

How EVD (Ebola Virus Disease) Spread and How People Respond: Socio-political Analysis of the Epidemic in Sierra Leone and Liberia

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This presentation examines miscellaneous social phenomena regarding the Ebola epidemics in Liberia and Sierra Leone. I (the presenter) have researched the two countries for 7 years to understand the armed conflicts in the region, but am presently hindered to have new field research (As of July 2015, the situation is nearly normal despite several new infected are counted in Sierra Leone).

The epidemic began in Guinea during December 2013, and the World Health Organization (WHO) was officially notified of the rapidly evolving EVD outbreak on March 23, 2014. Then, neighboring Sierra Leone and Liberia was also hit by the epidemics. On July 30, Sierra Leone declared a state of emergency, and on August 6, Liberia followed suit.

The period of rapid expansion (from March to October) caused havoc in and out of West Africa. In the two countries, near-riot situation can be observed. Quarantines of affected area created unrest. On the other hand, international media sensationally covered the epidemic, and discussed the possibilities of expanding to other regions. This presentation attempt to understand social phenomena observed in and out of West Africa, concerning how EVD spread and how people respond.

First, I examine the social factor of the expansion of EVD. EVD spread beyond the border of Guinea. It spread to neighboring Sierra Leone and Liberia. This expansion followed the trade network of the past. This network was also used by armed groups during the wars, and people still travel back and forth the three countries. In domestic level, especially in Sierra Leone, family ties of chieftaincy class facilitate longer-range diffusion. They consist of wealthy class in provincial area of Sierra Leone. Their family network are more geographically extended. Such ties urged the spread of EVD in longer distances.

Second, I examine how people overcome the lack of information. At the time of the initial epidemics, lack of information was pointed out. As the source of information was limited in provincial areas, people have no method to confirm information. I overview intentional and unintentional attempts of sensitization. Diasporas from the two countries uploaded video messages for sensitization of Ebola on Youtube. These video definitely include the message "Ebola is real." Chiefs also took a role of sensitization.

As shown above, the spread of EVD and the response of people tells the social situation of Liberia and Sierra Leone. This presentation deals with such social phenomena for further understanding of the EVD epidemics.