The scope of USAID’s work encompasses all aspects of humanitarian assistance. When it comes to large scale disasters and conflicts, the issues involved become even more urgent and complex. In Sonia’s case, the expertise she brought to this Fellowship was rooted in her time as a USAID Program Officer in South Sudan. Before that, a position with the International Medical Corps enabled her to take the lead in emergency health responses in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Indonesia. Other overseas work and an MPH degree from Johns Hopkins rounded out her unique set of skills and experience. For Sonia, timing for the Fellowship was right. “I had been working in the humanitarian health field for a number of years, and was interested in working more on the technical side as a donor,” she recalls.

In her role as a Technical Advisor, Sonia conducts public health assessments of affected populations, recommends appropriate remedies, and coordinates efforts among multiple agencies and disciplines. “Working together to address, for instance, acute malnutrition emergencies can be complex as each sector has its own guidance and rules,” she says. “The key is discussion and communication to support the response.”

In real life terms, her involvement in the USAID Ebola response in West Africa tells a compelling story. “I was requested to head the response in Sierra Leone, where I was the Deputy Team Lead and answered directly to the Ambassador,” she notes. Working closely with the National Ebola Response Center, the Ministry of Health, and the humanitarian community, Sonia worked hard to support those families affected who often had no access to care. “The most amazing moment was when President Obama called into our field team call and gave us words of encouragement and support,” she said.

With help from GHFP-II, Sonia has been able to grow her experience in a key sector—nutrition. “With support from the Fellowship, I have been able to attend conferences and take advantage of other opportunities to expand my learning in emergency nutrition,” she says. “I assisted USAID with the development of a multi-sectoral nutrition strategy which includes emergency nutrition,” she notes.

“The career coaching offered by the Fellowship is truly invaluable. It not only helped me to understand how to operate within my position, but how to operate within the Agency as a whole.”
Although Sonia has amassed an impressive number of technical skills in her career so far, there are three non-technical skills that stand out: Leadership, being proactive—an especially valuable talent in preparing for the next big emergency, whatever it might be, and communication.

Sonia has this to say about her time with GHFP-II: “The Fellowship has helped me gain an understanding of what it means to be a leader in my technical area as well as within USAID, and how to work within the bigger system. I have learned how funding decisions are made, how Congress and the White House are key in providing this funding, and what information is requested and needed in an emergency for them to make crucial funding decisions.”

In addition, her Fellowship has given Sonia a better idea of how she wants to move forward in her career. “I would like to continue working in the humanitarian field, providing support to public health and nutrition programming in emergency contexts. While they are the toughest environments, they provide immediate results and can save many lives.”

HIGHLIGHTS

- Governments of Guinea and Liberia report no new EVD (Ebola Virus Disease) cases since April 6; WHO declares end to March/April clusters
- Guinea and Liberia discharge remaining EVD patients from treatment
- USAID/OFDA provides more than $8.5 million for recovery efforts in Guinea and Sierra Leone.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- As of June 24, the governments of Guinea and Liberia had not reported a confirmed Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) case since April 6. The countries’ March/April clusters—both linked to an EVD survivor in Guinea’s N’Zérékoré Prefecture—included seven confirmed and three probable cases in Guinea and three confirmed cases in Liberia.
- The UN World Health Organization (WHO) declared an end to Guinea’s and Liberia’s recent EVD clusters on June 1 and 9, respectively, following 42-day periods of heightened surveillance in each country.
- USAID/OFDA recently provided the International Medical Corps (IMC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with nearly $6.9 million to bolster infection prevention control (IPC) and rapid response capacity in Sierra Leone. In addition, USAID/OFDA provided the French Red Cross (FRC) with more than $1.6 million to support treatment capacity for EVD and other infectious diseases in Guinea.

* Adapted from the USAID/CDC West Africa- Ebola Outbreak Fact Sheet #11 6/25/16