



COMMUNIQUE

EXTRA ORDINARY MEETING OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH ON EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

The SADC Ministers of Health held an Extra-Ordinary meeting in Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa, on 6th August, 2014. The meeting was attended by SADC Ministers of Health, their Senior Officials, World Health Organization and the SADC Secretariat. The main purpose of the meeting was to bring together Ministers of Health and key stakeholders to build a consensus on appropriate strategic action(s) to prevent the introduction and/ or spread of Ebola in the SADC Region. The emergency meeting also provided a forum for the region to share technical experiences on the Ebola virus disease (EVD) so that the Region remains vigilant and comes up with common understanding regarding the containment of the EVD in case of an outbreak; and to agree on a strategy for accelerated operational response.

Opening the meeting, Honourable Dr. Jean Kalilani, Chairperson of SADC Health Ministers, and Minister of Health, Republic of Malawi remarked that the current outbreak of Ebola in West Africa is the deadliest in history and therefore as Ministers, they should ensure that appropriate executive and political leadership takes the lead in all efforts to manage the disease. She emphasised that it is important as leaders; to lead the campaign awareness to dispel myths and restore calm to the population. The minister also informed the meeting that there has not been any Ebola case in the region thus far. It is critical that the region put in place preventive measures to ensure that there is no Ebola outbreak.

After their deliberations, the Ministers agreed on;

- i). In accordance with WHO International Health Regulations (2005), which provides for the control of international spread of disease across borders, urged Member States to accelerate the response in the event of an Ebola outbreak in the SADC Region. The IHR stresses the need for national coordination and leadership, and enhancement of cross border collaboration and involvement of communities and active facilitation by the SADC Secretariat.
- ii). Reaffirmed the need for high-level national leadership by Heads of State and Government in order to facilitate Multisectoral response interventions and coordination required to cope with the epidemic. The role of the WHO and SADC Secretariat was considered essential to provide technical and facilitatory support.

The Ministers made the following recommendations to address Prevention and Control of Ebola Virus Disease:

1. Member States should:

- i). Mobilise relevant government sectors and community, religious and political leaders to work together to increase awareness and understanding of the Ebola situation by communities in order to ensure optimum preparedness and response.
- ii). Identify and commit additional domestic financial resources to support the outbreak preparedness.
- iii). Organise cross border consultations to facilitate exchange of information and agree on joint collaborative actions.
- iv). Strengthen surveillance, case finding/detection, reporting and contact tracing and share information on EVD with WHO in a timely manner.
- v). Continue to build and strengthen IHR core capacities especially those needed to respond to serious public health events and adhere to these regulations.
- vi). Improve community information and communication in matters related to the Ebola epidemic, respecting the different socio-cultural contexts, enhance awareness and promote community participation in preventive, curative and health promotion interventions.
- vii). Identify health facilities to be used during the outbreak and it has to be equipped with all appropriate equipment based on WHO guidelines.
- viii). Committed to support the training of health workers in aspects of Ebola response.

2. Partners and Stakeholders should:

- i). Continue to participate in the response programme activities in line with the identified priorities.
- ii). Provide technical and financial support for response operations in the Region.
- iii). Adopt a coordinated approach to resource mobilisation and allocation.
- iv). Continue to work with WHO in a coordinated manner to ensure a more effective response.

3. SADC Regional Response

- i). Drafted and approved minimum standard checklist that will be used as a regional guide on the management of Ebola Virus
- ii). Ministers noted the need to put in place a regional fund to assist member states in emergency situations

- iii). Agreed that Republic of South Africa should be the centre of excellence in Ebola laboratory diagnosis in the region.
- iv). SADC Ministers agreed on establishing an inter-ministerial committee at both National and Regional level to coordinate regional response

4. World Health Organisation should:

- i). Provide leadership in the coordination of regional and country levels in providing support for national plans.
- ii). Mobilise and deploy the required WHO staff and other experts, consultants, institutions and networks.
- iii). Regularly disseminate up-to-date risk assessment and other information on the EVD outbreak to stakeholders.
- iv). Develop and disseminate information, education and communication materials for public awareness and training materials for health professionals, on Ebola virus disease prevention and control.
- v). Facilitate cross border collaboration among countries.
- vi). Continue to provide the necessary support to strengthen the core capacities crucial to responding to serious public health events.
- vii). Work closely with SADC Secretariat, Member States and provide leadership in the international effort to identify and prioritise key gaps and promote the research needed to address Ebola virus disease and other haemorrhagic fevers.

The ministers expressed satisfaction and reiterated their call for action by all SADC Member States in the provision of concerted support in the event of an outbreak in any of the Member States as a way of containing the Ebola virus disease.

The delegates concluded their deliberations on a high note and offered their heartfelt gratitude to the government and people of the Republic of South Africa for their warm reception and kindness extended to them during the course of the meeting.

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