THINKING LIKE A GEOGRAPHER

Studying geography helps you develop ways of thinking about the world. There are four geographic thinking concepts that are unique to geographic learning: interrelationships, spatial significance, geographic perspective, and patterns and trends. You can explore the Ebola case study by examining it through the lens of each geographic thinking concept.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS

When geographers look at the significance of a place, they also look at interrelationships. Interrelationships are the connections between parts in one system, or between two systems, such as between the natural environment and human environments.

Geographers examine interrelationships by asking
- What characteristics do the physical and human environments in a specific area have?
- How are these systems connected?
- How do people change the physical environment?
- How do these connections affect the lives of people living in a specific area?

Ebola was first passed to humans from animals in 1976. The Ebola outbreak of 2014 occurred in both rural and urban environments. However, there is a strong connection between large numbers of people living in poor conditions and the number of Ebola cases found there.

SPATIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Spatial refers to something that exists or occurs in a space. Spatial significance relates specifically to where places are located on the planet. To indicate where a place is, geographers talk about its
- absolute location: the precise position of a place; for example, Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, is located at latitude 6.31°N, longitude 10.80°W
- relative location: where a location is compared to other places around it; for example, Liberia is located in West Africa

Significance means importance. So spatial significance can be defined as the importance of a place and those things that are around it.

On the map of West Africa (Figure I.3), we can see the location of the Ebola-affected countries and their neighbours. The map also shows the extent of the disease—it was confined to just three of the countries shown. It was important that Ebola did not spread to neighbouring countries. It was also spatially significant that the limited number of treatment and testing centres for Ebola were concentrated in the major cities.