



HAL
open science

Mobilising experience from Ebola to address plague in Madagascar and future epidemics

Kelley Sams, Alice Desclaux, Julienne Anoko, Francis Akindès, Marc Egrot, Khoudia Sow, Bernard Taverne, Blandine Bila, Michèle Cros, Moustapha Keïta-Diop, et al.

► **To cite this version:**

Kelley Sams, Alice Desclaux, Julienne Anoko, Francis Akindès, Marc Egrot, et al.. Mobilising experience from Ebola to address plague in Madagascar and future epidemics. *The Lancet*, 2017, 390 (10113), pp.2624-2625. 10.1016/S0140-6736(17)33088-X . hal-02568983

HAL Id: hal-02568983

<https://hal.science/hal-02568983>

Submitted on 10 May 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Mobilising experience from Ebola to address plague in Madagascar and future epidemics

As of Nov 10, 2017, there were a total of 2119 confirmed, probable, and suspected cases of plague, and 171 deaths from plague in Madagascar. This outbreak is spreading throughout the country, affecting both rural and urban areas, and anthropologists have been mobilised by global health agencies to contribute to the emergency global health response. Many of these specialists previously worked on the 2014–16 Ebola virus disease epidemic in west Africa and possess experience and expertise gained from this context. How urgently these experts were sought out by public health programmes showed that the relevance of the social sciences in global health is being increasingly recognised. However, exactly how these cross-discipline collaborations can be most effectively implemented, how anthropology can best contribute to epidemic response, and how anthropologists should be prepared require additional reflection.

The west African Ebola virus disease epidemic was the first time that social science researchers were called upon by UN agencies to be involved with a global health emergency response at every stage. Originally, anthropologists were asked to help identify and address barriers to controlling the spread of Ebola virus and to encourage compliance from local populations. However, this role quickly expanded. In addition to helping adapt Ebola-related messages and activities to specific contexts and populations, anthropologists helped shape understanding of the disease from a global health perspective. This approach included critiquing the overuse of the terms “socio-cultural factors” and “resistance” as catch-all explanations for the spread of the epidemic; insisting upon the need to conduct in-depth qualitative research to complement

the rapid knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices surveys proposed by many public health programmes; and adapting public health measures to local contexts.

As the Madagascar plague epidemic expands, expert knowledge gained from the Ebola virus disease epidemic will be crucial to address topics that are relevant to both diseases—for example, avoidance of patients by health workers, hiding of the sick by their relatives, resistance to contact tracing and safe burials, over-reaction of the media, and discordance between the biomedical and lay representations of the illness. Anthropologists in Madagascar have been asked to examine burial practices, therapeutic itineraries, and the population’s relationship to (and fear of) global health interventions. Although the contexts are different from the west African Ebola virus disease epidemic, this previous experience is useful to help anthropologists face current situations.

On Oct 22, 2017, an epidemic of Marburg virus disease was declared at the Uganda–Kenya border, and social scientists should be rapidly identified to join in emergency response efforts. As highlighted by anthropologists working on plague response in Madagascar, relevant connections with other scholars are essential. The contribution of anthropology to addressing the Marburg virus disease epidemic should include circulating relevant theoretical and practical knowledge within the social sciences, adapting findings to share with public health professionals and clinicians, developing appropriate research methodologies, and translating individual experience into collective knowledge and skills. Networks in medical anthropology should be supported to work toward this emergency epidemic preparedness, engage more anthropologists in rapid response efforts, and develop complementary in-depth studies related to haemorrhagic fevers, plague, and other epidemics.

We declare no competing interests.

**Kelley Sams, Alice Desclaux, Julienne Anoko, Francis Akindès, Marc Egrot, Khoudia Sow, Bernard Taverne, Blandine Bila, Michèle Cros, Moustapha Keita-Diop, Mathieu Fribault, for the Réseau Ouest Africain Anthropologie des Epidémies Emergentes, and Annie Wilkinson, for the Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform; a full list of group members is available in the appendix*
kelleysams@me.com

Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Transvihmi (UMI 233 IRD, 1175 INSERM, Montpellier University), Montpellier, France (KS, AD, KSo, BT, MF); Walden University, Minneapolis, MN, USA (KS); Norbert Elias Center (UMR 8562), 13002 Marseille, France (KS, MF); Dakar, Senegal (JA); Alassane Ouattara University, Bouaké, Côte d’Ivoire (FA); Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Mivegec (UMR 224 IRD, Montpellier University, 5290 CNRS), Bouaké, Côte d’Ivoire (ME); Centre de Recherche et de Formation à la prise en charge du VIH et des maladies associées de Fann, Dakar, Sénégal (KSo); Institut de Recherche en Sciences de la Santé, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (BB); Université Lyon 2, LADEC (CNRS/Lyon2/ENS-Lyon), Lyon, France (MC); Laboratoire Socio-Anthropologique de Guinée (LASAG), Université Lansana Conté de Sonfonia, Conakry, Guinée (MK-D); and Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK (AW)



Published Online
 November 28, 2017
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(17\)33088-X](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)33088-X)

See Online for appendix

Submissions should be made via our electronic submission system at <http://ees.elsevier.com/thelancet/>