

Background Paper

3.4c Regional and global technical support for HPAI prevention and control Gardner Murray, OIE and Joseph Domenech, FAO

Emerging and re-emerging diseases of animals, often of a highly contagious nature, have had significant adverse socio-economic impacts on countries, particularly developing economies. Many of these diseases are zoonotic, that is they are transmissible from animals – production, wildlife and companion – to humans. In fact up to 75% of new infectious diseases of humans over the last 20 years are of animal origin.

Many of these diseases are trans-boundary in nature and can spread within countries and regions and even between continents, sometimes at an alarming rate, resulting in national and international crises. Socio-economic impacts of such diseases have included human suffering, lost development and trade opportunities, and concerns about food security.

Factors contributing to this situation include population growth, demographic changes, increased trade and tourism and intensified production systems, as well as climate change and environmental damage which have had impacts on host-pathogen ecology. Emerging disease risks are expected to increase and it is therefore critical that countries and regional and international organizations work together to help understand the changing nature of risk and establish prevention and management systems.

Key to this is the need to have regional and international coordinated approaches as well as highly effective inter-agency technical/scientific collaboration. Past and present experiences with H5N1 HPAI have demonstrated the essential nature of such approaches in achieving success, and the effective groundwork established forms a very sound basis for improving and refining approaches in the future.

FAO and OIE are the key players at the international level in the animal health area, with WHO a critical partner in the case of zoonotic diseases such as HPAI. A number of significant and innovative initiatives outlined below have been introduced.

A Global Framework for the progressive control of TADs (GF-TADs) has been developed as an FAO-OIE initiative. In this Global Framework, the global and regional approaches are highlighted with a strong axis regarding the support to, and collaboration with, the Regional Organisations (ASEAN, AU-IBAR and others). A chart of complementarities and synergies between FAO and OIE has been agreed and recently revised (February 2007).

Mechanisms have been put in place at global and regional levels for international coordination of support for HPAI control and for management of particular technical issues.

The global coordination of the animal health approach for addressing HPAI prevention and control is integrated with public health initiatives for prevention of human H5N1

virus infection and pandemic influenza preparedness, through the UN System for Influenza Coordination (UNSIC).

The two lead agencies FAO and OIE collaborate individually with partner agencies, with donors and with recipient country animal health authorities. They coordinate their approaches through activities such as conducting meetings on particular thematic issues (eg. the recent HPAI Vaccine Conference held in Verona in March, 2007), preparing strategic documents (e.g. the FAO/OIE Global Strategy for Prevention and Control of H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza¹) or developing information bulletins, health situation updates and warning messages.

FAO has reorganised itself to better respond to crises: establishment of a CVO position, of a special emergency fund and of an Emergency Center for Transboundary Diseases which is a multidisciplinary team associating veterinary, socio-economic, institutional development, policy, farming systems, ecology and communication experts, in order to address the prevention and control of disease with a global/holistic approach. OIE has strengthened its official information capabilities (WAHIS) and warning systems, as well as its network of Reference Laboratories and specialised Ad Hoc and Working Groups.

Several joint FAO-OIE tools have been developed at the global level to bring technical support to Regional Organisations and member countries. All of them are under the GF-TADs umbrella and they include:

(1) The OIE World Trust Fund for Animal Health and Animal Welfare, created for projects of international public utility relating to the control of animal diseases, including those affecting humans as well as the promotion of animal welfare and animal production food safety.

(2) The Global Early Warning and Response System (GLEWS) as a collaborative effort between FAO, OIE and WHO which uses many kinds of data (including diseases, land use, animal populations, socio-economic information, disasters and climate), to provide disease intelligence and enable modelling, making possible disease outbreak prediction and then warning. GLEWS provides the international community with advice on significant occurrences of transboundary and zoonotic diseases and it is being applied in the first instance to HPAI. GLEWS is also responsible for rumour tracking.

(3) A Crisis Management Centre has been established within FAO and the Animal Health response component is coordinated jointly by FAO and OIE. The Centre operates on an Incident Command System that is designed to support rapid response missions in response to country requests for support in the event of new disease events.

(4) A network of OIE and FAO influenza Reference Laboratories, together with groups with HPAI epidemiological expertise called OFFLU. This network was established to exchange scientific data and biological material, share information, offer technical advice and training, promote research and ensure their coordination, as well as supporting the development of human vaccines.

(5) A wildlife surveillance programme, coordinated by FAO and involving several partners, has made significant progress in understanding the role of migratory birds (and mammalian species) in the dissemination of HPAI. The research has implications for epidemiological understand of HPAI spread and for surveillance for early warning of HPAI incursions into new countries and regions.

All of these Global/International support tools were established to bring support to Regional Organisations and to member countries. They must be mirrored as appropriate at the Regional level, in order to better serve the needs of the countries and of the Regional Organisations.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/docs/eims/upload//228807/a1145e.pdf>

Several specific tools which have been put in place and need to be strengthened include:

(1) Regional Animal Health Centres (RAHC) which are FAO and OIE joint Centres, regrouping the necessary technical expertise and operational staff to implement programmes at the regional and country level. For Africa, these RAHCs are combining OIE, FAO and AU-IBAR resources. These Centres are operating under the guidance of the five existing GF-TADs regional steering committees, hosted by and secretariat provided by the OIE Regional Representations.

(2) Regional and Sub-Regional Networks of national laboratories and epidemiology teams or Regional and Sub-Regional networks of socio-economic, farming system and bio-diversity national experts. These networks are established to create a group spirit, to break the isolation of the national technicians and in so doing to better identify national constraints and weaknesses. They will also enable the identification of the national laboratories, epidemiology centres and national socio-economic expert groups which can serve as models for the others in the sub-region.

The building blocks for sound and effective coordination and cooperation have now been established by FAO and OIE in consultation with other organizations. Success has been achieved. However it needs to be recognized that continuous improvement will be essential if we are to meet the challenges of the future in providing global and regional protection. Enhancements will include improved coordination, communication and inter-agency collaboration, making efforts to remove any duplication and, importantly, ensuring approaches are consistent with the most up-to-date scientific knowledge. It is essential that countries assume responsibility for their own animal health programmes and ongoing efforts to improve animal health service delivery must continue be promoted through for example the OIE PVS approach. This will require the ongoing allocation of resources to meet the challenges not only of H5N1 but of other diseases which will inevitably emerge.

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