Dear Reader,

The current edition of SEF/INEF News brings approaches to global health risks and lessons learnt from the Ebola epidemic in Western Africa into focus.

Find out more about this and our other current focal areas – we wish you a fruitful reading!

Rebekka Hannes, sef: Jan Schabitzki, INEF

HEADLINE TOPIC

Overcoming Global Health Risks: Lessons from the Ebola outbreak

More than one year after its outbreak in West Africa, the Ebola epidemic is still not under control. The number of deaths has already passed the mark of 10,000, with a total of about 25,000 confirmed cases. Nonetheless, the focus is already shifting towards the effects of the worst Ebola epidemic recorded so far, as well as the lessons learnt for national and global health policies.

One of the main reasons why the epidemic could not be contained swiftly, and why eventually the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern“ (PHEIC) at the beginning of August 2014, can be found in the weak health systems of the three worst-affected countries – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, an effective Ebola response requires not only a well-trained medical team with the right protective equipment, but also specialist inpatient treatment facilities, laboratories and a basic health service. In all three countries, these systems are rudimentary in the extreme. Moreover, these countries also lack well-functioning public disease control systems, which is why the first cases were finally reported to the WHO in March 2014. Thus, due to a number of local social and cultural conditions the wave of infections could escalate into a public emergency thereby immensely challenging the international crisis response system.
The already weak health systems in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have been further weakened by the Ebola crisis, the more so since many fatal casualties had to be deplored among the health personnel. This is why efforts are needed on the part of many actors to (re-)build the public health systems in the three countries and to reduce the negative economic and social consequences of the Ebola outbreak. The international conference “Ebola: From Emergency to Recovery” in Brussels, organized by the EU Commission in early March 2015, centred on how to cope with these detrimental effects of Ebola. One of the main conclusions was that coordination is a major prerequisite for any emergency response or reconstruction measure to be successful.

During the course of the Ebola epidemic, the importance to coordinate the emergency measures of diverse actors in such a serious health crisis was demonstrated. It is, in fact, the WHO which is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. After many years of chronic underfunding, however, the WHO was not even able to execute its own emergency plan of August 2014 immediately, because it had to obtain the necessary funds first. It was only when the UN Security Council - for the first time in its history – addressed an acute health crisis on 18th September 2014, and the UN Secretary-General established a special mission to fight Ebola (UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, UNMEER) and appointed Dr David Nabarro as Special Envoy on Ebola, that a concerted and intensified international emergency response was launched.

Establishing a special mission to coordinate the work of UN bodies, however, is not a viable model for a future response to health crises. Instead, existing structures centred on the WHO must be strengthened and expanded. Just as regional efforts are necessary to build up effective systems of disease control and prevention. This includes better information and awareness raising, as well as better involvement of local communities in the health emergency response. Moreover, with respect to formulating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) there are also lessons to be learnt from the Ebola epidemic: Strengthening national health systems and developing health workforce capacities must be made a top priority compared to small-scale vertical approaches to public health issues.

In the latest issue of the Global Governance Spotlights series, Dr Cornelia Ulbert argues for a more resolved reform of the WHO and for strengthening national health systems. Furthermore, this year’s sef: Potsdam Spring Dialogues are under the banner of disease control and prevention in Africa.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2015
Disease Control and Prevention in Africa: Current Reforms to Strengthen Regional Cooperation

26th-27th March 2015 in Potsdam

This year’s sef: Potsdam Spring Dialogues will take place from 26th until 27th March under the title “Disease Control and Prevention in Africa: Current Reforms to Strengthen Regional Cooperation”. International Experts will examine existing and new initiatives on an Africa-wide and regional level and will discuss more effective ways of preventing communicable diseases and curbing outbreaks in the future. Further focus will be put on experiences from other regions of the world and the role of international organizations and NGOs. : find out more
4th Käte Hamburger Dialogue
Engaging Crimea: Prospects for Conflict and Cooperation
9th April 2015 in Duisburg

One year after the highly controversial referendum, Crimea is de-facto Russian territory, incorporated into the Russian Federation at both the political and societal level. In collaboration with the German Development Institute, the Centre for Global Cooperation Research invites to the fourth Käte Hamburger Dialogue to discuss the current situation with international academics and experts. The Käte Hamburger Dialogue will be the opening event for the following workshop on 10th April in Duisburg, where the discussion on the impact of the Crimean referendum on both Ukraine and Russia as well as their relationship will continue. : find out more

11th Käte Hamburger Lecture
Identity and Political Mobilization of Diasporas: A Gendered Perspective
21th April 2015 in Duisburg

In the eleventh Käte Hamburger Lecture Nadje Al-Ali, Professor of Gender Studies at SOAS, University of London, will address the importance of a gendered perspective when analyzing the identity formations and political mobilizations of Muslim Diasporas in Europe and beyond. The Major of Duisburg Sören Link will welcome the audience, and the Director of INEF and the Centre for Global Cooperation Research Prof. Tobias Debiel will lead into the event that is co-organized with the Volkshochschule Duisburg. The lecture will be commented by INEF Researcher Dr Jochen Hippler, University of Duisburg-Essen, and Dr Ariane Sadjed, University of Vienna. : find out more
On 13th Mai 2015 sef: will, together with Germanwatch, host a workshop at the Bonn Conference for Global Transformation, which is organized by the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the State of North Rhine-Westphalia. The workshop entitled "Transformative alliances: How small groups of stakeholders could make a big difference" will discuss success factors of frontrunner alliances as they can be found in the security sector. We will also focus on the question under which circumstances alliances between national and subnational governments, civil society and businesses can be successful in the sustainability sector as well. : find out more

PUBLICATIONS

Global Governance Spotlight 1|2015
The United Nations and Global Health Crises. Lessons learned from the Ebola outbreak

The Global Governance Spotlight 1|2015 by Dr Cornelia Ulbert, INEF’s Executive Director, is entitled „The United Nations and Global Health Crises. Lessons learnt from the Ebola outbreak“. Ulbert outlines the genesis of the international health emergency and discusses the reaction of the international community, especially that of the UN and the World Health Organisation (WHO). She argues for a more resolved reform of the WHO and for strengthening national health systems. : find out more
The International Journal of Human Rights

'From naming and shaming to knowing and showing': human rights and the power of corporate practice

Hegemonic discourses tend to swallow their enemies, meaning that they tend to reframe the antagonistic demands and merge them into their own interests. INEF Researcher Christian Scheper demonstrates this for capitalism and demands for human rights. He describes the transformation process, in which the implementation of human rights is increasingly integrated into the inner business strategies of companies, and is outwardly displayed to the public. As an effect the rather fundamental critique on capitalistic business practices is weakened. : find out more

Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Global Dialogues 6

Global Cooperation in Transitional Justice: Challenges, Possibilities, and Limits

The sixth issue of the "Global Dialogues" series aims to broaden the scientific discourse on transitional justice. Although growing attention is given to the developments and dynamics beyond the nation state, the global dimensions of the phenomenon are still insufficiently researched. Therefore, the editors of this issue, Noemi Gal-Or and Birgit Schwellng, brought together scholars from a variety of disciplines and institutions to elaborate the challenges, ambiguities and paradoxes of global cooperation in transitional justice. : find out more

Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Global Dialogues 7

The Tunisian Constitutional Process: Main Actors and Key Issues

The authors of this issue of the "Global Dialogues" series reflect on the domestic, international, legal, and economic implications of religion and politics in the context of post-revolutionary Tunisia. Edited by Mathieu Rousselin and Christopher Smith, this multi-disciplinary piece provides both non-professionals and experts alike with an essential, comprehensive understanding of this event. The articles draw inspiration from and add to the issues discussed at the second Käte Hamburger Dialogue event and a following workshop which took place in Duisburg in May 2014. : find out more
The Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. The cross-party, non-profit-making foundation argues for a new political order in a world increasingly marked by globalisation. More information under: www.sef-bonn.org.

The SEF has a particularly close working relationship with the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF) at the University of Duisburg-Essen. The two institutions are linked by a cooperation agreement. The aim of INEF’s application-oriented research is to build bridges between theory and practice. More information under: www.inef.uni-due.de