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BY MONITOR TEAM

At the busy dusty border towns of Lia and Odramacaku, both in Arua City, traders are sighted crossing from the Democratic Republic of Congo into Uganda using illegal border entry points. Some are crossing using the designated routes with UPDF soldiers patrolling the areas as a measure to control the movement of people.

But when *Daily Monitor* visited one of the illegal border crossings in Lia on Wednesday afternoon, women were seen walking across the border with baskets of cassava and smoked fish on their heads. Boda boda riders were also ferrying passengers through the muddy paths, following a downpour.

At another unmanned border point at Lia, a UPDF soldier and a plain-clothed colleague emerged from the nearby bush. They then stopped the *Daily Monitor* reporters and asked them where they were coming from and where they were going. People have always crossed freely between the two countries. After assuring them that the team was heading to Arua City, they allowed the reporters to proceed. At the two border towns, residents depend on cross-border interactions with people from the DR Congo.

However, this way of life is now restricted due to an outbreak of Ebola in the DR Congo. Despite the movement restricts issued by the government, people are still sneakily crossing the border for trade, among others.

For weeks, health workers have been on high alert after Ebola broke out cross the border in eastern DR Congo.

The Ministry of Health and the district Ebola task force committee have intensified screening at official border points, established screening/quarantine centres and banned movements from DR Congo to Uganda and vice versa.

However, the hundreds of illegal crossing routes are negating government's effort to contain the spread of Ebola.

Ms Leticia Avako, a resident of Arua City, speaking to the *Daily Monitor* said: "I usually cross to the DRC in Ariwara every market day. It is where I earn money for survival. But now, this disease will affect my business because I cannot go to that side because life is important."

She added: "No money can buy life." Ms Avako was quick to mention that there are still loopholes at the borders due to undesignated crossing points. "Some youth use the *panya* routes to cross for disco in Ariwara or even smuggle. They should stop," she said.

On May 27, security personnel used teargas and live bullets to disperse revellers from disco halls in Arua City.

**The measures**

During a taskforce meeting for Arua



A health worker checks the temperature of a traveller at Birijaku border in Koboko District with DRC. PHOTO/RASHUL ADIDI.

# How border districts are fighting Ebola

City on Monday, it was resolved that all social gatherings, border markets and cultural events be suspended until further notice.

Security agencies have been directed to fully enforce these measures.

"Security deployment along border lines will be increased to enforce the suspension of cross-border movements, except for authorised transit. And any boda-boda rider found crossing the border will be arrested," the Arua City Resident City Commissioner, Maj (rtd) Betty Akello, said.

Arua City has so far tested and isolated 18 suspected cases, all of whom tested negative and have since been discharged.

Dr Paul Onzubo, the Maracha District health officer, said community sensitisation, screening and early isolation of suspected cases should be intensified, in order to contain the spread.

**Laxity and myths**

Last week, videos circulated on social media showing community members in Mongbwalu Town in Ituri province of Bunia and Mahagi areas in DRC removing dead bodies from the Ebola burial teams, with some disputing the outbreak of Ebola.

Days later, those who came into close contact with the dead body tested positive, according to health officials in DRC. The Alur Kingdom issued a statement against cross-border movement.

"All people on both sides of the border should avoid all non-essential travel across the border and to and from the epicentres in the DRC. The temporary limitation is not a punishment but done in good faith to protect all of us," Dr Amos Nyathirombo, the minister for Health in Alur Kingdom, said.

He appealed to communities to avoid public places that may be hot spots for the spread of the diseases such as border markets, cultural festivities and rites and any other uncontrolled public gatherings.

**Weekly markets stopped**

Border markets in the district bordering the DR Congo have also been closed indefinitely.

Health workers say many communities still lack adequate knowledge about Ebola symptoms and transmission, especially in remote villages near the border.

At the border of Vurra, Ms Jennifer Onzia, said: "Some people here still believe that Ebola only affects Congolese. Community sensitisation should be strengthened because we had such outbreaks in Uganda years ago and many people died."

As a result of locals' disregard for government's directive stopping cross-border movements, the authorities have been compelled to deploy police officers and soldiers along the border to enforce the directive.

At Birijaku border point in Koboko District, soldiers were seen chasing Congolese women attempting to enter Uganda with their merchandise.

**Schools tighten SOPs**

Schools countrywide have also insti-

tuted measures to prevent the spread of Ebola.

In Soroti District, Mr Bernard William Okello, the head teacher of Teso Boarding Primary School, told *Daily Monitor* that access to school has been restricted to only teaching staff.

At Jeressar High School, Soroti City, parents with fees balances have to pay the money at the gate, with teaching staff subjected to temperature checks before accessing the premises.

A number of washing points have also been placed across the compound.

In the western part of the country, in Kisoro District, local leaders in the border communities have been put on high alert to guard against illegal entry from DR Congo into the country.

"In liaison with the district security committee members, we have beefed up security in the border communities by alerting local leaders to be vigilant to curb illegal entry," said Mr Richard Ndyana, the Kisoro District LC5 chairperson.

He added that they have established checkpoints on different roads that connect Uganda to the DR Congo.

**FACTS**

**How Ebola spreads**

- Blood of infected person
- Urine
- Saliva
- Faeces
- Sweat
- Vomit
- Unsterilised equipment used by an infected person
- Soiled clothing of an infected person
- Handling wildlife whether alive or dead (especially bats and monkeys)

**Prevention**

- Avoid physical contact with

anyone showing the Ebola symptoms.

- Practice hand washing and maintain good hand hygiene at all times.
- Avoid contact with body fluids that include urine, blood, sweat, saliva, vomitus, and stool
- Seek appropriate health care services immediately when you experience Ebola-like symptoms
- Handling and burial of dead bodies of suspected Ebola patients should be supervised by the health team.
- All public places should have hand-washing facilities at their premises.

**Training and screening**

The Ministry of Health and district health teams have been training village health workers to enable them detect symptomatic Ebola suspects so that the district task force members can isolate them.

Ms Adah Nasiima, the Resident District Commissioner Isingiro District, said they have put screening points at the border entry points of Bugango, Kakagati and Nakivale and Oruchinga refugee settlements.

She said the Ebola threat is not only from the border points but also refugee camps because some of the people they host come from the DR Congo, where the disease originated from.

In Ntungamo District, Ms Mirriam Kagaiga Mugisha, the Resident District Commissioner said: "We are working with people to identify those who would have crossed illegally. At the Kizinga and Mirama hills, we screen everyone who crosses," she said.

While Rwanda and Tanzania have not registered any Ebola cases, both countries are transit routes for people from DR Congo.

The Uganda People's Defence Forces and police have increased patrols along known illegal routes.

Village Health Teams have been instructed to report suspicious illnesses immediately.

Community radios broadcast messages urging residents to avoid unauthorised crossings and report newcomers with Ebola-like symptoms. Still, enforcement is proving difficult.

**Water transport**

Buliisa District authorities have intensified security on Lake Albert and temporarily banned cross-border movements.

All landing sites on the lake have been closed as a preventive measure to stop possible spread of the disease.

Mr Watt Atuhairwe, the Buliisa District LC5 chairperson, said security forces have been deployed to stop the spread of the virus in communities living around the lake.

**Reported by Felix Warom Okello, Clement Aluma, Rashul Adidi, Simon Peter Emwamu, Robert Muhereza, Julius Hafasha, Ismail Bategeka, Rajab Mukombozi and Perez Rumanzi**