11 March 2015 ¦ GENEVA -WHO and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) are combining their forces in a new partnership in the Ebola-affected countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The arrangement combines the logistics strength of WFP with WHO's public health expertise to help get the current Ebola outbreak down to zero cases in West Africa. The platform also establishes an alert and response infrastructure for future crises.

WHO and WFP combine their expertise in the 3 most Ebola-affected countries

"This partnership increases both agencies' abilities to reach, monitor and respond to the needs of all people touched by Ebola," says Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. "It helps us deploy and maintain technical teams with expertise in infection prevention and control, epidemiology, and contact tracing, enabling dedicated health workers in the deep field to do their best work. The partnership is also a learning opportunity for the future, informing our capacities to launch joint operations during large scale emergencies."

"Over the past seven months, partnerships have been crucial in fighting this devastating outbreak. WFP has worked with our partners to respond to communities' most basic needs -- making sure food is reaching everywhere that the Ebola virus has hit.

Our logistical support to WHO and the wider humanitarian community has enabled affected people to receive the urgent care and support they need," says WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin. "We are making progress, however we must remain vigilant. The Ebola crisis will not end until we identify, reach and successfully treat every last case. Recognizing this goal, the WHO-WFP partnership – a joint technical and operational force – will continue providing the support required to achieve zero cases."

Using a joint operations approach, the two agencies agreed to combine their expertise in more than 60 priority districts and prefectures on the ground in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the three most Ebola-affected countries.

Today, more WHO employees are working at the community level on Ebola in West Africa than

at any other point in the epidemic. Over 700 people are currently deployed in the Ebola affected countries. In districts with ongoing Ebola transmission, WFP is ensuring that WHO disease detectives have the resources they need — computer equipment, phones and stable internet connectivity — to share information critical to tracking and stopping the virus.

WFP is also managing the fleet of rugged vehicles carrying WHO social anthropologists and epidemiologists to isolated villages, where they will continue gaining the trust of communities to find and follow contacts of Ebola patients until all cases are resolved.

The joint partnership responds to the directive of WHO's Executive Board Special Session on Ebola, to develop new ways to strengthen health emergency operations and provides a model for collaboration in future response to emergencies with health impact.