

**THE EBOLA CRISIS: ONE YEAR LATER**  
**Panel Moderator: Lindiwe Majele Sibanda**  
October 14, 2015 -2:45 p.m.

*Introduction:*

**Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn**  
President - World Food Prize Foundation

---

Last year we had His Excellency Kanayo Nwanze here, and then Florence Chenoweth, who was the Minister of Agriculture of Liberia, and we had Joseph Sam Sesay, who was the Minister of Agriculture of Sierra Leone. And we had a live hookup to Sierra Leone to the presidential palace, so President Ernest Bai Koroma could address us here. And at that time, of course, the world was focused on the incredible Ebola devastating impact. And afterwards we had a press conference, and the only thing comparable in the sadness I felt was the night I got the call that Norm Borlaug had passed away. But the powerful descriptions that Minister Chenoweth and Joseph Sesay and President Koroma provided were of such power and what devastation had been wrought not only on people but on agriculture.

So we wanted to have this opportunity now to take a look and have an update with this. Dr. Sibanda, thank you again for... changed her schedule and flew here to get here on time. Thank you so very much, but to have Minister Chenoweth and Dr. Jones here, so it's over to you.

*Panel Moderator:*

**Lindiwe Majele Sibanda**  
Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network

*Panel Members:*

**Monty Jones** 2004 World Food Prize Laureate  
**H.E. Florence Chenoweth** Former Minister of Agriculture, Liberia

---

**Lindiwe Majele Sibanda**

Thank you very much, Ambassador Quinn. Thank you for this opportunity to revisit what we call Ebola 102.

When I go back to last year's session, two keynote speakers spoke to us. First was Kanayo Nwanze, the president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, who reminded us of what Norman Borlaug said in 1970. I quote, *It is said that at this late date there are still two worlds, the privileged world and the forgotten world.* Kanayo went on to say, *Our role is to make it*

*happen. Our role is to facilitate. Our role is to support and to enhance.* He emphasized that the poor rural people are not waiting for handouts – they are looking for economic opportunities. Ebola has taken all this away.

We also connected with His Excellency, the president of Sierra Leone, President Ernest Bai Koroma, who emphasized and articulated the damage that they had experienced. In his words, he said, “The majority of the victims of this disease are persons between the age of 15 and 20, the most active age category comprising of our youths. This is a disease that strikes the youths. It strikes the farmers. It is a disease that destroys food. It is a disease that has destroyed our economy. The Ebola disease is a disease against agricultural productivity. It is a disease against our youth. It is a disease that has compromised the role of our youth in agriculture.”

We are all here today to have the hunger fighters of Africa. If you want to know about agriculture in Africa, if you are appointed a minister, the go-to person is our very own Dr. Florence Chenoweth, who was the first Minister of Agriculture in Liberia in 1970, having served outside but had to then go back to Liberia to fight hunger. She is an eminent luminary in our field, and she was here last year. And what she said was, “We Liberians are resilient people. We are going to fight and bounce back.” Thank you. It’s an honor to invite you back today.

We were unfortunate last year, because our very own Dr. Monty Jones could not join us because the president would not let him go. In his new role as advisor to the president, he had to be in the forefront to stay at home and make sure the situation is contained. Welcome, Professor Dr. Monty Jones, our own laureate co-prize winner of the World Food Prize 2004 for his work on being Mr. NERICA – that what’s what we know him as in Africa. Thank you very much for joining us today.

To our panelists, let me start with Dr. Jones. You were not here last year. Can you paint a bright picture. If we think of Sierra Leone now, is it gloom or there is hope? Post-Ebola, where are we?

### **Monty Jones**

Well, I would first of all like to say that when my President spoke to you last October, Ebola was ravaging Sierra Leone. It was really very bad, because at that time we were at the peak of Ebola. We were getting about an excess of 500 cases per week. In fact, I remember one day in November we had the highest cases of, I think 111 case for that particular day. People were dying. It was really very bad. It got to the stage wherein you hear the siren passing you shiver. But at that time, I remember what was said to us, that it was a case of hopelessness, by experts, and that Ebola was going to take millions of lives in the three countries, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, and that we had a 90% chance of dying from the disease.

So today I would say that there is hope, because today we average a 70% chance of survival, which is very good news. Millions of people did not die. Instead, we got 8,800-plus people that were affected by the disease. We got 4,100 survivors and just under 4,000 deaths of people. But I will say that those people, their deaths will not go in vain, because through that period from May 2014, when Ebola struck, to date, you know, we’ve got the international community to learn about Ebola. Sierra Leoneans to know about Ebola, Liberians and Guineans I guess it’s the same thing. You know, we now know what to do. We know how to intervene. Prior to this period, the international community did not know what to do because this was the first major

case of Ebola in the world. We were all panicky because nobody knew what to do. But today at least we know what to do.

In Sierra Leone we know how to move very swiftly to curtail the disease. We've increased contact tracing, we've increased surveillance tracing. We're working with key partners, international donor partners, international health organizations, including the World Health Organization and others to develop resilient response to any case of Ebola that will come to Sierra Leone. And even though for the past five weeks we've not got a case of Ebola, and in our countdown to zero plus 42, we've done something like 19 days in the countdown today. So we're moving there, but even then we're going to keep the structures in place, not all of them, some of them in strategically located places, so that if anything, we can move very swiftly.

So I will say that, yes, we now have hope, and in fact we've started moving towards planning for reconstruction, rebuilding of our society and of course go into development programs. So we are quite happy with the progress today.

### **Lindiwe Majele Sibanda**

Thank you very much, Professor Jones, for that positive narrative. Of course, 4,000 deaths is one too many, but we want to congratulate for containing the disease and looking upward to a better future. I will come back to you, but let's turn over to Liberia.

You told us you are resilient. You were lying flat on the ground, and you're back today. What is the positive narrative from Liberia?

### **H.E. Florence Chenoweth**

Well, when Ebola was identified in the country, very, very few people had even ever heard about it. Thanks to knowledge gained in my international work on the continent, I knew what Ebola was, and I had even participated in one of the training classes for how do you organize people when it was in Eastern Africa. So I'm a Girl Guide – be prepared.

So I immediately started making myself an advisor, telling the story that this is what we have to do. We have to act very fast. And, of course, in being responsible for the agricultural sector, I had worked too hard to build our human capacity that was completely destroyed during those 24-plus years of our civil unrest, to have anything happen to those young people that were placed around the country.

So the telephones were still working. In Africa, leapfrog telephone, use of the telephone – thank God for that, too, because we were able to speak to our farmers the same way a farmer would call me and tell me there's something on my leaf of this plant and then we would discuss it, send an extension worker, and then send those farmers... Many of them cannot read or write, but they know money. So I figure I'll send them a dollar on their phone, and I figure that if I send a stress message on the phone about this disease that can kill you instantly, you must react also. So the phone helped to get people out.

But our greatest success... the person responsible for our greatest success was our president. She is a go-getter for it. And when she heard about it, she said the buck stops here. So

everything – whether you are ambassador, whether you’re a university president, whether you’re a Liberian – every week the messages, the concerns will be expressed in one place, directed at one point, and the remedies that we’ll take will be directed by that one source. So she was in charge of it. And that’s how we started, sending those messages out.

We had bodies dropping like they didn’t know what to do with them. We have a smaller health capacity than Sierra Leone does. We had no aircraft around to take people anywhere. We knew that we had to build ETUs, for even though they are quick to build, you have to furnish them and prepare them. So once through that period we exceeded the number of deaths by Sierra Leone. But apart from our president taking leadership, I think we owed it to the Liberian people themselves that took leadership. They heard the message – you must control your community. Don't let anybody in, don't let anybody out. Answer the calls when we call you. Tell your story. Help is on its way.

And those people drew imaginary lines around villages and their communities, because Ebola came right on our border from Guinea into the breadbasket for agriculture. When it hit the breadbasket, I knew that we had lost the sector. So that was our story.

We were a country just celebrating the fact that we had gone from zero to development financing, funding rate that was high. We were being complimented around the world. We had galvanized \$17.6 billion worth of foreign investments, \$6.2 of which was in the agricultural sector. And we could see light at the end of the tunnel. Forget that. The billions that the foreign investors brought in, they took out; because they left. They’re beginning to come back, some of them, now.

But while we waited for assistance, especially in terms of what to do, we used everything we had in our cupboard. So we had predicted that our GDP would drop. Our growth rate, not GDP, our growth rate would drop from that 9% to about 5%. But when I saw that Ebola had hit all four of the major breadbasket areas around the country, my figure was we’re going to zero. So mentally I prepared myself for that – it’s over. And as we all know now, we lost, but we’ve permitted from that, about 9% good to negative. But maybe we needed to not just go to five but to... it hit us so hard, a negative, and it brought a true resilience that’s in us. We will rebuild. So that’s what we are doing.

**Dr. Sibanda**

Excellent story, so you are still fighting, and you still believe you will rebuild.

**Minister Chenoweth**

Yes. We have opened our schools. Our children are back in school. Our farmers are back in the field. We are Ebola free. We’re declared Ebola free by the bodies, the global bodies that do this. And then we enjoyed that for almost three months and we got one case that came in. But October 4<sup>th</sup> we got the declaration again we are Ebola free.

**Dr. Sibanda**

Congratulations. Congratulations for that. Ladies and gentlemen, we have two success stories. Africa can do it. Africa has done it. But we need to move forward. Agriculture is about the long term. We need investment. We need to build resilience of the people and of the systems and the institutions that have been destroyed.

Minister Chenoweth, you did explain to us that you lost bridges, and I could not connect the two, that how can a disease result in the loss of bridges? Can you unpack that further?

**Minister Chenoweth**

Well, you know, we went through 24½ years of unrest, civil unrest. And we had in 2006 there was nothing; there was no water running, no electricity, and no schools, no churches, no nothing. We started to rebuild from all angles. And so when something like Ebola comes around and everything comes to a standstill, the equipment I just left out there. There were bridges that we were constructing. So we had a year of nobody doing anything, and so it collapsed. The work just, it stopped.

**Dr. Sibanda**

I get it now. That's sad. Professor Jones, the youth affected – what efforts are in place to make sure... All of Africa is crying about the aging population of famine. They are all trying to get the youth back into agriculture and here is a country that has been hardest hit at the heart of agriculture. What are you doing as advisor to the president in terms of getting things back on track?

**Dr. Jones**

Thanks Madam facilitator, first of all, I would like to say, permit me to say, a few words. Actually, like Liberia, our President is the champion. He was called, and he's still called the "chief social mobilizer" of Ebola. Because our President traveled the length and breadth of the country. We will work from Monday to Friday in Freetown, and Friday evening we will take off to visit regional headquarters, district, towns, cities, and in some cases even villages in the provinces, to deliver the social mobilizing message. And at the same time, the president took that opportunity to rally all the people, the counselors, political leaders, including parliamentarians, ministers from a particular region, and the religious leaders, and local leaders, paramount chiefs – paramount chiefs are supposed to be the boss for their chiefdom – and the youth. The youths, the young people created vigilante groups, and women's groups, for each region, for each city – they are supposed to be the watchdog to make sure that anybody who visits is cleared of having the disease.

And the youth played a major role here. Because I remember when His Excellency spoke to you last year, he did mention that he would work with the youth to make sure that he brings them into the platform for development of the country. And apparently we have a program that we called the Agenda for Prosperity, and the youths is very prominent in that program, in terms of

engaging them in various issues. Prior to when this Government came to power unemployment within the youth was very high. And my president has been trying to close up this gap by creating opportunities for the youths. And now he has put the mechanism in place that will further engage the youth in government, in businesses; and we are trying to get them to go back to agriculture. So they are trying to get back to agriculture.

And having said that, I would say that one of the things that we have done as we begin to curtail the disease was to work with our sister countries, Liberia and Guinea, to develop a regional, post-Ebola recovery plan. We presented that plan to the international community, and they gave support to that plan. For Sierra Leone, we have regional activities and specific country activities. And for Sierra Leone our focus was on agriculture, although we're looking at improving the health sector, improving the education sector. Like Liberia, our children are now all back to school. And we are also looking at social safety nets so that our people don't slide back to extreme poverty. So we're making food available to some of the people in the provinces that were hard hit by Ebola – we give them rice seed so that they could cultivate, by the way, rice is our staple food. Make even phones available to them. And this created some jobs for our youths as well. But the private sector has been requested to play a significant role here so that they would lead us through achieving our growth trajectory.

**Dr. Sibanda**

Talking about private sector, I'm keen to understand in terms of the growth trajectory. When Minister Sesay was here last year, he told us that Sierra Leone is the go-to place; it's growing in double digits. But because of Ebola, you have had to revise your growth from 11% to 7% and to 2%, was it? Where are you now?

**Dr. Jones**

Let me say that, when Ebola struck in May 2014, we were at 11% GDP growth rate, and it was projected to get to 15.5% by the end of that year. In fact, at that time we were the second-fastest growing economy of the world – second. And we were making considerable progress in all fronts: infrastructural development, agricultural development, etc. etc. When Ebola struck, we went to 7%, and just before I left, we got a group from McKinsey that were doing studies in Sierra Leone and we are currently at 5% growth rate, still but very low, compared with where we wanted to go.

My country is very keen to get back to where we were before Ebola struck, as soon as possible. So in our plan that we've put together, the first Ebola recovery plan, we have two phases of development programs where we have various activities in the key areas that I've mentioned earlier on – agriculture, private sector involvement, schools, education, health, etc.

The first plan is to go for nine months and it is going to be a crash program that will enable us to get to where we were before Ebola struck, and this would be followed by a rolling 24 months plan, program that will address all the key issues and bring us to achieving the vision, goals and objectives of our Agenda

for Prosperity because the Agenda for Prosperity calls for prosperity for all Sierra Leoneans. We have time-bound milestones spanning through 2035 that will take us to where we want to be in terms of getting Sierra Leone to becoming a middle-income country. And so the reason for the infrastructure development, the roads and electricity... In fact, we are very keen to see every city, every town, every village electrified within the next two years – that program is currently on.

And I must say that we must thank the international community. My sister has mentioned it for Liberia, we have good rapport with the international community. Usually, my children are all here – I have five children, by the way – and they are all here in the USA, schooling and married, and working, and they are citizens of this country already, though I am not. But let me say that usually I pay a visit once in every year or once a year. I have been to the United States five times this year alone, coming with my President to interact with the donor community i.e. USAID, World Bank, the U.N., with other development partners to discuss support to Ebola programs and to my country. In fact, I attended the last U.N. General Assembly with the President when the Sustainable Development Goals were endorsed by the U.N. So this first visit is to solicit these resources, and I think that thanking the international community, it's because of the funding that they've made available, the personnel that they've sent to Sierra Leone, the assistance that they've given to Sierra Leone, not only for Ebola but for infrastructural development, etc. etc.

So we are keeping our fingers crossed and very optimistic that we move fast to get to 11%, hopefully within the next nine months, and then continue on track to our Agenda for Prosperity programs for the following 24 months.

#### **Dr. Sibanda**

Thank you. I think that's a big thank you to the international community, and I believe that community includes the Iowa community, which has, I quote from what Ambassador Quinn told me last year, "has a proud history of alleviating human suffering and confronting hunger." Thank you to the whole world. Thank you from Sierra Leone. Thank you from Liberia.

I'll come back to you, Dr. Chenoweth again. You emphasized the role of communication. You say the cell phone played an important role, but I recall last year you mentioned that, if we had communicated right from the onset, maybe the damage wouldn't have been as bad. What is your advice now? How should this be communicated if disaster were to strike again?

#### **Minister Chenoweth**

The communication could have been faster, but it wouldn't have happened if we knew what to communicate. We had no idea, as I said, I was one of the loners. People had no idea what this... Can you imagine saying to a mother, that two-month-old baby or two-year-old baby or your six children, you cannot touch them. If they are sick, don't touch, don't. Or your mother is dying – don't touch

her. Just wait for the ambulance. Because the minute... it's such a deadly disease, the minute you touch or come close... so the messages were communicated when we had a message to communicate. But we needed the training from those wonderful doctors like Doctors Without Borders, the people that came to help us from CDC or the people that came from your health, the U.S. Health Department, from the World Health Organization. And the African countries that had experiences, or especially Uganda – we had doctors that were flying in, unfortunately, some of them lost their lives, or two. So if we had had the message to say, this is what we should do.

But we ourselves went into training. We were all, in our, I was still in the cabinet at the time, were trained on how to handle things. And the communication we were sending out, I'm no longer there now, but what they are sending out is – Don't rush to dismantle everything. Because some aspects of what we did to delay the spread of the disease, we want to keep them in place. Everywhere, every market table, every home, every workplace from the president, the imam, the priest, you have to wash, you have to sanitize before you go in – and we want to keep that. It's a good habit to keep. So we were delayed in opening our schools because we had to put those facilities there to protect our children and the teachers.

So we're trying to hold onto things that are in place to strengthen the medical services so that they can respond. As I said, we did, we surprised the international community. Not only am I an agriculturalist, an agricultural scientist, but I came out of FAO, so you prepare in time of disaster you had - I mean, I was trained on how you moved and what you do to prepare for these. So we had already done for the agricultural sector, repositioned ourselves on a post-recovery plan. We knew that there would be no seeds, so we got money set aside by our government to order seeds and things and reposition them in different areas. So it's being like a good girl guides or boy scout, you have to be prepared.

**Dr. Sibanda**

Excellent. That's an excellent note – be prepared, like the Girl Guides and the Boy Scouts do. I think we're really talking about a country that went through over 25 years of war, a country that's been recovered and became self-sufficient in seeds, self-sufficient in their staples to the extent that they convinced the World Food Programme to buy internally – all that was destroyed by Ebola. We are happy today because we are looking at a positive note, and we are looking at a recovery plan that will see Sierra Leone go back to be a middle-income country by year 2035?

**Dr. Jones**      That's right.

**Dr. Sibanda**



We hold you to account for that. We hope no disaster will strike and take you back. Any burning questions from the floor? Burning, burning? Thank you. There are mics. You have to run to the mic. And my boss is already on his feet, so there are mics in the middle aisle, so if you can just...

Q Thank you.

**Dr. Sibanda** Please keep your questions brief.

Q Yeah, thank you ma'am. First off, I'm Festus Amadu from Sierra Leone, studying at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a Borlaug fellow, Borlaug elite fellow. So the two countries, what is the plan for the extension system? Because I think extension is critical to transmit information to the farmers in order to rebuild the agricultural sector. This is for both Liberia and Sierra Leone. Now that Ebola, we are on a positive note, what's the plan for the extension system?

**Dr. Sibanda** Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Q I'm Andrew Quinn from the Aspen Institute. I was wondering if you could tell us—I know when we talk about the health sector in the three countries, there's a lot of discussion of ways that you can utilize this crisis to drive forward improvements on healthcare delivery. And I'm wondering if you can talk about whether there are similar opportunities in the agricultural sector. Thank you.

**Dr. Sibanda** Thank you, healthcare—how are you using that to drive agricultural development?

Q Thank you, madam for the excellent sessions. My name is Hippolyte Fofack from the African Export-Import Bank. And I would like to look at opportunity side of the crisis, and as a result of that shock, we had the AU working with CDC to establish an African version of CDC for protocol arrangement and so forth and to preempt to get such risk in the future. And the risk is that, as the disease subsides, that could fall to the back burner, how do we make sure that such a proposal remains on the table? And who will be the champions of that? Who is the champion of such a proposal at this stage?

**Dr. Sibanda** Thank you.

**Minister Chenoweth**

Let me start with the extension part of it. When we started off, we could not send people in the field, because we would be sending them to danger. The people that were in the field, we kept, we just grounded them, because we wanted to know ourselves how safe it was for them to move and when could they go. People left for one side just to go and check on their parents—kill whole households. We're not talking about one person dying at a time, we're talking about a whole family. When Ebola hit Liberia across the village, everybody died

in that village except a 12-year-old child. So that's how dangerous it is. But the extension workers are back. In fact, when I completed my time in Liberia and left, the person that replaced me is an extensionist, Dr. Moses Zinnah, out of the University of Wisconsin. So everybody thinks that I put him there – I didn't.

But before I forget, I wanted to say to you, Catherine Bertini, I can understand why you got the Nobel Peace Prize – because the organization that is built around this body called the World Food Programme was in fact the people in charge of logistics. We divided our tasks, and World Food Prize with our own general service agencies and our ministry took care of the logistics from the beginning to the end – wonderful job. If there was not a U.N., one would have to be built.

**Dr. Sibanda** Thank you very much. That's heartening to hear. We'll come back to you in the role of women. They are the caregivers. They are the ones who are affected when there is a death in the family. They are the ones who are the backbone of the agriculture systems in our African economy. What is happening now? What programs are in place?

**Minister Chenoweth**

Because we had developed those plans ahead of time and we had important the seeds and we prepositioned them around or in the country, we were able, as soon as we got the green light, to move very fast with seeds and other inputs and program of cash transfer.

But the women suffer; because they are the caregivers, they rush to try to give care and died by it.

**Dr. Sibanda** Thank you. We can go to the question on the healthcare. How are we using this to benefit agriculture?

**Dr. Jones** Well, actually, before Ebola struck, the health system in Sierra Leone was very weak. I believe this is the case for the three countries. And one of the focus in our recovery plan is to improve the health system and if possible to get a healthcare disease control unit in Sierra Leone so that we can move fast in combatting any future occurrence, whether it's Ebola or other diseases like Lassa fever or any of those disaster diseases. So effort has been made to improve the health system in Sierra Leone. But it's not just the health system that I believe will contribute to agricultural development. The health system, the education system, the private sector – all of these are issues that we are looking at in our recovery plan will contribute. I strongly believe that all have a role to play in promoting agricultural development. I think you could see the value of these systems being strengthened so that we have abled people, good professionals that would support the agricultural development plan.

But having said that, I would just like to state that the question on extension, you know, my colleague from Sierra Leone knows the structure that we've got in

Sierra Leone. Agricultural or extension officers are strategically located in each of the districts and Chiefdoms in Sierra Leone. When Ebola struck, they continued to remain in their districts and chiefdoms. And for those chiefdoms where Ebola was not very severe, farmers continued to cultivate their fields, and they were getting support from the extension workers. At the same time, we have developed what we call the ABCs, the Agribusiness Centers. You wouldn't believe how many of these centers we have in the country, maybe about 300 or so. Not all of them are fully functional, but those ones that are functional, even during Ebola period, those farmers that were able to cultivate their fields were getting support, you know from the extension officers in those centers.

And we need to strengthen all of this system, because I think Ebola was an eye-opener for us in the three countries that we need to put structures in place so that we should not ever be taken unawares again. If this problem should occur again, we should know what to do, and we have to move fast to make sure that it doesn't spread. Like my sister mentioned, when it came, we had little or no knowledge, that is, when Ebola came. But today I believe we know what to do. And again I would like to end by saying that my President is champion in all of these issues, and I think it is the same thing for Liberia and Guinea. The three presidents really worked very well to mobilize the international community to come to give support to what we were doing. You wouldn't believe the number of people that came to Sierra Leone from China, from the U.S., from Britain, Cuba, etc. African countries, the AU and ECOWAS all sent medical officers, technicians and military personnel to Sierra Leone. And all are still giving support to us, although they've reduced the number of people that are there right now.

**Dr. Sibanda** Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, a big thank you from Liberia, thank you from Sierra Leone. Clearly, when agriculture is struck by disease, the whole economy is affected. Excellent narrative on a positive trajectory, and we just want to make sure we get out of poverty and we achieve our new goals. Thank you very much for the panelists.

### **Ambassador Quinn**

So thank you, thank you again for a wonderful update. What I said last year was, when I heard the press conference and the president's speech, I was heartbroken. Today my heart feels warm with what's happening, and these are two of the true, true heroes of agriculture and of their country. Let's have another round of applause.