

Leaders say border collaboration key to curbing Ebola

NEBBI

By Lawrence Mulondo

Nebbi district leaders have called for increased support to facilitate regular cross-border engagements with leaders and communities in the DR Congo, saying such co-operation is vital in preventing the spread of the Ebola Bundibugyo virus and strengthening surveillance along the Uganda-DR Congo border.

The appeal was made during an orientation meeting of the Nebbi district Ebola task force on Tuesday, where leaders warned that Uganda's efforts to contain the disease could be undermined if similar preventive measures are not implemented across the border.

Nebbi resident district commissioner (RDC) Robert Abak said Uganda and DR Congo must co-ordinate their response to effectively contain the outbreak.

"We have to be on the same page with Congo if we are to win this war. It will not help if we ban disco parties and other mass gatherings here to contain the spread of Ebola while similar activities continue on the other side, enticing people to cross through porous borders," Abak said.

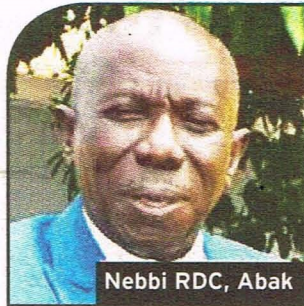
COMMUNITIES VULNERABLE

Uganda's Ministry of Health had registered 19 confirmed Ebola cases by Friday, including 14 imported cases and five local infections. Of these, 13 patients remained admitted, five had been discharged and two deaths had been recorded.

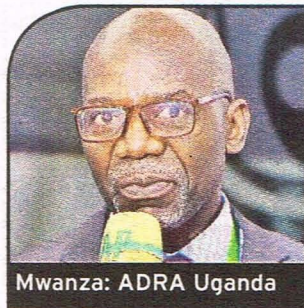
As one of Uganda's high-risk districts bordering DR Congo, Nebbi remains vulnerable because of numerous ungazetted crossing points used daily by residents on both sides of the border.

Abak said longstanding social, cultural and economic ties between communities in Nebbi and eastern DR Congo continue to complicate disease control efforts.

"Many people in Nebbi have relatives in Congo. Some even own gardens across the border. Because of these family and economic ties, people regularly cross through ungazetted routes to



Nebbi RDC, Abak



Mwanza: ADRA Uganda

visit relatives, cultivate land or conduct business," he said.

INTELLIGENCE REPORTS

Abak revealed that district authorities had received intelligence reports indicating that a group of people had reportedly escaped from an Ebola treatment centre in Congo and could be heading towards Uganda.

"We have to remain on high alert. Our teams are moving to border communities to share information and encourage residents to report any unfamiliar persons arriving in their villages," he said.

PARTNERS' SUPPORT RESPONSE

John Mwanza, ADRA Uganda's director, said the organisation is supporting Ebola preparedness and response efforts in the high-risk West Nile districts of Zombo, Nebbi, Pakwach and Arua, key entry points for travellers from the DR Congo.

"Working with the Ministry of Health, district task forces and community leaders, we are promoting Ebola awareness, hygiene, early reporting and disease prevention. We are also training district task forces, supporting public handwashing facilities and reaching communities through radio programmes and volunteers. ADRA's interventions are expected to benefit about 90,000 people, particularly vulnerable groups, while helping curb misinformation and strengthen surveillance," he said.

RESOURCE SHORTAGE THREATENS PREPAREDNESS

District officials expressed concern over limited resources for Ebola preparedness and response.

"Logistical support remains a major challenge because the border area is vast. We still lack essential supplies such as sanitisers, gloves, aprons and equipment for isolation centres," the Nebbi RDC, Abak, said. He added that although health workers are prepared to respond to Ebola, shortages of protective equipment could expose them to unnecessary risks.