

Enhancing Public-Private Collaboration:

Observations of role of the private sector contribution in fighting Ebola and promoting recovery

**As collected in consultations hosted by the Ebola Private Sector Mobilization Group (EPSMG)
New York, December, 2014**

Context

Affected governments and communities, the international community, the UN system, non-governmental organizations and the private sector all have a role to play to end the Ebola outbreak and support long-term recovery. On 11 December, the UN Global Compact, UN Foundation and UNMEER convened a meeting on UN-Business Collaboration for Global Ebola Response to showcase successful interventions by business in support of the Ebola response, identify lessons learned, and explore how success can be replicated. Leaders from the private sector, UN, government, and civil society discussed the role of business in long-term regional recovery and considered how lessons learned can help to foster more effective public-private collaboration in the context of future global public health challenges. It was recognized that economic recovery and healthcare security in West Africa are inextricably linked.

In advance of the public meeting, the Ebola Private Sector Mobilization Group (EPSMG) held a day of deliberations which included businesses operating in each of the affected countries as well as neighboring states. Stakeholders from affected governments and donor agencies were also engaged. More than 35 organizations and companies were represented in a six hour session, which fed into broader discussions the following day.

The following EPSMG summary of its New York meetings provides an overview of the important contributions that the private sector can make to support the Ebola response and identifies key areas where the private and public sector can work together to support an accelerated and sustained recovery. The document aims to inform critical discussions on the way forward and to galvanize the private and public sectors to work more effectively together to respond to the Ebola crisis.

This does not reflect an official view from all EPSMG members, and rather represents a summary of the discussions with those present for the New York consultations.

The Role of the Private Sector

The private sector's contribution to the Ebola response was early and agile, its mobilization and outreach efforts unprecedented. At the onset of the outbreak, the companies focused on their fundamental responsibility to protect employees, their families and surrounding communities and then quickly moved to help mobilize a broader national, regional and global response. Companies have demonstrated through their leadership that the private sector can and should serve as a critical partner to governments, the UN, and civil society in the fight against Ebola. The private sector should be

engaged in the multidimensional response effort, including policy formulation and implementation. We must change the mentality of looking at the private sector solely as a source of funding.

All companies with operations in the affected region are encouraged to:

- Continue operational diligence for employees, families, and communities; support the greater national awareness campaigns.
- Remain committed to the region and be part of the long-term economic and social recovery and development.
- Maintain business operations to support livelihoods by retaining as many existing employees as they possibly can.
- Continue identifying lessons learned and share them with other sectors to determine what is required to secure and protect employees, families, and communities and to mobilize with agility and speed.
- Contribute to the development of response models and early warning systems that leverage private sector resources and knowledge.

Continuing to do business in the affected countries, and working towards normalizing operations, is a key contribution that the private sector can make to recovery. However, this is not a straightforward proposition. The costs and risks of doing business in affected countries have risen to historic levels while the price of commodities has dropped. Airlines are reducing flights, shipping lines are restricting their ports of call, insurance rates have gone up or plans are being terminated entirely, and it is more difficult for companies to attract staff with the required experience and skills because of uncertainty over medevac procedures. Capital has become scarce and banks are seeing increasing defaults on loans, all but destroying the fundamental economics of small and medium sized businesses.

The Role of the Public Sector

The public sector can help business and support the recovery by taking a number of steps towards creating an enabling environment to sustain existing business operations and generate new investment. These include:

- **Helping to mitigate the rising costs of doing business in post-Ebola economies:** National governments, bilateral and multilateral donors, and other stakeholders should consider the importance of preserving and strengthening the enabling environment to allow business to recover and to attract and sustain inward investment. Specific issues that need to be reviewed in this context include insurance costs and availability, air and shipping access, medevac and healthcare costs, and the unknown consequences of stigma.
- **Promoting liquidity in the domestic market and access to capital:** Public assistance should be carefully planned and executed so as not to crowd out the domestic marketplace. Direct cash transfers should be scaled up as part of immediate and medium term relief provided to consumers and local businesses. Stimulus packages are needed, along with other incentives to sustain and revive the private economy. However, there also needs to be a vigilant focus on transparency and governance, and the post-Ebola recovery must encourage more regional integration promoting free flow of capital and goods.

Areas for Public/Private Collaboration

The private and public sectors both have important roles to play to respond to the Ebola crisis. Converging interests create opportunities for stronger collaboration in the following areas:

- **Continued diligence from all sectors on immediate relief and response:** While discussions now turn toward early and long-term recovery, business leaders and responders from other sectors must continue to work relentlessly to defeat the outbreak. We must all stay focused and committed until there are zero new cases over a 42 day period. If Ebola becomes an endemic health concern it will forever change economic and social modeling of the affected countries, if not the region.
- **Re-opening trade and transportation corridors:** There are essential shared interests between the private sector and humanitarian responders to reopen air, sea, and land access to Ebola affected countries. All stakeholders must work together toward procedures and protocols to realize the continued functioning of the ports, unblocking of commercial air routes, and opening of trade corridors. Joint advocacy on these important topics must continue.
- **Addressing stigmatization of individuals affected by Ebola and stigma of the region:** Individuals and communities who survive Ebola are doubly traumatized by stigma, which undermines recovery efforts. Joint advocacy to combat Ebola stigma in all its forms should increase. The public and private sectors should take measures wherever possible to support job opportunities for Ebola survivors and create social mobilization to de-stigmatize families and communities affected by the disease.
- **Co-investment in preparedness:** EPSMG and the broader private sector must continue identifying lessons learned and sharing them with other sectors to determine what is required to secure and protect employees, families, and communities and to mobilize with agility and speed. Implications for affected countries and the neighboring states, exportable response models, and contributions to the development of early warning systems are all important longer-term contributions the private sector can make. The public sector must recognize and leverage such knowledge and expertise in its own policies and planning.
- **Greater investments in capacity building, systems, and sustainability in healthcare delivery:** The Ebola crisis devastated the healthcare systems in the affected countries. Restoring the infrastructure to pre-Ebola status will not be sufficient. A national health action plan, one which strengthens the governing institutions and considers urban and rural care delivery, prevention and treatment, needs to be defined. The public and private sector must work together to determine what went wrong, and what type of capacity building and system strengthening is needed to prevent such emergencies in the future. Donor-driven response models can learn from response systems put in place by the private sector and should take the experiences of businesses into account.
- **Collaborative data collection:** Greater efforts should be taken by the public and private sectors to work together to collect and analyze data to evaluate the multi-sector, multi-dimensional response and its effectiveness. Such analysis should take into account the contributions and experiences of both public and private sector actors.

Collectively, we need to beat back Ebola and return as quickly as possible to the promising growth patterns that existed before the crisis. Now is the time for the private sector and the public sector to come together to take more decisive action to sustain the private economy; to mitigate the costs of doing business; to reduce risks; to provide access to capital for small and medium enterprises; to reduce regulatory and fiscal burdens; and, in short, to create an enabling environment more conducive to investment. Without a private economy there can be no sustainable recovery in the region.

Background on the Ebola Private Sector Mobilization Group (EPSMG)

Formed in July of 2014, originally as a small group of companies trying to share information on the Ebola outbreak, EPSMG has since grown to encompass nearly 100 companies. Learn more at: www.epsmg.com

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