covered by radio telecommunications services.

3. Provide voice communications services in 150x CCCs for health workers and staff through a combination of GSM and satellite phone solutions.

4. In partnership with UNMEER, support provision of Microsoft Lync instant messaging services for humanitarians to communicate with and between ETUs across the three affected countries.

5. Support ICT infrastructure and services after installation and for an initial period of 6 months.
   a. Implementation phase 60 days
   b. Support for four months post implementation phase.

Pillar 2: Common Humanitarian IT Services

6. Provide shared security telecommunications services - relating to the prevailing UNDSS security level - to the humanitarian response community across the three affected countries. Communications Centres (COMCENs) will be installed, or upgraded where possible, in 15 areas to support the safety of humanitarian response efforts.
   a. Guinea: Gueckedou, Macenta, Nzerekore, Kissidougou and Conakry.
   b. Liberia: Voinjama, Gbarnga and Buchanan.
   c. Sierra Leone: Freetown, Kailahun, Kenema, Makeni, Kono, Port Loko and Bo.

7. Provide ICT support to Logistic Cluster and UNHAS operations, where required.

Pillar 3: Comms 4 Communities

8. Support communications for affected populations by engaging with health workers and determining the needs and the means through which patients can communicate with their families between the ETU logistics and clinic hubs only e.g. video chat via Skype, or MS Lync on tablets or laptops, at Wi-Fi cafés.

9. Under the umbrella of the ET Cluster response, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will work with its partners, such as Mobile Network Operators, to support healthcare workers with mobile services such as e-payments, anonymised Call Data Records, data surveillance and reporting, clinical workflow management and financing mechanisms.

General

10. Engage and coordinate with UNMEER ICT command structure, ensuring sufficient representation of the humanitarian ICT community in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone as well as UNMEER headquarters in Accra, Ghana.

11. Establish a staging area in Accra, Ghana where people and equipment will be prepositioned to facilitate call-forward from regional sites. The area will also be used for staff rotation and recovery purposes.

12. Design contingency plans for worsening scenarios and enable staff mobility and working from remote locations.

13. Establish an efficient exit strategy for the sustainability of the services and infrastructure deployed.

Assistance & Support required:

14. Logistic / UNHRD support for forwarding of equipment, both to the staging area in Accra and to the specific regional sites.

15. UNMEER support for forwarding of equipment from the staging area in Accra to the affected countries, and clearing from customs in each location.

16. Clearance of staffing pipeline.

17. Support from Government Authorities for the importation of equipment and approval of communications licenses.

Background

Guinea

1. Security telecommunications services are provided to humanitarians (UN and NGO) by UNDSS in three locations, and by UNHCR in one location across Guinea. Given the current emergency, and the associated deterioration of the security situation, additional locations will need to be added.

2. GSM and 3G coverage is available in key locations across Guinea. As humanitarian operations expand into more remote areas, an alternative solution will need to be sought.

Liberia

3. Liberia is a UN integrated mission and the JOC (Joint Operations Centre) at UNMIL HQ is providing 24/7 radio room support to UN agencies. UNMIL VHF Mototrbo back-to-back repeaters covers most of Liberia (divided into seven sectors) with provision of one security channel for all the UN agencies monitored by their seven COMCENS. JOC do not provide radio room services to NGOs.

4. There are two repeater channels for NGOs in Monrovia while there is no radio network for NGOs in rest of country and to make assessment to provide radio coverage for NGOs.

5. World Health Organization (WHO) has requested support from WFP to establish Ebola Treatment Units (ETU) in Liberia. A separate Service Level Agreement (SLA) between WFP and WHO is being drafted and yet to be signed.

6. Monrovia is connected to international high speed optic fibre. All UN agencies are in the process of establishing fibre connection.

Sierra Leone

7. 3G USB sticks are not a reliable form of data connectivity in most areas of Sierra Leone.

8. There are two ISPs which can provide connectivity to regional locations. Afcom has a terrestrial 300Mb microwave backbone to most regions, Atlas use VSAT backhaul through Brussels, and offer VSAT services in regional areas and 4G Data services in Freetown.

9. The Sierra Leone Regional Optical Fibre connectivity project has been put on hold due to the ebola crisis.

Equipment

10. Dangerous cargo (e.g. lithium batteries and generators) cannot be shipped directly to the affected countries due to airline limitations.

11. A logistics strategy is being developed considering the use of Accra as a staging. Cargo will be shipped directly to Accra, and further dispatch to the affected countries will be facilitated by UNHRD, UNHAS and UNMEER.

All information related to ET Cluster operations can be found on the website: www.ETCluster.org

For more information about the ET Cluster response, contact: WestAfrica.ETC@wfp.org