

A conversation with Anders Nordström on December 9, 2014

Participants

- Dr. Anders Nordström – Advisor to the UN Secretary General’s Special Advisor on Ebola and Ambassador for Global Health, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs
- Jake Marcus – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Dr. Nordström.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Dr. Anders Nordström as part of its work on Ebola. Conversation topics included: sources of funding for the Ebola response, the funding gap in the response, and whether GiveWell donors could meaningfully help to fill this gap.

Funding needs

The \$988 million outlined in September in the United Nation’s (UN) Overview of Needs and Requirements and updated in October to \$1.5 billion cover the needs of UN agencies and major non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the six-month period from September 2014 to March 2015 and assumes significant additional contributions from governments.

The resource needs were revised up in mid-October when the outbreak was particularly strong. The outbreak has weakened somewhat since then, though it is far from contained (Dr. Nordström is particularly concerned about the situation in Sierra Leone and Guinea).

So far, \$1.1 billion of the \$1.5 billion have been raised, leaving a \$400 million gap.

The UN will update the Overview of Needs and Requirements in early January. The revision planned for early January will aim to represent funding needs for the second half of the six-month period begun this past September and ending this coming March.

The funding gap is the result of:

- Lags between when contributions are pledged, given, and mobilized. Pledged funds may not be noted in funding reports, causing apparent funding gaps to be reported. More precise reporting could reduce this issue.
- Governments shifting too soon from stopping the outbreak to promoting long-term recovery. This is a manageable risk.
- Governments might want to see the updated Overview before pledging additional resources. If the updated Overview is more specific than the current one, governments might be more willing to fill the funding gap.

The funding gap of \$400 million mostly represents a need for flexible cash contributions that could be quickly spent on things not provided as in-kind contributions. A flexible “trust fund” has raised \$130 million so far.

More flexible funding could be used to:

- Improve management practices
- Build epidemiological capacity
- Coordinate work across organizations and governments

Flexible funding could make it possible to better use larger-scale funding. UN agencies and major NGOs had planned to fund some things (e.g. construction of hospital beds) that complement with governments’ in-kind contributions.

Governments are capable of doing much, but not all, of the work UN agencies and NGOs can do. For example, governments are sometimes less equipped than the World Health Organization (WHO) to provide surveillance and monitoring services and guidance and clear standards for health workers.

International partner governments have provided about an additional \$1.2 billion, mostly comprised of in-kind contributions. There is presently no estimate of the total funds at large needed to contain the Ebola outbreak and associated costs.

Dr. Nordström does not know how much of the \$6.2 billion requested by the Obama administration has been allocated to cover past purchases vs. how much is fresh money for further relief; he has neither got information about the division of funds for long-term recovery vs. funds for immediately containing the outbreak. It is not clear if the funding package will be approved.

(More detail on the funding package proposal here: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/05/fact-sheet-emergency-funding-request-enhance-us-government-s-response-eb>)

The role of GiveWell donors

Given (1) the extraordinary scale of contributions to the Ebola response, (2) Ebola being a national security issue to which governments are responding and (3) Heavy news coverage of the outbreak, GiveWell-influenced donors probably should not divert their donations away from other important, neglected giving opportunities in global health and development to support outbreak containment though donations towards Ebola could spur a greater connection to those causes in the future.

All GiveWell conversations are available at <http://www.givewell.org/conversations>