Despite millions pouring into Ebola relief effort, not even a trickle has reached many of the community holding centres for Ebola patients

LONDON, 25 NOVEMBER, 2014. Unprecedented levels of donation to support Ebola-struck Sierra Leone are bypassing many of the places where funding is urgently needed, claim two UK-based experts. The independent experts, Dutch sustainability scientist, Robert Verkerk PhD, and Sierra Leonean crisis management expert, Morris Marah, have just returned from a one-week capacity assessment mission requested by the Ministry of Information and Communications, Sierra Leone.

Dr Verkerk and Mr Marah were invited by Sierra Leone's Minister of Information and Communications, Hon Alpha Kanu, to assess capacity and requirements for the fight against Ebola in the Port Loko district. The district, for which Mr Kanu also acts as Member of Parliament, is one of the hardest hit outbreak areas in the country.

Last week saw a decline in numbers of reported Ebola cases in the Port Loko district from the peak in October. The availability of funds to rapidly build and resource 20 holding and community centres in the district is critical to Mr Kanu's ambitious bid to oust Ebola from the district by the end of the year.

"*It's a bitter pill to swallow for many Sierra Leoneans*," says Dr Verkerk on his return today, "*Loc al people listen daily to radio news reports saying that the British are donating at unprecedented levels to support the effort against Ebola. Yet this spend is being concentrated in very limited areas, like the British-built facilities, only one of which is ready*
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"*The majority of Sierra Leone government-run facilities*," added Dr Verkerk, "*have yet to receive a penny and are struggling to find funds for things as commonplace as tarpaulin for walls and roofing, and glue for the gauze windows to make them mosquito-proof*
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"*There is complete disparity in how the funding is being distributed*", explains Mr Marah. "*We've visited many of the holding and community care centres for Ebola victims in the Port Loko district. We didn't find a single Sierra Leone government facility that had received any external funding despite all the money pouring in from well-meaning donors around the world.*
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The two experts stressed that these holding centres are playing a key role in the fight against Ebola because they allow infected individuals to be rapidly isolated from their communities. This role is being coordinated by British army personnel, the WHO and CDC, who are working closely with Sierra Leone police, army and medical staff.

Commenting on these centres, Mr Marah said "*It's critical that they don't turn into death camps – places where infected people are brought and simply left to die, just because resources aren't there. The British-built Kerrytown facility is a long way from Port Loko and the Port Loko facility probably won't be functional until the new year.* "

Aside from Kerrytown, there are five more British centres under construction. But these new centres are a case of 'too much, too late'. The view on the ground is that better support of the temporary Sierra Leone-run holding and community centres would be far more effective and costly, both economically and in terms of human suffering.