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Real time monitoring to examine economic impact of Ebola in Sierra Leone will help inform government response

A system to monitor the economic impact of Ebola in Sierra Leone has been activated by the International Growth Centre (IGC) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) in light of the significant effect the crisis will have on the country.

The monitoring system will assess the extent to which travel disruptions are impacting rural marketplaces and alert the government as to their location. This will help it, and its development partners, respond by bringing in supplies and/or modifying transport restrictions.

Researchers from IPA will survey traders overseeing 185 rural markets and ask a series of questions about the availability, quantity and price of basic food stuffs including imported and local rice, cassava, fish, and palm oil.

The monitoring will also seek to provide evidence on the extent to which economic activity, especially in the informal sector, has declined in response to fear and uncertainty around the outbreak as well as restrictions on bars, restaurants and transport.

The IGC hopes to present the results of this first round of monitoring to the government next week.

Rachel Glennerster, Lead Academic for IGC Sierra Leone and Executive Director of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), said: "August is the peak of the lean season, when food stocks from the last harvest are running short and farmers are most vulnerable. They must buy the food they need in August and September. Any disruption to transport routes and trade can lead to sharp spikes in the price of food and other necessities, putting them out of the reach of the poor."

Some districts in Sierra Leone have been quarantined and while food is being transported into these districts it will be a major challenge to ensure that it reaches all rural communities.

The IGC is also proposing that current transportation restrictions, such as the closing of international borders, are reviewed to see if concerns about disease control can be addressed while reducing the economic impact of these measures.

Under the State of Emergency some commercial (okada) vehicles have been restricted and bars and restaurants have been closed at night. Workers in these informal sectors, who are mostly young men, are likely to be particularly affected.

Glennerster said: “The short term economic impacts of the Ebola crisis are already being felt. Some of the medium to longer term consequences are predictable and the government and other agencies need to prepare now to limit the likely impact. However, there is also a risk of hastily taken measures backfiring. The IGC is therefore committed to not only providing this real-time information but also conducting research into the wider economic implications of the crisis.”

Notes to Editors

This system draws on previous research funded by the IGC which monitored the price and quantity of staple foods in a random sample of markets throughout the country. Information on this research is available here:
<http://www.theigc.org/publications/working-paper/rural-roads-and-intermediated-trade-regression-discontinuity-evidence>

The International Growth Centre (IGC) aims to promote sustainable growth in developing countries by providing demand-led policy advice based on frontier research. Based at LSE and in partnership with Oxford University, the IGC is initiated and funded by DFID. For more information on the IGC, please visit <http://www.theigc.org>.

For more information

For more information on the food price monitoring system implemented by IGC and IPA, please contact Charlie Haines, Communications Officer (charlie.haines@theigc.org, 07960405516). Mr. Haines will be able to field media enquiries to Rachel Glennerster (mentioned above) and Herbert M’cLeod, Country Director, IGC Sierra Leone.

Please also see a full statement on the economic implications of the Ebola crisis on our website: <http://www.theigc.org/news/understanding-economic-threat-posed-ebola-outbreak-sierra-leone>