Response to the Ebola Outbreak

Since March 2014, the West African states of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have been battling the spread of the deadly Ebola virus, which has already killed more than 1900, including many health workers. Governments have been unable to effectively contain the outbreak due to the poor capacity of health systems and a lack of public information or acceptation of the risks posed by the disease. The imposition of quarantines backed by security forces, a lack of transparency in how money is being used, and the distrust of government – particularly in the worst-affected areas – undermines the response in these post-conflict countries.

Search for Common Ground has been on the ground in this region for more than 15 years. Our acclaimed “Talking Drum Studio” has worked with nearly every community and rural radio station in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. We bring together diverse groups of citizens, civil society groups, and governments, in order to find inclusive solutions to the region’s most pressing issues. Following the Ebola outbreak, we have begun integrating public awareness campaigns into our existing media programs and partnering with civil society groups to work closely with the Ministries of Health to support transparency and the respect of human rights throughout the response.

These initiatives have largely been unfunded to date. But with the crisis likely to persist for six months or more, we are seeking support to:

(a) Roll-out an intensive communications campaign through our existing communication platforms and networks throughout the countries. This includes integrating messages into our existing popular, news and drama programs with particular following in marginalized communities, as well as supporting the distribution of approved public-service messages developed by Governments, the CDC and the WHO. We will additionally support town-hall forums and rumor management trainings with particularly vulnerable groups.

(b) Community Outreach: Support the Civil Society Taskforce in each country (existing coalitions of civil society groups working on health policy issues in which we are a member) in each country to develop a local action plan to address both public awareness and human rights monitoring activities (equal access to care, human rights issues around quarantines, etc). We will manage small grant funds for outreach activities to enable local and community groups to implement these action plans. This might also include supporting qualified organizations doing monitoring or providing services in particularly marginalized and hard-to-reach areas.

About Search for Common Ground. Search is an international non-governmental organization that works in 34 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. We have worked in West Africa for more than 15 years and have been a key outlet for ensuring that citizens have opportunities and access to information amidst crises.