

World Bank announces \$160m for Ebola-hit Sierra Leone

December 3 2014

World Bank chief Jim Yong Kim announced a \$160 million two-year economic recovery plan on Wednesday to help impoverished Sierra Leone battle the worst Ebola outbreak on record.

Kim said after a closed-door meeting with President Ernest Bai Koroma in Freetown the cash would go towards regional operations centres and emergency response teams in the hard-hit west and north of the country.

The aid would also focus on the country's floundering farming sector and rural job creation, he told reporters.

"We are concerned that agricultural production has dropped significantly as a result of the Ebola epidemic and we will help farmers recover by building feeder roads that connect small farmers to markets," Kim said.

"We must make sure that the Ebola epidemic is not followed by a food security crisis. We will work to improve basic infrastructure such as urban services and access to electricity that will help the well being of citizens."

The Ebola outbreak ravaging west Africa has claimed 6,070 lives, according to the latest World Health Organization update, with almost all of the deaths in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea.

In Sierra Leone, where an increase in cases in the west of the country is causing alarm, 1,583 deaths out of 7,312 suspected cases were reported

as of November 30.

The World Bank said Tuesday the fallout from Ebola would push Sierra Leone into recession next year.

The west African nation of six million grew at 11.3 percent in the first half of the year but has contracted since at a 2.8 percent rate.

The country is expected to achieve four percent growth this year and shrink by two percent in 2015. Gross domestic product could fall \$900 million next year, the bank said.

Food production will also decrease because planting was curtailed in the June-August period. Heavy rain in September hit the country's rice crop and iron ore prices plunged.

A recent United Nations study in Sierra Leone found that 47 percent of people questioned believe the crisis has seriously affected their agricultural activities.

Koroma said he was reassured by Kim's visit.

"The presence of (Kim) will send a signal to the rest of the world that Sierra Leone is still open for visitors," he said at the joint news conference at the State House.

"We are still safe, we are fighting Ebola and our focus is to isolate the virus and not to isolate the country."

Kim flew to Conakry later on Wednesday, where he was expected to meet government officials and health experts.

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