

Notes from the frontier

Countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion work together to assess HPAI risk along a cross border corridor

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Not many people would have heard of the Greater Mekong Subregion (or GMS) before 1992. But in that year, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), in a far-sighted move, saw sense in funding an economic cooperation project that brought together the riparian states around the Mekong Basin — Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and China's Yunnan Province.

Not surprisingly, today the GMS is in the hot focus of international attention because of its potential to serve as a crucible for the evolution and mutation of H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) among numerous other Emerging Infectious Diseases (EIDs).

ADB's current HPAI project has a strong regional focus and aims to develop a zonal approach to disease control and identifying disease risks to poultry and humans through improved understanding of the spread and location of outbreaks along the poultry production and market chain, and by supporting the development of appropriate regional policies to enhance a regional approach to HPAI control.

An HPAI risk assessment of the potential spread of the disease along this route taking into account the epidemiologic and socio-economic risk factors was conducted between June 7 and 11 this year along the eastern section of the ADB East-West economic corridor of the Great Mekong Sub-region. The assessment was conducted in collaboration with national and field veterinary service officers and border control staff of Lao PDR, Viet Nam and Thailand.

As a follow-up to the *Inception Meeting for the Regional Risk Assessment of HPAI in South and Southeast Asia: A Socio-economic Perspective* held in April, this activity broadly aimed to conduct a field trip along the corridor



UNDERSTANDING THE GMS SUBREGION: The region has a diverse geographic landscape and is home to a staggering range of biodiversity. More than 1068 new species have been discovered here during the last couple of decades. The zone encapsulates 16 of the World Wildlife Fund's Global 200 ecoregions, and habitats for an estimated 20 000 plant species, 1 300 fish species, 1 200 bird species, 800 reptile and amphibian species, and 430 mammal species.



KEEPING THE CORRIDOR CLEAN: Birds in their wire baskets at a live bird market near the Lao Bao international border.

PHOTO: Teerapone Chotchuang

The team collected information by visiting markets and through meetings with market and quarantine officials and state agencies located in the four border areas

with veterinary officials of the three countries to collect field data and information; conduct a workshop to collate all the information and conduct a semi-quantitative risk assessment of the spread of HPAI in the corridor; and identify and collectively agree upon risk-mitigation strategies for preventing the spread of HPAI along the corridor.

A major output was a semi-quantitative risk assessment involving several countries and action plans at the national and cross-border levels that will be presented to respective national and provincial policymakers.

A multi-country collaboration

A total of 28 people joined this study tour (11 from Lao PDR, 8 from Viet Nam, 4 from Thailand and 5 from FAO-ECTAD). The field trip was conducted from 7-9 June and proceeded from Quang Tri, Viet Nam to Savannakhet, Lao PDR, and terminated at Mukdahan, Thailand.

During this trip the team collected information by visiting markets and through meetings with market and quarantine officials and state agencies located in the four border areas: Lao Bao, Vietnam and Sepon (Lao PDR), both situated in the Viet Nam–Lao border; Kayson, Savannakhet (Lao PDR); and Mukdahan in the Thailand side of the Lao PDR-Thailand border.

Observations and information collected during the field trip were evaluated in the subsequent workshop conducted in Kayson, Savannakhet, Lao PDR. During this workshop, the risk assessment methodology was presented, HPAI situation and cross border issues were discussed.

The regional action plan that was agreed upon after these five days included HPAI risk-mitigation strategies at national and regional levels and an assessment of live bird markets and prices of poultry commodities on both sides of the borders.



(Left) The team of veterinary and other border services staff of Lao PDR, Viet Nam and Thailand at the Lao-Vietnamese border during the joint cross-border risk assessment of HPAI along the East West Economic Corridor. (Above and top) They collected data from live markets and other settings along the eastern section of the ADB East-West economic corridor of the Great Mekong Sub-region

Photos: (left) Pornpiroon Chinson, DLD Thailand. (Above and top) Mary Elizabeth Miranda and Angel Ortiz-Pelaez

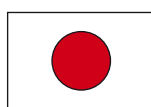
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Laws in the balance

Proven and promising practices in the fight against H5N1 HPAI are shared by key partners

Workshop and Training Course on the Modernization and Regional Alignment of Animal Health Legislation in the Region

Bangkok, 2-4 June 2010

For some weeks now, Ian Robertson has been toiling away on a handbook that will address the challenges of modernizing and aligning the animal health legislation in the region of Asia and the Pacific. The workshop cum training course that was conducted in Bangkok 2-4 June was born out of the insights from Ian's work.



The workshop, facilitated by Ian Robertson (above), will lead to the final draft of a handbook on modernizing and aligning animal health legislation in the Asia-Pacific region.

The workshop had five objectives: increasing Participants' understanding and competence in the assessment and amendment of veterinary animal health legislation; introducing them to the relationship between animal health policies and veterinary legislation; developing an improved understanding of emerging disease control strategies for the control of HPAI and other livestock diseases in the region; involving them in the development and refinement of the new strategy for minimizing the risk of cross-border disease spread; and sharing the content of Ian's proposed handbook draft version to solicit feedback.

Participants included representatives from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand, and Timor Leste. In addition to ECTAD-RAP

staff, and regional organizations such as Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The International Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), which has been sharing its inputs as FAO's partner, was also represented.

The agenda included a presentation by OIE, six presentations on the chapters from the draft handbook, country presentations and group exercises. The level and quality of discussion on the topics presented were excellent and the course was evaluated well by the participants. In addition, the useful oral and written feedback will help in the final drafting of the handbook.

Another follow up exercise will be Ian's visits to Cambodia and Lao PDR to help them with the revision and completion of their veterinary laws.

Inception Workshop for OSRO/IND/802/ USA Project Immediate Technical Assistance to Strengthen Emergency Preparedness for HPAI in India

New Delhi, India, 10-11 May 2010

This project funded by USAID for USD 1 million a year for three years, was formulated to build India's veterinary capacity to address transboundary and emerging infectious diseases through the establishment of an epidemiology unit within the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DADF), Government of India; develop a national Field Epidemiology Training Program for Veterinarians (FETPV) in India with support from the regional FETPV; and develop epidemiological skills in surveillance, disease investigation and epidemiological analysis in the eastern states of Assam, Sikkim, and West Bengal. A total of 59 participants attended the two-day workshop, including secretaries and technical staff from national and state levels of India, Ministry of Agriculture secretaries from Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, the Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), FAO-R in India, and FAO staff from ECTAD-RAP, and the FAO headquarters in Rome.

The topics discussed during the workshop included cross-border issues, the status of HPAI in India, a review of the epidemiological assessment of Assam, Sikkim, and West Bengal states conducted in 2009, a phylogenetic analysis of Indian HPAI isolates, capacity building and FETPV, strategies and considerations for future surveillance, among others. The Sub-regional Cross Border Policy and Technical Working Group also had a meeting on 12 May to discuss country updates on strengthening cross-border issues; obtain feedback on review of national veterinary legislation in the sub-region; and discuss cross-border activities related to preparedness, planning, surveillance and response, current constraints and future plans taking stock of lessons learnt.

An important outcome is that an epidemiology unit will be established soon at the Animal Quarantine Station in New Delhi. Epidemiology capacity building will be focused at local, state and national levels with FETPV. An overseas training program for laboratory personnel at the regional laboratories in India and from neighboring countries will be conducted during the same period.

Introduction Meeting to USAID's Emerging Pandemic Threats (EPT) Programme In Southeast Asia

Siem Reap, Cambodia, 4 June 2010

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) organized a meeting on their Emerging Pandemic Threats (EPT) programme at Siem Reap, Cambodia on 4 June 2010 to introduce and provide an overview of the EPT programme and its implementation partners to USAID mission colleagues. Also discussed were areas of coordination, collaboration and management.

A total of 34 participants (from USAID HQ, regional and country offices; FAO, OIE, WHO and EPT partners) attended this one-day planning meeting. FAO attended this meeting as one of the USAID implementing partners in the region and as part of the tripartite FAO/OIE/WHO IDENTIFY partners.

The EPT programme has four key areas of emphasis:

1. **Wildlife pathogen detection:** the identification of target pathogens in wildlife that threaten humans;

2. **Risk determination:** Characterization



World Bank



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China



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New Zealand



Ireland



France

of the potential risk and method of transmission for specific diseases of animal origin;

3. Capacity for outbreak response:

Support for sustainable, country-level response; and

4. Risk reduction: Promotion of actions that minimize or eliminate the potential for the emergence and spread of new disease threats.

Dr. Pawin Padungtod of ECTAD-RAP was nominated by FAO the focal point for IDENTIFY in Southeast Asia along with Dr. Alexandre Bouchot of OIE SRR SEA. A follow up Tripartite FAO/OIE/WHO IDENTIFY Meeting was held in Bangkok on 28-29 June to discuss the work plan for Southeast Asia, South Asia and China.

Updating Regional Strategy Framework for Communication on HPAI and EIDs in Asia and the Pacific 2010

Bangkok, Thailand • 23-25 June 2010

Late in 2009, ECTAD-RAP finalised the region's first-ever strategic framework for communication on HPAI and EIDs in Asia and the Pacific. But the winds of change were already blowing over the region. By the time the International Ministerial



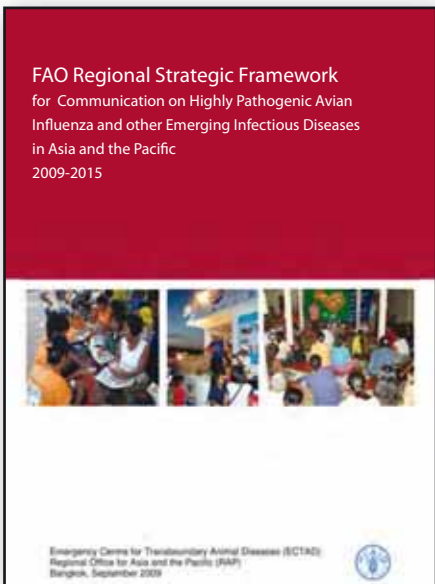
Training on Animal Influenza Viruses Diagnosis and Molecular Characterization in Indonesia, 22-24 June 2010, at the Disease Investigation Center, Lampung, Indonesia: Kim Newberry, Laboratory Expert from Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) demonstrated how to prepare serum (RDE treated) for serological assay of Swine Influenza Virus

document sets forth guiding principles towards these goals.

Updating FAO's 2009 regional communication strategy framework to make it responsive to these emerging themes and make it relevant and useful for a regional audience were primary goals. As a first step, an internal consultation was held June 23 to 25 at the Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel in Bangkok, convening Team Leaders, Chief Technical Advisers and others working in communications. Four broad strategic

themes were approved as significant at the workshop: addressing HPAI and other animal diseases; adopting the *One Health* approach; enhancing multi-disciplinary collaboration; and broadening the scope to include other EIDs.

The next step is a regional consultation in July that will convene major stakeholders to refine the outcomes of the first consultation and form a task force to craft the regional strategy framework.



Conference of Avian and Pathogenic Influenza took place in Hanoi, Viet Nam, in March 2010, several new directions were clearly emerging.

Globally, there is growing awareness of the intimate interlinkages between human, animal and environmental health, and the need for different disciplines and sectors to work together in both the prevention and control of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. The *One World One Health*



Participants at the Tripartite FAO/OIE/WHO IDENTIFY Project Meeting in the Southeast Asian Region, Bangkok, Thailand, 28-29 June 2010.