In March 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized Ebola as an international public health emergency. At this point the virus had already spread across West Africa. In response, donor funding became immediately available to West African countries. Unlike traditional methods of public health investments, there is limited time to plan and coordinate during a humanitarian crisis. During the Ebola crisis, there was little infrastructure to implement intervention strategies supported by aid.\(^1\)

The gap in data availability was a primary issue that prevented proper donor coordination. Post-evaluative research has indicated that of the key players in the Ebola response, only a third of them provided any type of horizontal aid.\(^2\) The West African countries were set up primarily to receive horizontal aid and did not have the infrastructure to receive vertical donations.\(^3\) Providing money and supplies to a state with little to no infrastructure is impractical and the virulence of the Ebola epidemic further compounded the logistical challenges. Beyond the integration of both forms of aid, there needs to be better interaction between different donors, in addition to the donors and in-country groups. The lack of unity and communication between these varying groups “clearly [brought] to light shortcomings in public health systems.” A surveillance system has been suggested as a wise investment, specifically one that could deploy “resources strategically to respond better.”\(^4\) Examining the Ebola crisis has highlighted many of the missteps that occurred in its response but it also offers a chance to use these limitations to determine a system to improve group interaction and better allocation of aid.

In an effort to address the following question, “How can aid responses be more effective in humanitarian crisis situations?” we are exploring the feasibility of a data-driven solution to address the current gap in data availability at times of humanitarian crises. The predominate reporting method in events like Ebola is delivered through the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS). Aid efforts that are captured by UNOCHA are of a limited scope with no project-level geographic or temporal values. Additionally, most donors that report to UNOCHA are traditional Western donors, which leaves out a significant number of actors such as non-traditional, emerging donors. The large time disparity between the sending of aid, the reporting of aid to UNOCHA, and the publishing of an official aid report from UNOCHA furthers the fault with this method. Without a full picture of donor activities, it is difficult to deliver swift and effective relief efforts. By supplementing official reports with project-level information, this pilot will demonstrate the benefits of capturing more granular data on donor activities in humanitarian disasters.

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