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## IPA Supports Ebola Response Effort in Sierra Leone and Liberia

Since first appearing in March 2014 in rural Guinea, the Ebola virus has infected at least 17,800 people in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea and killed more than 6,300, according to figures from the Center for Disease Control from early December 2014.<sup>1</sup> To ensure the safety of our team on the ground, IPA has suspended all non-Ebola studies and operations in the region. We are now pursuing new studies that simultaneously address the Ebola crisis, capitalize on our strong local presence, and ensure the safety of our staff.

"The priority right now is getting information into the hands of policymakers so they can effectively respond to the crisis," said Andrew Tedesco, the Country Director of IPA in Sierra Leone and Liberia. "We're working to generate data that guides the fight against Ebola and helps alleviate the shock on the economy."

### Adapting our work in the face of a crisis

In August, IPA evacuated all international staff from Ebola-affected countries and suspended most research. Within a short time, however, we have developed new projects that contribute to the Ebola response effort. Our ability to swiftly develop these projects was made possible through our long-standing partnerships.

IPA-affiliated researchers have been working in Sierra Leone and Liberia for nearly 10 years, and IPA officially established offices in those countries in 2009 and 2010. During this time we have taken on over 25 research projects in health, post-conflict recovery, agriculture, governance, education, and youth development.

Working in Ebola-affected countries, our local staff have adapted their data collection methods to stay safe. They are now mostly collecting data by phone, for instance, rather than traveling to Ebola-affected areas. "I'm very proud that our staff have been so resilient and

that we can be effective even in the face of a crisis,” Tedesco said.

Our comparative advantage in data collection has positioned us to address the outbreak in multiple ways:

**Contact Tracing:** In cooperation with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, we will assess the impact and feasibility of using mobile phones to speed up the identification and isolation of suspected Ebola patients. In addition, we will explore whether Ebola patients share more information about their contacts once they have settled into a treatment facility, compared to when they first arrive at the facility. The lead researchers on this study are David Ross, Helen Weiss, Deborah Watson-Jones, and Catherine Houlihan.

**The Socio-economic Impacts of Ebola on Households in Sierra Leone:** Even if the Ebola outbreak is contained, the economic impact of the disruption to the local economy is likely to be considerable. The virus may be limiting the movement of people and goods, slowing international trade and tourism, and/or disrupting the financial system. In partnership with Statistics Sierra Leone & the World Bank, we are conducting a phone-based household survey in Sierra Leone to collect information on the economic impact of the crisis, including employment, investment, and market and supply chains. The lead researchers on this study are Tavneet Suri, Rachel Glennerster, Kristen Himelein and Nina Rosas Raffo. [Read a full description of this project.](#)

**The Impact of Ebola on Market Prices in Sierra Leone:** In partnership with the International Growth Center, we are gathering data from markets across Sierra Leone to see how the outbreak, and restrictions imposed on trade and travel, are affecting market prices. Researchers are measuring changes over time and comparing the information to similar data IPA gathered from the same markets in 2011 and 2012. The information is being shared with the Ministry of Finance after the data is collected every month. The lead researchers on this study are Rachel Glennerster and Tavneet Suri. [Read a full description of this project.](#)

**Ebola's Impacts on Businesses:** In this study, we will survey hundreds of businesses in all major sectors during the Ebola outbreak to understand how the crisis has affected business and economic activity, including employment, investment and market and supply chains. The lead researchers on this study are Katherine Casey, Rachel Glennerster and Tavneet Suri.

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[1] CDC November 10, 2014

<http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/2014-west-africa/case-counts.html>