

Background Note

Socio-economic impact of the Ebola outbreak

The Ebola outbreak brought attention to the need for greater preparedness among countries and the international community to respond to pandemics. The worst-affected countries are among the least developed countries, where national healthcare systems are not equipped to handle a health crisis of such magnitude.

The international community witnessed how the Ebola outbreak in West Africa had a devastating impact on the economies and societies of the affected countries. This includes first and foremost a significant burden on often already fragile national healthcare systems. The worst affected countries – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – suffered significant decline in their growth rates in 2014 because of disruption of economic activities due to Ebola. Guinea registered negative growth in 2014, while the growth rate of Sierra Leone fell from 20.1 per cent in 2013 to 7.0 per cent in 2014. The outbreak resulted in increased labour absenteeism and unemployment as well as reduced consumption and investment. Economic activities in agriculture, mining and transportation sectors have been particularly hard hit, disrupting domestic and cross-border trade. Furthermore, the pandemic imposed huge costs of missed educational opportunities, social stigma and exclusion on the affected families in these countries. The affected countries are also likely to face higher risks of morbidity and mortality from diseases other than Ebola. These are likely to pose a serious setback to the achievement of sustainable development.

The *International Ebola Recovery Conference* on 10 July 2014, convened by the Secretary-General, brought together the affected countries, the UN system and the international community to support the response led by the Governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. At the end of the conference, the preliminary commitment for financial support amounted to US\$ 3.4 billion, taking the total resources pledged to around US\$ 5 billion.