



EMERGENCY CENTRE FOR TRANSBOUNDARY ANIMAL DISEASES • FAO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

# Preparing for H7N9

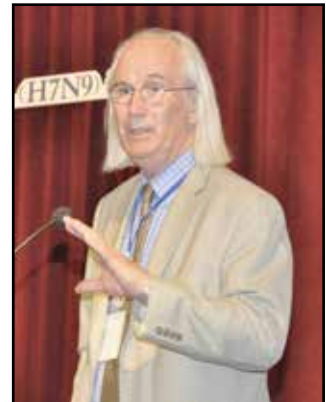
As the flu season in October draws near, experts meet to devise a strategy against a possible (A) H7N9 re-emergence

1. Dr Dennis Carroll, Director of USAID's Pandemic Influenza and Other Emerging Threats Unit, speaks at the technical and policy discussion on the prevention and control of avian influenza (A) H7N9 in Bangkok.

2. Participants of the June meeting, including in the first row: Dr Juan Lubroth, Chief Veterinary Officer, FAO, Rome (second from left) and Mr Hiroyuki Konuma, Assistant Director General, FAO-RAP.

"These were unprecedented discussions," said Dr Dennis Carroll, Director, Pandemic Influenza and Other Emerging Threats Unit of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), at the conclusion of a *Technical and Policy Discussion on the Prevention and Control of Avian Influenza (A) H7N9 in Asia*, held on 24-25 June in Bangkok. "We are discussing how to prevent something, rather than react to it. Having seen the unfolding of an emerging threat in China we have learned a lot about H7N9 because of that work. We are in a better spot than we could have been, although we don't know if it will re-emerge. . . We do know more than we would have. And this is due to the work we have been doing for the last 10 years. . . Today we are working together to begin developing the plans of action should H7N9 re-emerge in October."

The meeting was attended by high-level representatives from Ministries of Health and Ministries of Agriculture from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam. H.E. Yukol Limlamthong, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives, and Dr Michael Yates, Director of the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia, and Mr Hiroyuki Konuma, Assistant Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the



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Continued overleaf

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*The (A) H7N9 influenza virus is unique, able to cause severe disease in humans but not affecting poultry, and challenging efforts to detect and control the virus in animals. Since March 2013, China has reported 132 laboratory confirmed human cases of (A) H7N9 influenza, including 39 fatalities, to WHO.*

United Nations (FAO) participated in the opening session of the meeting. In addition, the meeting included international development partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), FHI360, and others.

The meeting's objectives were to share lessons learned from China's efforts to prevent and manage (A) H7N9 influenza infections in poultry and humans as well as monitoring H7N9 influenza's viral evolution; discuss unresolved issues related to viral transmission, surveillance, risk assessment and management and practical interventions for H7N9 influenza infection based on capacity developed from the H5N1 crisis; discuss risks and scenarios of the H7N9 situation in the region and possible mitigation measures in the short, medium and longer term; and identify possible synergies of the human health, animal health and other sectors among the countries and international organizations in the region.

Dr. Subhash Morzaria, Regional Manager of FAO's Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ECTAD-RAP), began the meeting by inviting guests to give opening remarks. Speaking on behalf of the Royal Thai Government, H.E. Dr. Yukol Limlaemthong commended the Government of China for its efforts in controlling the (A) H7N9 outbreaks and sharing valuable information about the virus.

### How it started

The story began on 31 March, when three Chinese persons were found to be infected with a strain of influenza A that had not been in the news before. The three infected persons died shortly after, following an illness similar to severe respiratory disease including severe pneumonia. In the days and weeks that followed, the novel virus,



(LEFT) Dr Subhash Morzaria, Regional Manager, Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases, Regional office for Asia and the Pacific. (RIGHT) Dr Richard Brown, Regional Advisor, WHO South East Asia Regional Office.



(A) H7N9, rapidly infected many others, raising the spectre of a new flu pandemic. New cases were being reported almost daily by the Chinese Ministry of Health, and about 20 per cent of the infected were dying. Though the source of (A) H7N9 had not been confirmed, the large case virological surveillance indicated infection in chickens, ducks and pigeons. Samples collected from several Live Bird Markets (LBMs) had also been found to be positive. In humans, the infection was believed to pass through the oro-pharyngeal route, manifesting a range of symptoms from sub-clinical to mild disease to severe pneumonia.

### Low pathogenicity

To confound matters, the (A) H7N9 virus had low pathogenicity. Though it was highly infectious, causing severe disease in humans, it did not cause any disease or apparent production loss in poultry. With this characteristic, the virus had the potential to spread widely among poultry populations while remaining undetected.

The (A) H7N9 influenza virus challenges efforts to detect and control it in animals. Since March 2013, China has reported 132 laboratory confirmed human cases of (A) H7N9 influenza, including 39 fatalities, to

WHO. While there is no evidence of spread wider than the ten provinces in Eastern China, influenzas often follow a seasonal pattern, and representatives from the region discussed best practices to heighten targeted surveillance and rapidly implement diagnosis and treatment should the virus be found outside of China.

### Close cooperation

Representatives agreed that close cooperation between human and animal health authorities is critical to controlling this emerging virus at its source. FAO, OIE and WHO stressed that (A) H7N9 is a public health challenge linked

closely to its probable source in domestic poultry. Together with USAID, the three organizations stand ready to help public and animal health authorities collaborate in responding to the virus, and urged countries to work together across sectors and disciplines using a One Health approach to best protect human and animal health while safeguarding livelihoods, food security, the environment and the public good.

With nearly a decade of experience with avian influenza H5N1 in the region, the Bangkok meeting, jointly hosted by the Royal Government of Thailand and USAID, presented a virtual toolkit for detection, diagnosis and control options that countries can call upon in the campaign against (A) H7N9 or future influenzas that threaten health and livelihoods in Asia.

"The ability of governments and their partners to quickly detect and respond to the (A) H7N9 virus has been enhanced by the partnerships, platforms and knowledge-base built across Asia over the past decade, responding to serial threats posed by SARS, the H5N1 avian flu and the pandemic H1N1 flu," said Dr. Dennis Carroll. "This meeting is an opportunity to highlight these partnerships and forge a united way forward."

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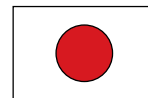
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# Putting women in the picture

## Gender, Livestock and Livelihood in Southeast Asia

4-6 June 2013 • Bangkok, Thailand

The second training workshop on Gender, Livestock and Livelihood was conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, by FAO's Animal Production and Health (AGA) and the Gender, Equity and Rural employment (ESW) Divisions from 4-6 June, to enhance the capacity of FAO's livestock experts in field offices as well as FAO's counterparts in Ministries of Livestock (or equivalent). The Southeast Asia region was identified as a number of livestock programmes and projects are currently starting or are ongoing.

The workshop was attended by 23 participants from nine Southeast Asian and South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam). On the second day, this swelled to 28 as additional FAO staff joined.

The objectives of the workshop were to build knowledge and understanding on specific gender issues emerging in livestock farming in the region; and to build capacity to integrate gender issues in livestock programmes and projects, while identifying the main constraints faced by women and men in accessing, controlling and managing livestock farming in the region.

The main outcome of the workshop will be a booklet on *Gender and Livestock in SE Asia*, planned to be released in 2014.

## Regional Laboratory Network Workshop on Strengthening of the Laboratory and Field Epidemiology Linkage

20-31 May 2013 • Bangkok, Thailand

Recognizing the importance of the linkage between veterinary field epidemiology and laboratory components, FAO, in collaboration with the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL), conducted a Regional Laboratory Network Workshop on Strengthening of the Laboratory and Field Epidemiology Linkage on 20-31 May at the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. The workshop's objectives were to foster appreciation for the communication required between laboratory and epidemiology field



(ABOVE and RIGHT): Participants at the Gender, Livestock and Livelihood meeting in Bangkok

staff for the effective planning and implementation of surveillance and outbreak investigation activities; to enhance the understanding of current diagnostic tests including the selection of appropriate assays and associated sample requirements; and to enhance participants' competence in interpreting diagnostic test results and relating them to risk assessment and decision making or policy advice.

The workshop was attended by 19 veterinary laboratory and 6 field epidemiology staff from the national animal health services in the Regional Laboratory Network.

The FAO regional laboratory capacity building programme is supported by USAID's Emerging Pandemic Threat Programme (USAID-EPT, IDENTIFY) and the European Commission Regional Collaborative Programme on Highly Pathogenic Emerging Diseases (EU-HPED).

## 21st meeting of ASWGL

The 21st Meeting of ASEAN Sectoral Livestock Working Group (ASWGL) was held in Manila from 22-24 May. FAO presented several initiatives for political endorsement and support to ensure sustainability and eventual ownership by ASEAN. Among others, the meeting commended the progress of the EU-HPED project's FAO component and agreed to continue to support its implementation.

This includes the establishment of an



ASEAN epidemiology focal group to oversee the broader initiative in developing the regional strategic framework for epidemiology capacity development and networking in southeast Asia. Another activity will be the establishment of an ASEAN laboratory focal group to oversee the development of the regional strategic framework for laboratory capacity building and networking in ASEAN, recognizing the Regional Laboratory Directors' Forum as an ASEAN ad hoc group for advancing the establishment of the ASEAN laboratory focal group.

The meeting also took note of the progress of the ASEAN Ad hoc Communication Group for Livestock and supported the implementation of the proposed work plan, including the development of a strategic framework for communication, and the development of the ASEAN-FAO-EU website to be launch during the 35th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry. A decision was also taken for Philippines, with support from FAO, to continue its regional role on Environmental Animal Health Management Initiative project under the ASEAN banner, to enable it to expand to other ASEAN countries.

## *Playing tag with bats*

*A Thai bat biologist and veterinarian tag and anesthetize a flying fox in Viet Nam.*

