Immediate technical assistance to strengthen emergency preparedness for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**Target Area:** National project  
**Donor:** United States Agency for International Development (USAID)  
**Contribution:** USD 1,900,000  
**Project Code:** OSRO/MYA/501/USA  
**Government Counterpart(s):** Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MoALI)  
**Beneficiaries:** Technical personnel in LBVD, particularly veterinary epidemiologists and diagnostic laboratory specialists, and also senior departmental decision-makers. Indirect beneficiaries are poultry traders, producers and consumers. In terms of preventing epidemics, the project contributes to benefit a much wider group in the Myanmar population and globally.  
**Implementing period:** Annual basis since 2007

**BACKGROUND**

In Myanmar the agriculture sector accounts for more than half national employment and the poultry population is large and growing and had reached over 263 million by 2014 according to official national statistics. Demand for poultry products is not wholly satisfied by domestic production, however, resulting in value chain activity across international borders with concomitant risk of zoonotic disease incursion from neighbouring countries. FAO supports the Myanmar Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) to monitor virus entry risk from informal poultry imports across the China border. China has reported highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPA) caused by several influenza A virus subtypes, which has reported HPAI outbreaks with several influenza A subtypes.  

In 2009, the threat of new infectious disease recognized to extend beyond the risk posed by avian influenza, and the USAID launched a significant global programme on emerging pandemic threats referred to as EPT-1, that addressed pre-emergence, prevention and preparedness. Since 2007, FAO has worked in Myanmar with USAID support to enhance national capacity to prevent, detect and respond effectively to HPAI. Through this partnership, Myanmar’s capacity has been strengthened. FAO work in this particular area is of the highest importance considering that Myanmar has a very high annual rate of growth of animal product consumption.  

The large majority of poultry is kept in backyard or small-scale commercial systems. Sporadic HPAI outbreaks have been reported in Myanmar, the latest in March 2015. Myanmar is considered at high risk for incursion of avian influenza A (H7N9) from China. Since first being identified in 2013, H7N9 has resulted in more confirmed fatalities in people in China than H5N1 since 2003. The project builds on USAID-funded H7N9 prevention and preparedness activities initiated by FAO under a related project. It will operate within the framework of two programmes: Emerging Pandemic Threats (EPT2) and the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA).
OBJECTIVE

The objective of the project is to enhance Myanmar’s capacity to prevent, detect and respond to zoonotic diseases, particularly to those caused by avian influenza viruses or emerging infectious viral agents.

The project will contribute to ensure human health and strengthen livelihood resilience through minimizing the threat of infectious diseases.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project builds on progress made under the previous Emerging Pandemic Threats programmes (EPT-1 and EPT-Plus). By implementing inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral collaboration at regional, country and epizone levels, the project strengthens the Myanmar authorities’ capacity to prevent, detect and respond to emerging infectious disease.

The project has five key output areas:
1. Multi-sectoral coordination for effective zoonotic disease prevention, response and control strengthened;
2. Understanding of drivers for spread and emergence of avian influenza and other emerging zoonoses improved;
3. Epidemiology and laboratory capacities and networking for real time bio-surveillance and outbreak response strengthened;
4. Policy and good practice developed to reduce the risk of emergence and spread; and
5. National preparedness and response system strengthened.

The project supports achievement of

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Important achievements are summarized below:

- Multi-sectoral coordination has significantly progressed through project activities including supporting meetings between representatives of key government departments to develop the National One Health strategy.
- Forty-four professionals were trained as One Health workforce.

DISTRIBUTION OF CURRENT PROFESSIONALS TRAINED

- Reviews of value chain study were carried out to prioritize surveillance appropriately.
- Joint field missions were conducted for synchronized surveillance, through close dialogues with PREDIT2.
- International coordination for cross-border live animal trade and disease transfer implications with strengthened laboratory capacity was improved through high-level, multilateral meetings with Lao PDR and China.
- The 7th round risk based surveillance was completed. Samples sequenced at an international reference laboratory yielded important results for three Avian Influenza Virus subtypes: H5N1, H5N6 and H9N2.
- Director General level endorsed the framework strategy to develop the draft National One Health Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Myanmar.
- Risk communication messages have been delivered at multiple Poultry Production Zones to raise farmer, feed seller and egg collector awareness on practical biosecurity measures.
- The ECTAD team collaborated with LBVD to conduct field visits to avian influenza (H5N1) outbreak areas in Taninthayi and Yangon Regions in 2017. The project assisted LBVD activities for dispatch of technical supplies for disease control and surveillance and provided emergency response equipment.
- National preparedness and response systems have been strengthened by regular updates information to the authorities, 1) on the developing H7N9 situation in China, 2) on its detected spatio-temporal distribution in humans, poultry and the environment.
- The LBVD contingency plans for zoonotic influenza of Avian origin were updated and consolidated into a generic plan, tested in a desk-top simulation exercise and revised.

At a border market, with FAO support, LBVD field staff collected samples from chicken for viral testing.