



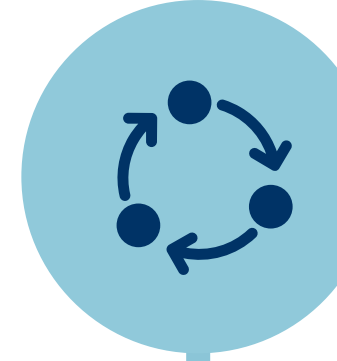
The Background: What We Know

Although the COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented, prior experiences with disease outbreaks, such as Ebola, shaped many countries' preparedness and response strategies [1-4]. Research suggests that these countries were better prepared to manage public health emergencies more effectively. Their investments in national and community health systems and their public health workforce strengthened their response coordination and supported innovation and infrastructure development [3, 4].



The Aim: What We Did

We used a novel data source—news articles—to explore how specific lessons learned from the 2014–2016 West African Ebola outbreak informed the COVID-19 pandemic response in five African countries.



The Method: How We Did It

We conducted a secondary qualitative analysis. The original dataset included 34,225 news articles published during the first six months of the pandemic. We filtered the dataset to include only articles that contained the keyword "Ebola," resulting in 861 articles across five countries.

We used a machine learning text classification model to identify 442 articles that discussed clear and country-specific lessons learned from the Ebola response applied to the COVID-19 pandemic based on our inclusion/exclusion criteria.

We used inductive and deductive coding to categorize and analyze the lessons learned, and identify emergent patterns discussed in the news articles [5]. Through our coding process, we excluded an additional 258 articles.



The Key Message

News articles highlighted the importance of empowering communities to take leadership and ownership of their local COVID-19 response to avoid a repeat of the Ebola outbreak.



The Result: What We Found

News articles in all five countries highlighted the **importance of mobilizing local leaders and community members in the decision-making and enforcement of mitigation measures**. Involving trusted members of the community, such as traditional and religious leaders, led to better compliance and cooperation with mitigation measures. Articles discussed how communities took the initiative to be more active during the COVID-19 pandemic because of their negative experience with Ebola. Communities still feared how their governments handled the Ebola response, especially the mismanagement of quarantine and lockdown measures by police. This fear, and a desire to avoid making the same mistakes during Ebola, prompted communities to take on more responsibility in responding to COVID-19.



The Contribution: Why Is This Important?

Governments should engage with and rely on local and traditional leaders throughout disease surveillance and response activities, as they have more immediate pathways to community members and can message effectively to them.

"The success of the Ebola response was built on what individuals did for themselves, their families, their neighbourhood, and communities. Therefore, **what needs to be given high priority is individual contributions by the average 'Joe at Tengbeh Town.'** The knowledge that people did not feel powerless but empowered to set up veronica buckets at home, washing their hands at every opportunity, avoiding handshakes and public gatherings is as powerful a contribution as the biomedical response."
- Sierra Leone

"We must understand the plight of our citizens and work with them constructively in ensuring that they can obey the stay-home order," said Moses Carter, a police spokesman... **Roland Weah, the commissioner of the West Point neighbourhood, where police opened fire during the Ebola outbreak to enforce a quarantine, said authorities were working closely with communities to avoid a repeat.** 'We have put into place measures to ensure there is not a recurrence of that situation,' he said. 'We are working as a community ... providing information that corona is here, (applying) all health protocols announced by the ministry of health.'
- Liberia

"Like in the days of the Ebola scare, **faith-based organisations and civil society must lend their support** in spreading precautionary measures so that an outbreak would be prevented."
- Ghana

"One should revisit pandemic-related local experiences, for example, **Community Based Intervention for Ebola in West Africa** and the potential of other community-based resources ... It is going to reveal the strength of local traditions and values, as well as the potential of LMICs to innovate. **It is important to capitalize on local initiatives** rather than copying wholesale approaches that proved successful in other parts of the world."
- Ethiopia

"So concerned residents in neighbourhoods neglected by Kenya's notoriously corrupt government are setting up handwashing stations and organising teams of volunteers to educate people about the disease. 'We can't sit pretty in our houses knowing that tomorrow we may have a crisis beyond our control,' ... **Community-led initiatives like SHOFCO's coronavirus drive are far more likely to win compliance from residents than edicts from a government noted only for its neglect - an important lesson learned from the Ebola outbreaks in West Africa in 2014 and in Congo last year.**"
- Kenya

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