

Caritas Internationalis

Ebola Responses Taken by Member Organizations and Related Partners

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Measures Taken by Caritas Sierra Leone

✿ Training

In the Dioceses of Bo, Kenema, Makeni, and Freetown, the diocesan Caritas organizations have conducted training sessions for priests, catechists, teachers, nurses, and others, with facilitation by the District Health Management Teams.

✿ Prayer, Fasting, and Sermons

In all Catholic Churches, parishes, and out-stations, the Church has integrated a religious dimension to the response, by organizing prayer, fasting, and preaching sermons on Ebola. These sessions seek the intercession of God for eradication of Ebola. The government has called on all major religions to pray, to fast and to ask God protection and mercy at this time.

✿ Parish-based Activities – Trainings/Sensitization/House to House Focus Groups Activities

In three Dioceses, Caritas Bo, Freetown and Kenema, small group trainings, sensitizations and house-to-house focus group discussions have been organized across the various districts and parishes in earnest. Whilst educating and sensitizing people, the volunteers involved in this project also have the responsibility to monitor for possible suspected cases and make referrals. These activities will be initiated in additional villages as the response to Ebola continues. Much emphasis is placed on eliminating stigma and discrimination toward those already, or suspected to be, infected by Ebola, as well as toward health care workers who have been engaged in care of Ebola patients.

✿ Food Assistance and Other Material Support

The organization intends to supply food assistance to affected communities where agriculture has been interrupted as a result of the illness of family members and/or quarantine of families or of entire communities. Other social and material support also will be offered to widows, orphans, or other affected loved ones.

The OCPH (Organisation Catholique pour la Promotion Humaine) – Caritas Guinea

The OCPH (Organisation Catholique pour la Promotion Humaine) – Caritas Guinea is mandated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference to respond to the needs of people in distress and who are suffering. Such activities include education and health services, as well as humanitarian assistance and development.

For several months, Caritas Guinea has purchased and distributed containers for water, soap, bleach and rehydration salts, and well as Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for health care workers. The organization also has assembled a group of staff and volunteers to facilitate these operations by visiting households and conducting educational sessions at village level and by disseminating some 2700 public health messages through the mass media outlets. Results of these activities include 622 training sessions for both religious and community leaders and

other, more than 3000 public education sessions, reaching more than 64,000 households. Much emphasis is placed on eliminating stigma and discrimination toward those already, or suspected to be, infected by Ebola, as well as toward health care workers who have been engaged in care of Ebola patients.

In the coming weeks, Caritas Guinea will supply food assistance to people during their weeks of quarantine.

Liberia

Catholic Health facilities in Liberia experienced the deaths of several religious and lay staff as a result of Ebola infection. This resulted in the closure of St. Joseph's Hospital in Monrovia, which was one of the most highly esteemed health facilities in the country.

Recently, the National Catholic Health Council, with the help of international volunteers from USA and Vietnam, has initiated training for health workers in several Catholic health facilities. The seminar-like training, takes place on the campus of the Mother Patern College of Health Sciences (MPCHS) of the Stella Maris Polytechnic in Monrovia, with 50 participants including Catholic Health workers, instructors, parishioners, priests, and catechists. This training of trainers (ToT) initiative is one component of strategies by the Catholic Church to reach out to the greater Liberian population in communities across the Archdiocese of Monrovia and in two other dioceses of Gbarnga and Cape Palms and thus effectively reaching a significant portion of the population in Liberia.

The National Catholic Health Council also plans to advance activities necessary to ensure the safe reopening of facilities for routine services (not Ebola treatment). Needs include provision of PPE as well as training for staff in screening for Ebola and infection control.

Caritas Liberia, in collaboration with diocesan Caritas organizations throughout the country, recently prepared a plan to address Ebola needs as follows:

- ✿ Conduct public education programming to improve KAP (Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perception) among the population of Liberia and to promote preventive behavior to avoid infection with the virus;
- ✿ Provide food, basic provisions and other items to affected and quarantined communities especially in worst affected counties;
- ✿ Conduct periodic psychosocial and trauma counseling to those recovered from Ebola, their families, and neighborhood to be able to cope with the attitude of stigmatization;
- ✿ Initiate a monitoring and advocacy mechanism at which time monitors will track deliverables to affected persons and communities, as well as raise issues of peace, security and human rights in the course of the epidemic.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Project in the Three Heavily Affected Countries

CRS, one of the Caritas International member organizations from USA, is in the process of developing a comprehensive strategy for responding to the Ebola outbreak that focuses on both health and livelihoods in line with the overall agency strategy. The Ebola strategy seeks to respond to immediate needs as well as prepare to support families, communities and systems recover and rebuild. In the immediate term, health activities are expected to focus on support to faith based facilities to maintain operations, Ebola-focused behavior change activities, implementation of community early alert systems, and psychosocial care (including stigma reduction) for affected families and communities. CRS will support health systems recovery and strengthening in the medium to longer term. In terms of livelihoods, CRS will provide immediate assistance to affected families and monitor food security trends to respond appropriately in affected communities in the medium to longer term, helping them to recover and build resilience.

Activities At Global Level – Caritas Internationalis

Caritas has launched several emergency appeals to support programming by Caritas Sierra Leone and Caritas Guinea. It now is considering launching an emergency appeal to support activities being planned by Caritas Liberia. In order to assist with further development of the Emergency Appeal for Liberia activities and to show solidarity of the entire global Confederation of Caritas Internationalis, Monsignor Robert Vitillo, Head of the Caritas Internationalis Delegation to the UN in Geneva and Special Advisor on Health and HIV, has undertaken a mission visit to Liberia.

As an international organization in full status relationship with World Health Organization (WHO) Caritas Internationalis maintains close cooperation with WHO staff and disseminates WHO guidelines and information to its member organizations in the affected and neighboring countries. At the request of WHO, Caritas Internationalis has prepared a Guidance Note on the Confederation's response to Ebola; this document also includes guidance for health care, social service, and pastoral workers in its own and other Catholic Church-inspired organizations.

For Further Information:

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