

# **Complex adaptive health system governance: Sierra Leone case study of epidemic response**

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For the Ebola Gbalo Research Group

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# Introduction

- The EVD response in W Africa poses difficult questions about what kind of responses are helpful to such shocks.
- Narrow focus on 'building disaster management capacity' not explicit commitment to building & governing resilient health systems.
- In Sierra Leone, late international response meant local responses became critical.
- The connections (and tensions) between international, national and local actors and responses, or between sectors, has been little explored.
- There is a need to rethink governance and connections between levels and sectors in light of this.

# Aim, Approach, Methods

**Aim:** To provide an understanding of the connections and disconnections between international/national, district and local responses during the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, to learn lessons for building resilient governance.

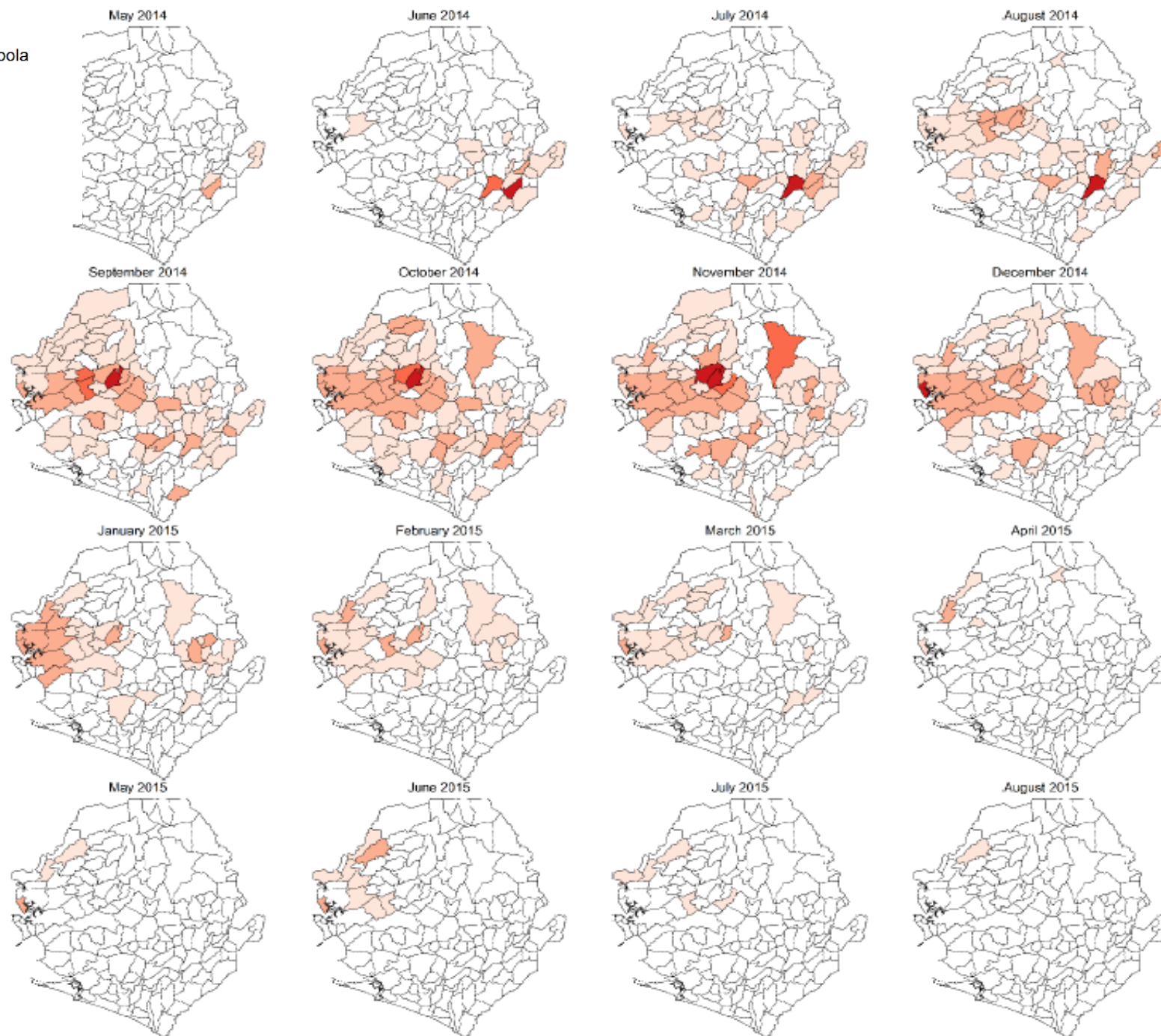
➤ Multidisciplinary disciplinary approach

- scoping reviews,
- policy document analysis,
- key informant interviews,
- network analysis,
- ethnographic fieldwork
- causal pathway tracing.



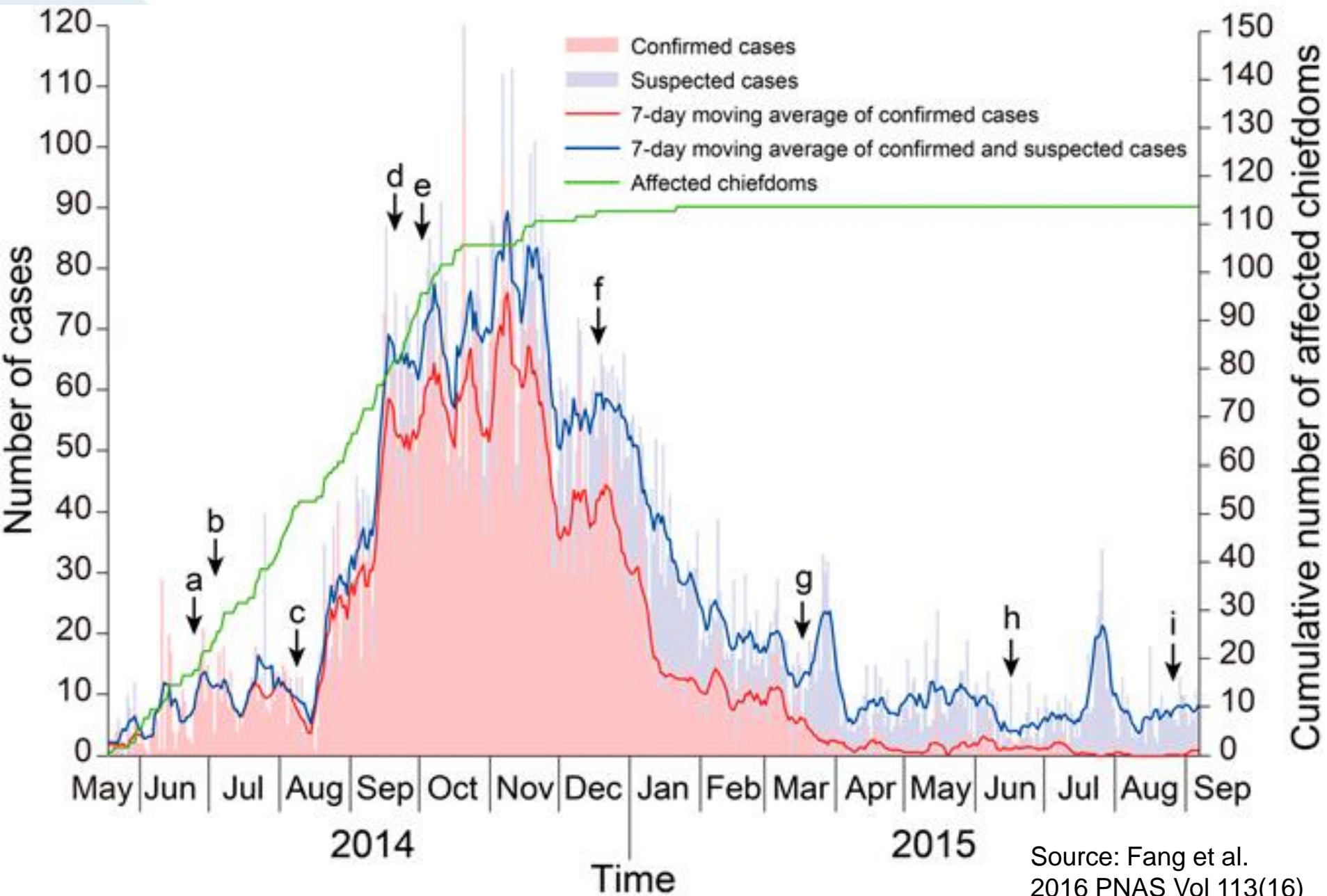
Confirmed Ebola

- (100,750]
- (50,100]
- (10,50]
- [1,10]
- No cases



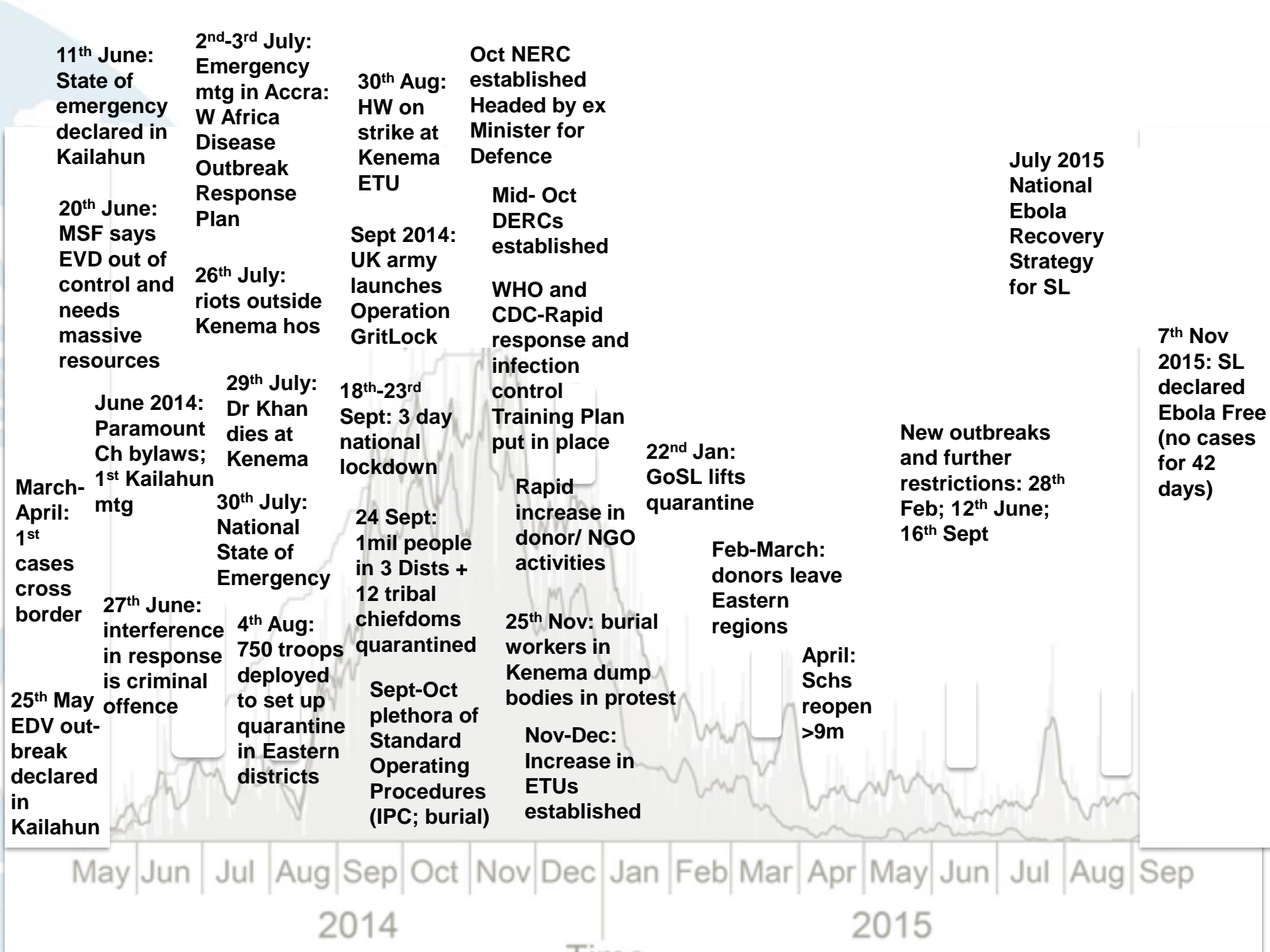
Source:  
Voors  
based  
on data  
from  
Fang et  
al 2016

# Published EVD trajectory to date



Source: Fang et al.  
2016 PNAS Vol 113(16)





# Emerging examples of health governance failures during EVD outbreak in Sierra Leone



Uncoordinated, inconsistent treatment and containment interventions

Governance breakdown at periphery of health system reach



Use of military not governed by health sector



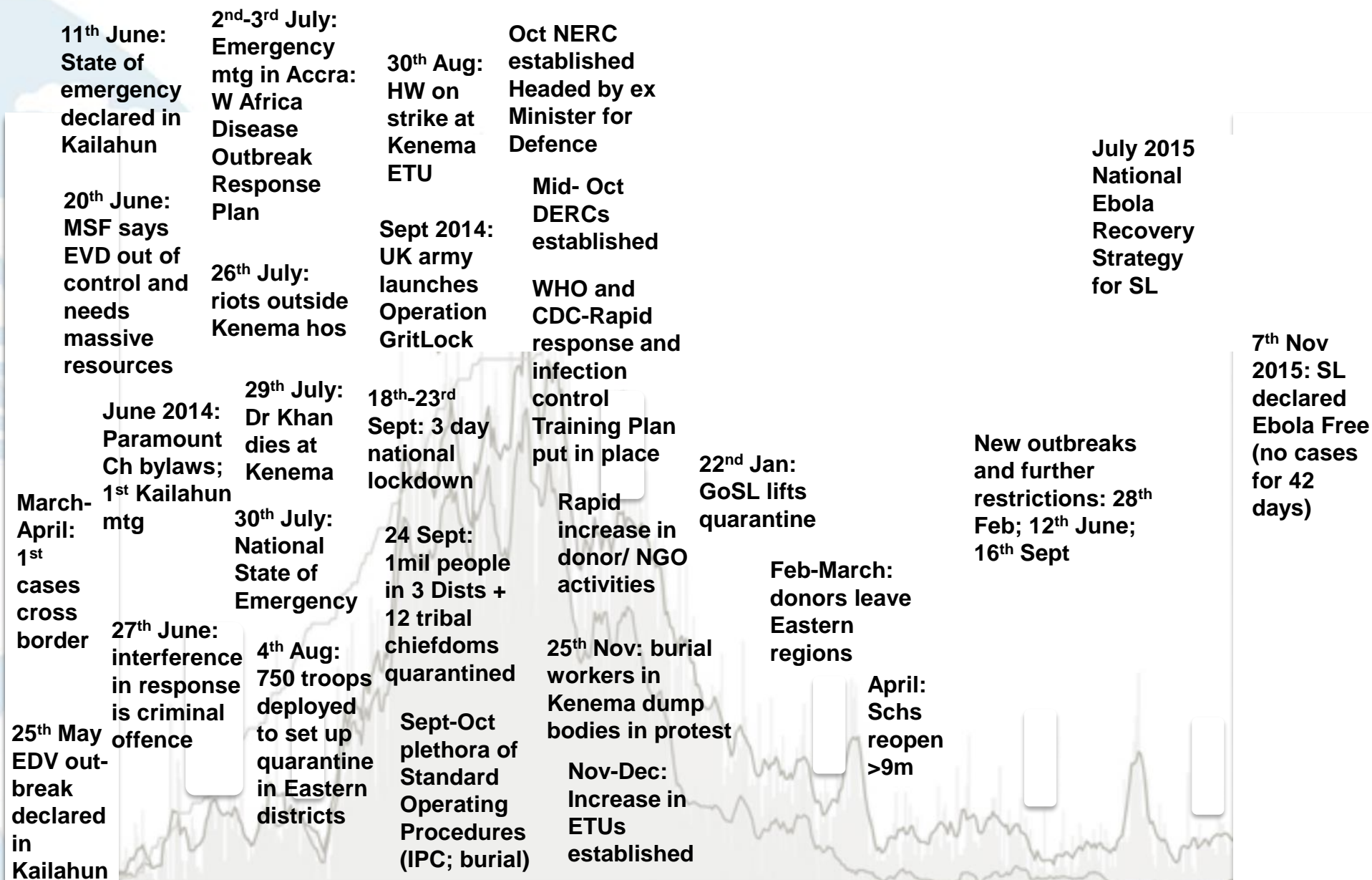
Photo credit: Ashley Harmer, The Guardian

Slow response to address potentially harmful practices



Mixed legacy

Photo credit: Zeit online



**Chaos: uncertainty; disagreement; multiple actors national-local disconnect**

**Complexity: muddling through; develop new modes of operating**

**Judgement-based decision-making: shared goals but unclear pathways**



# Lessons so far

- Coordination of humanitarian aid remains elusive – key is to move as rapidly as possible from high chaos to more coordinated stages.
- To achieve this, working with local responders is critical.
- Global actors who control macro-governance structures have little understanding of complex local governance systems.
- Need for rapid connection of levels & immediate engagement of local leaders.
- Coordinated communication.
- Rapid mobilisation of international resources but deployed with local advisers.

# Thank you!

**To find out more or receive  
updates please email:**

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