

Ebola-hit countries seek recovery plan to 'keep standing'

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Ebola-hit countries urged the United Nations on Friday to come up with an economic recovery plan to help them cushion the outbreak's devastating blow on agriculture, mining and public finances.

Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have all dramatically cut their growth forecasts as the year-long outbreak has left 6,000 dead and overwhelmed health services.

"We need additional support so that we will still be standing when this outbreak is over," Guinea's Finance and Economy Minister Mohamed Diare told a special meeting on Ebola of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Ministers from the three countries said the Ebola crisis had placed heavy strains on their national budgets and left key sectors such as farming on the brink.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recalled that "before the Ebola outbreak, the economies of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone were vibrant and growing."

"Now they are weak and stagnant. Incomes are down. Prices have risen. Markets are bare. People are hungry.

"That is why it is imperative that while we work to end the Ebola outbreak, we must also begin to focus on recovery," he said.

The UN focus shifted to economic recovery even as the latest data showed the epidemic was far from over, with an increase in cases reported in Sierra Leone and Guinea, but a drop in Liberia.

Rice, maize and cassava production in Guinea have shrunk by 40-50 percent due to the outbreak and exports of potatoes to Senegal have collapsed, Diare said by videolink from Conakry.

The \$20-billion Simandou mining project is facing delays while the government is struggling with a loss in tax revenue combined with added public expenses, he added.

Ebola shrinks budgets

Sierra Leone's finance and economic development minister said that while \$712 million in aid had been received in his country, "only five percent was channeled to the national systems."

Kaifala Marrah said more financial aid should go to support national budgets and allow governments to help small farmers, local entrepreneurs, bankers and the tourism sector.

Currency rate fluctuations have left a \$90 million-dollar-hole in Sierra Leone's budget, forcing the government to consider costly measures to shore up the currency, he said.

Two key ore mining companies, London Mining and Africa Minerals, are facing difficulties, he added.

Liberia's deputy economy minister Mounir Siaplay stressed that expatriate workers have mostly left the country, compelling foreign firms to scale back activity.

A three-month state of emergency made "food harder to find and more expensive to buy," he said.

The World Bank estimates that growth in 2014 has dropped from 4.5 percent to 2.4 percent in Guinea, from 5.9 percent to 2.5 percent in Liberia and from 11.3 percent to 8.0 percent in Sierra Leone.

Guinea and Sierra Leone are headed for recession in 2015 and Liberia is expected to cling to modest growth.

The United Nations is leading international efforts to beat back the Ebola [outbreak](#), which the Security Council has declared a threat to world peace and security.

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