

## **FAO launches country-wide surveillance of bird flu in Nigeria**

26 September 2006 – FAO has launched a country-wide surveillance project funded by the European Union to identify outbreaks of avian influenza in Nigeria. The project, which will cost almost USD 653,000, aims to help eradicate the disease from Africa's most populous country.

The principal objective of the project is to obtain current and reliable data on the status of the disease so as to enable the Nigerian authorities to better report to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and, together with U.N. technical agencies such as FAO, the World Health Organization and the UN Children's Fund, and the donor community, plan more effective responses to avian influenza outbreaks in the country. During the six-month duration of the project, a team of 200 animal health workers will monitor the situation throughout the country, collecting data on the incidence, spread and impact of bird flu

FAO representative in Nigeria Helder Muteia says the active surveillance will help establish the extent of bird flu outbreaks in Nigeria. "We have about 14 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, with reported avian flu cases. But, nobody knows the real extent of the disease in Nigeria. We know that about 40 local governments have been affected."

Nigeria has not recorded any human cases of the disease but there are fears that the prolonged existence of the virus in Nigeria will increase the risk of human infection. "In Africa, we have to be very careful because of the close relationship between birds and humans, especially in the rural areas," warns Muteia.

Avian influenza was first confirmed in poultry in the north of the country in February 2006 and quickly spread to 13 of Nigeria's 36 states, as well as the Federal Capital Territory .