Transferable lessons from natural disease outbreak response

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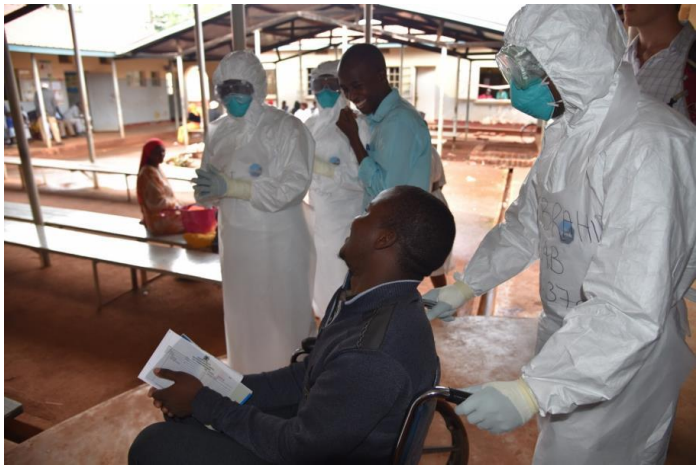
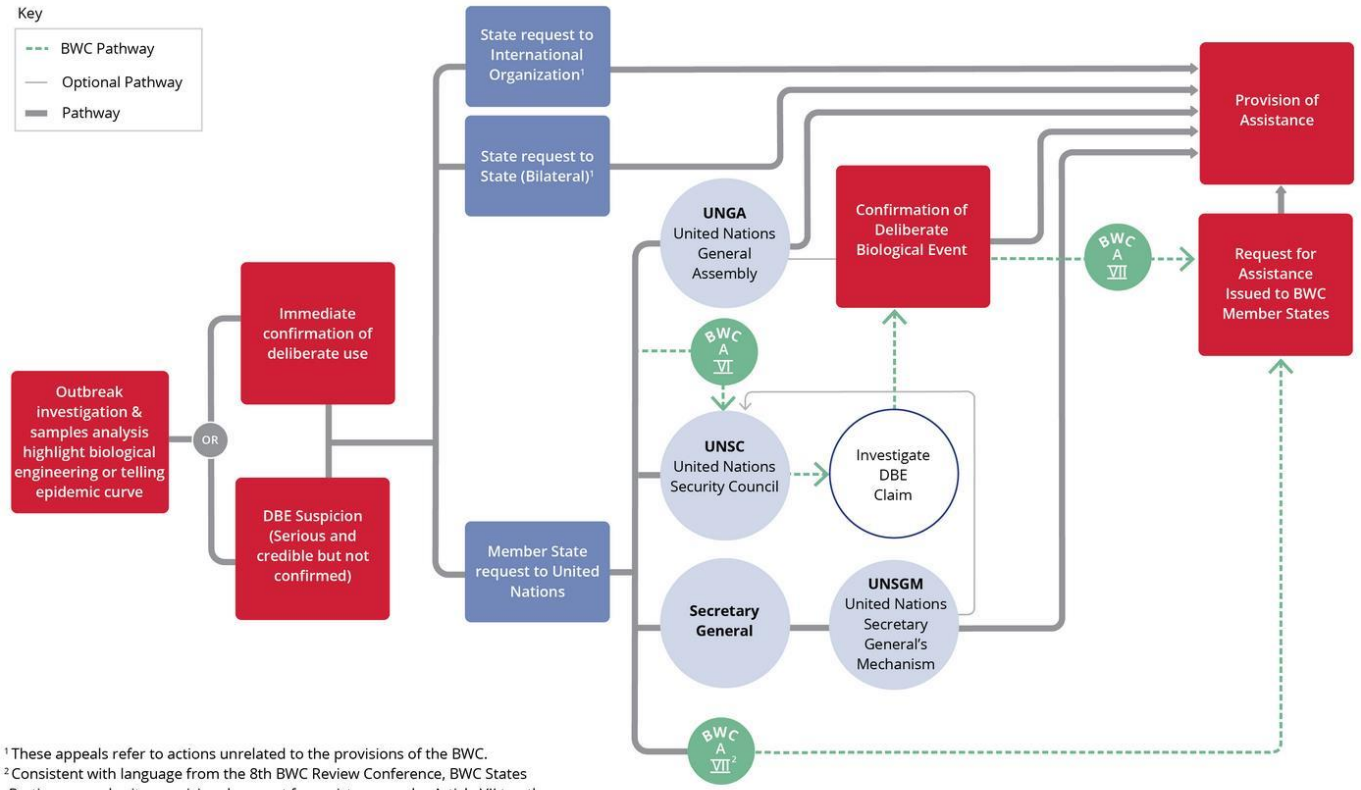
The core insight

The systems Article VII would rely on already exist — they were built for natural outbreaks.

- Uganda has responded to repeated Ebola outbreaks since 2000, most recently Sudan virus disease in 2022
- Detection, request, coordination and delivery run through standing national structures
- These structures already operate before causation is established
- Adapting them for a deliberate event is cheaper and faster than building parallel machinery



Where Article VII sits in the assistance pathway



[1] These appeals refer to actions unrelated to the provisions of the BWC.
[2] Consistent with language from the 8th BWC Review Conference, BWC States Parties may submit a provisional request for assistance under Article VII to other BWC States Parties, pending a determination by the UNSC.

Preparedness and surveillance

1 Preparedness



- Response depends on pre-existing capacity
- Legal frameworks enable cooperation
- Weak systems delay assistance, whatever the cause

2 Surveillance



- Early detection drives response speed
- Event-based and indicator-based systems together
- Cross-border information sharing is decisive

Requests

3 A request is an operational document, not a diplomatic gesture

- Requests must be clear and specific
- They must define needs, scale and urgency
- Vague requests slow the response — providers cannot pre-position against them
- Standard formats measurably improve effectiveness
- This is the single most transferable item for Article VII



Coordination

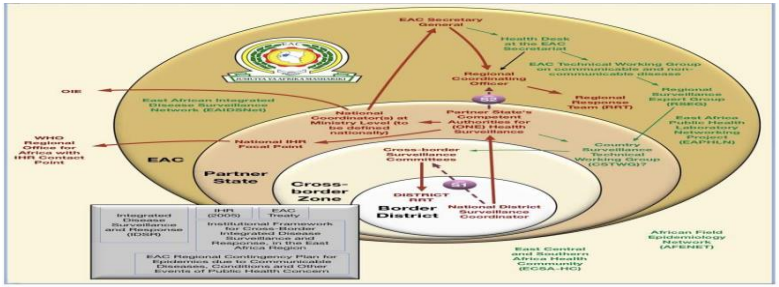
4 One incident management system, clearly led

- Incident management systems are essential
- Clear roles and single-point leadership
- Reduces duplication and confusion among incoming partners
- Fragmentation weakens response more than shortage does



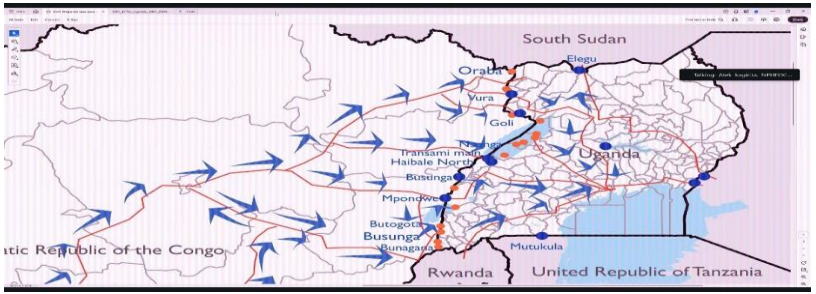
Relationships and acting under uncertainty

5 Relationships



- Trust is built before the crisis, not during it
- Regional and global networks carry the load
- Ad hoc coordination is inefficient and slow

6 Acting under uncertainty



- Response routinely begins before confirmation
- Waiting for certainty is itself a decision with costs
- Directly relevant where deliberate use is suspected but unproven

Logistics

7 Most delays are logistical, not political

- Deployment depends on logistics systems
- Transport, supply chains and physical access
- Planning and pre-positioning improve speed more than funding alone
- Assistance that cannot be moved has not been delivered



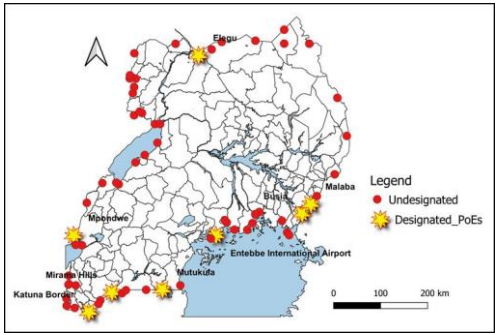
What has to be in place beforehand

Minimum national preparedness

- Functional surveillance system
- Coordination structure (incident management)
- Basic trained workforce
- Legal framework for cooperation

What enables rapid scale-up

- Pre-existing agreements and MOUs
- Standard operating procedures
- Regional and international platforms
- Established coordination channels



None of this can be assembled after an allegation is made. Every item on both lists is a peacetime investment — which is why Article VII preparedness is national capacity-building, and why Article X delivery is inseparable from it.

Key takeaways for Article VII

1. Build on existing outbreak response systems
2. Focus on integration, not new structures
3. Strengthen national capacity first
4. Improve the clarity of requests and the lines of coordination



CONVENTION
ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND STOCKPILING OF BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

The States Parties to this Convention,

Determined to act with a view to achieving effective progress towards general and complete disarmament, including the prohibition and elimination of all types of weapons of mass destruction, and convinced that the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and their elimination, through effective measures, will facilitate the achievement of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control,

Recognizing the important significance of the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, signed at Geneva on 17 June 1925, and conscious also of the contribution which the said Protocol has already made, and continues to make, to mitigating the horrors of war,

Reaffirming their adherence to the principles and objectives of that Protocol and calling upon all States to comply strictly with them,

Recalling that the General Assembly of the United Nations has repeatedly condemned all actions contrary to the principles and objectives of the Geneva Protocol of 17 June 1925,

Desiring to contribute to the strengthening of confidence between peoples and the general improvement of the international atmosphere,

Desiring also to contribute to the realization of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations,

Convinced of the importance and urgency of eliminating from the arsenals of States, through effective measures, such dangerous weapons of mass destruction as those using chemical or bacteriological (biological) agents,

Recognizing that an agreement on the prohibition of bacteriological (biological) and toxin weapons represents a first possible step towards the achievement of agreement on effective measures also for the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons, and determined to continue negotiations to that end,

Determined, for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of bacteriological (biological) agents and toxins being used as weapons,

Convinced that such use would be repugnant to the conscience of mankind and that no effort should be spared to minimize this risk,

Have agreed as follows:



Reflections on the May 2026 Workshop



Did the Workshop advance understanding of Article VII and its national implementation?

- It put practitioners and delegations in the same room — the operational vocabulary and the treaty vocabulary were tested against each other
- It clarified that assistance pathways under Article VII are not separate from the outbreak response architecture States already run
- It exposed where national implementation actually stalls: request formats, receiving authorities and pre-agreed logistics, rather than political willingness
- For Uganda it has fed directly into how we frame Article VII preparedness domestically

For God and my Country