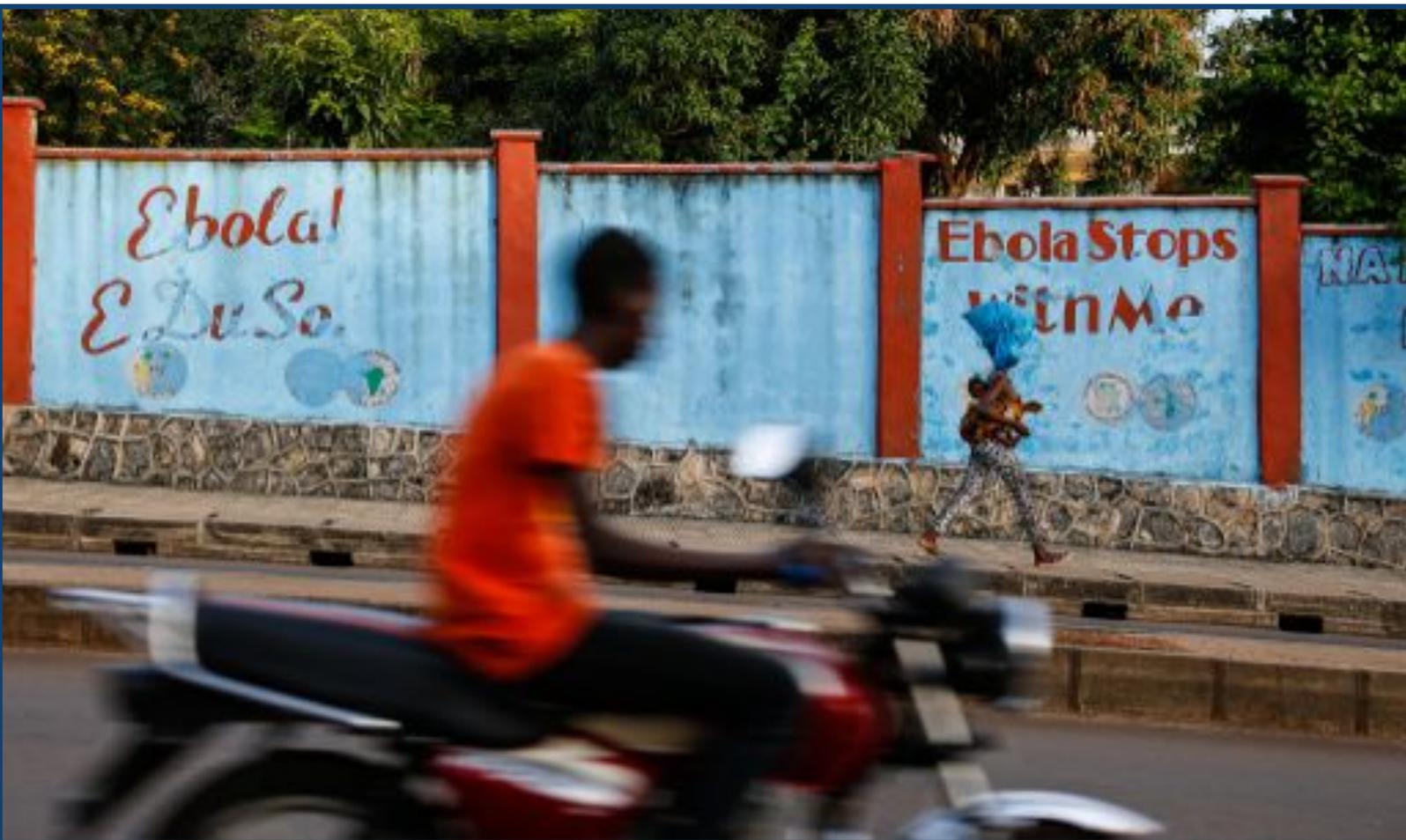


Mining Companies and Host Communities

Experiences Before, During and After the Ebola
Outbreak in Sierra Leone

Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

This report, prepared by **Habitat Health Impact Consulting** (<http://www.habitatcorp.com>) and **Independent Social Performance** (<http://independentsp.org/>), investigates how the decisions made by mining companies during the 2014 West African Ebola Viral Disease (EVD) outbreak may have affected health and social well-being in the host communities, and how the relationship between mining companies and host communities may have changed as a result. The research was conducted in Sierra Leone, a low-resource setting where health and social service infrastructure and funding are limited.

The study took advantage of a unique research opportunity. Interviews were conducted with community members, representatives of NGOs and mining company personnel at **three time points**: before, at the height of, and at the downturn of the 2014 EVD outbreak, across **four separate mining host communities** in Sierra Leone. Over 60 interviews took place in total.

Across all communities, hardship was experienced during the outbreak. Fear of and struggles with the disease affected community members strongly. However, almost all respondents emphasized that the indirect effects of the outbreak adversely affected the communities even more than the Ebola disease itself. Issues that stemmed from outbreak conditions, including high food prices, restrictions on movement, economic uncertainty, and the loss of important community supports for basic necessities were of central importance.

The different approaches taken by the mining companies in responding to the outbreak contributed towards a different experience in each community, both in terms of how the community was able to respond to these indirect effects, and also in how the relationship between the mining company and the host community evolved. In **Community A**, recent resettlement prior to the outbreak meant that the community was not yet self-sufficient during this crisis time, and the company's inaction on fulfilling their social responsibility commitments contributed to hardship and led to a worsening of community relations. In contrast, the approach taken by the mining company operating in **Community B** during the outbreak was inclusive of all community members, and led to an overall improvement in relations, as community members felt the company had all residents' interests in mind. A similar experience was seen in **Community C**, where an inclusive communication process about the outbreak resulted in an improved relationship, despite a very poor relationship before the outbreak. **Community D** experienced a combination of challenges due to resettlement that happened immediately prior to the outbreak, and a limited communications strategy developed by the mining company in which information about disease prevention and control was shared mainly with workers, and rarely with the community at large.

From an analysis of the experiences across these communities, four high-level lessons for extractive industry companies emerged, alongside specific recommendations.

1. **Public health matters for both communities and business.** In a health crisis situation such as the Ebola outbreak, successful disease prevention and control requires the participation of both the host community and the mining company; and both stand to benefit from their involvement.

Recommendations:

- Companies should prepare outbreak response plans that incorporate strategies for not only their workforce, but also for host communities.
- During a crisis, companies should take an approach that incorporates an 'outside-the-fence' approach to infection prevention and control.

2. **The biggest problems faced by the host communities during the outbreak wasn't necessarily Ebola itself.** Rather, hardships were caused by the indirect effects on the price and accessibility of food and other basic necessities, government-imposed restrictions on movement that limited the ability of families to earn an income, and the withdrawal of some development initiatives and resettlement supports that had previously been provided or promised by the mining companies, such as clean water supply and road building.

Recommendations:

- During an outbreak, companies should consider how they can continue development programs while maintaining the safety of their workers.
- After an outbreak, any development programs that have been suspended should be restarted as soon as possible.

3. **Resettlement is a determinant of community resiliency.** A community needs to be self-reliant in order to be sustainable. Resettled communities that are reliant on external organizations for meeting basic needs such as sufficient food, clean water or waste management are particularly vulnerable if those organizations are unable to supply these needs due to the crisis situation.

Recommendation:

- Resettlement Action Plans should be designed with the understanding that a crisis is possible; that a company may face diminished resources during this crisis; and that the resettled community's vulnerability at that time will be extremely high.

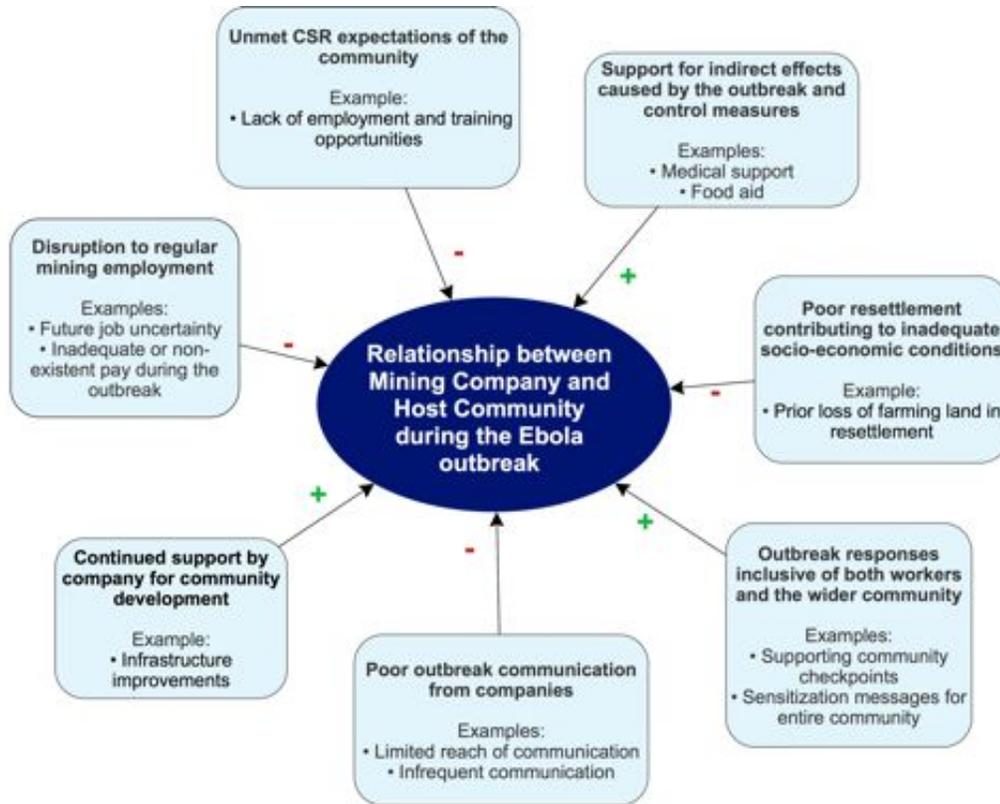
4. **Crisis communication presents a novel opportunity.** Crisis communication is easier when the company and community have a good relationship beforehand. However, even in the absence of a good prior relationship, crisis communication may be a foundation for building trust between the company and the host community in the future.

Recommendations:

- Best practice principles for effective outbreak communication are: build trust, announce early, be transparent, respect public concerns, and plan in advance.
- Communication needs to be conducted in a manner that involves the entire community.

As noted above, the EVD outbreak affected the relationship between the mining company and the host community in all four study locations. In some cases, the relationship improved; in other cases, it deteriorated. The figure below summarizes the key factors that mediated the relationship between the mining companies and the four host communities.

Key factors that affected the relationship between mining companies and host communities during the EVD outbreak. Positive and negative influences are indicated by a + or – sign, respectively.



In summary, to protect company assets, ensure the safety of their workers, and promote a high standard of corporate responsibility, companies need to acknowledge the rare but serious risk an outbreak can have on both their own operations and on their host communities. While adverse effects are likely to be experienced by all, indications from this research support the recommendation that well-planned approaches and preventative actions amidst an outbreak can minimize risks to both company operations and assets and to community health and safety. In specific instances, such actions may even improve relationships between a host community and an extractive company over the longer term as trust and resilience is constructed together.