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(Right) A sketch on preventing avian influenza by local drama and arts group Sanggar Masin in Laga village near Baucau; (above) Children in Maliana village study a cock-fighting poster; (below) The audience at Hatudo village watches a show rapt.



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Timor Leste

On the road with Sanggar Masin

Taking the HPAI communication campaign to the remote corners of Timor Leste

THE HOUR IS LATE. There have been generator problems. The audience is seated on the ground, wrapped in blankets to keep out the cold. Over 150 people, almost the entire village of Fatululik, are quietly waiting for something to begin. The band strikes a chord and starts to sing a reggae song about avian flu; people start clapping. Then the actors come out

into the beam of the car lights with their prop chickens. And so starts the first of 24 drama performances around Timor Leste on HPAI prevention.

Drama has always been an effective form of communication and education in rural and remote areas. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO ECTAD unit), Timor Leste, in collaboration with

the Ministry of Agriculture, used drama in a multi-pronged awareness campaign focusing on avian influenza and other TAD's in high risk areas.

arts group based in Dili, combined a series of short sketches with bird flu songs. It was lively, fun and educational entertainment for border villages or those with close contact with neighbouring Indonesia, where avian influenza is prevalent. The communication campaign, supported by USAID and AusAID, began on September 10 and continued all the way till the end of November. It combined drama and music, with posters, banners, flipcharts, T-shirts, radio, and communications training for extension workers, village chiefs and district livestock officers. Over 10,000 posters, 1000 flip-charts, 100 banners, and 2000 T-shirts were distributed. Workshops were held in six high-risk districts.



3 meetings and a workshop

Workplans, strategies, capacity development, and training were some of this September's outcomes

The Sub-Regional HPAI Laboratory Network Meeting and Biosecurity Training

Bangkok, September 28-30, 2009.

THE EVENT WAS ORGANIZED by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) working with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), funded by the Government of Japan, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The 49 participants included national laboratory officials from Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam, as well as experts from key international partners and donors: ASEAN HPAI Regional Reference Laboratory, AusAID, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Delegation of the European Commission, FAO, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the OIE-FAO Network of Expertise on Animal Influenza, OIE, USDA, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

National laboratory partners from the 13 participating countries presented the

(Below) Dr. Chris Morissy demonstrates how to put on PPE for working in BSL2 safety cabinet. Photo: Sharie Michelle Razo Aviso, OIE in Asia Pacific



Participants at the Sub-Regional HPAI Laboratory Network Meeting

status of their lab capacities, and key international partners shared information on their current support of lab activities in the region. Among the gaps identified were —

- Maintenance of facility and equipment
- Medium to long term training with follow-up activities
- Standard Operating Procedures, accreditation, national and international standards
- Reference reagents
- Information sharing
- Implementing biosecurity and biosafety system
- Sustainability of laboratory capacity and activities

•Strategies for laboratory development/improvement

A major outcome was a draft regional strategic framework for laboratory capacity building and networking, which will serve as a guide for FAO and key international partners for the next steps in strengthening HPAI laboratory capacity in the region.

On the last day, 25 participants from the national laboratory received training on quality assurance and biosecurity provided by AAHL at the National Institute of Animal Health. The participants also agreed to develop regional guidelines for HPAI surveillance and diagnosis based on the existing draft guiding principles for HPAI surveillance and diagnosis network in Asia.

USAID Partners' Meeting

Bangkok September 24-25, 2009

THE TWO-DAY MEETING'S main aim was to review the progress of activities between April and October 2009, and look at proposed plans, including the work plans of key partners. Participants included representatives from Abt Associates, Academy for Educational Development, American Refugee Committee, the ASEAN Secretariat, FAO, the International Rescue Committee (Thailand), the Kenan Institute Asia, Malteser International, MEASURE Evaluation, USAID, US CDC, the US Embassy, and WHO. Presentations focused on activities in USAID-funded avian influenza and regional pandemic programs, cross-border and in these countries: Myanmar, Cambodia, China PR, Lao PDR, Nepal, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Molecular epidemiology meeting

Bangkok 24-25 September 2009

THE JOINT FAO/USDA regional meeting on the molecular epidemiology of the origin and the evolution of H5N1 HPAI in Asia took place in Bangkok on September 24-25. After examining current country capacities for molecular characterization,

the meeting identified key partners and labs for the regional effort to conduct a structured molecular surveillance. Participants reached agreement on harmonising diagnostics, a methodology and sampling frame, as well as a mechanism for sharing samples and information through a regional meeting to be organized at AAHL, Geelong, Australia (see *Coming Up*, below).

ASEAN-TCP (H1N1) Inception Workshop

Bangkok, September 7-8, 2009

EIGHT OF THE TEN ASEAN countries — Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam — participated at the two-day Inception Workshop held in Bangkok on September 7 and 8 this year. There were also participants from WHO, and donors like AusAID, USAID, USDA, and CDC.

The meeting aimed to finalize the work plan and ensure that the Technical Cooperation Project (TCP) funding of USD 500,000 would be used to carry out strategic activities and produce outputs which could be used to leverage additional funds. Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam have already developed plans to start H1N1 surveillance in pigs. The latter two are to be funded by the World Bank through FAO.

Among the meeting's significant outputs were strong support from the project for training labs to diagnose H1N1 to enable country surveillance; support for lab training courses by the identified key reference laboratory, the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL); recognition that there are no well validated reagents for characterizing H1N1, especially some of the pandemic H1N1 2009 strains.

Cambodia

Preventing H5N1 in the time of Pchum Ben



Question and answer session on avian influenza at US medical mission, Cambodia.

Photo: Cecilia Dy, FAO AI programme, Cambodia

THEY SAY SEPTEMBER IS HIGH-RISK for avian influenza in Cambodia. This is the month of Pchum Ben, when Buddhists propitiate the dead with food offerings. Almost every Cambodian takes part by bringing offerings to the pagodas. And what are these offerings? For the most part, chicken and ducks.

To counter the risk posed by this, this September FAO and the Department of Animal Health and Production (DAHP) of Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries organized a public awareness campaign on radio and television. Five TV stations and three radio stations with 11 provincial relay stations broadcast avian influenza public service announcements produced by the FAO and DAHP.

The broadcasts included a three-minute karaoke video that showed the benefits of raising backyard poultry with improved biosecurity. Starring popular local singer Kat Sakhim and comedian Ta Sis, the video encouraged farmers to quarantine new and sick birds, wash their hands with soap, clean yards and poultry pens of faeces and other poultry wastes, wear masks and gloves or a *krama* (Cambodian scarf), use plastic bags, keep children away from poultry, and separate ducks from chickens. The video also promoted prompt reporting of sick and dead poultry.

Other PSAs warned people of the danger of contracting avian influenza during this high-risk period. Two songs promoted a 14-day quarantine and the separation of ducks from chickens.

Coming up!

November 25, 2009 • Bangkok, Thailand.

National Workshop on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds: From Surveillance to Data Sharing to Publication. *Co-organizers and sponsors:* USDA, FAO, and Zoological Park Organization, Thailand. *Key donors:* USA; FAO; ADB.

December 9-11, 2009 • Geelong, Australia.

Workshop on Surveillance and Laboratory Diagnosis of Animal Influenza in Asia. *Collaborators:* FAO-RAP, AAHL, Murdoch University. *Key donors:* Sweden, FAO, Japan.

December 14-19, 2009 • Geelong, Australia.

Training on Surveillance and Laboratory Diagnosis of Animal Influenza in Asia. *Key donors:* Sweden, FAO, Japan.

Philippines' secret weapons against HPAI

13 Philippine vets get intensive AVET training in preventing HPAI from touching down on their soil

IF THE HPAI VIRUS were ever to enter the Philippines, it would lay waste a poultry industry worth 140 billion pesos (USD 3 billion poultry industry. Thankfully, the country has an energetic program called *Strengthening Laboratory and Field Surveillance for an Effective Avian Influenza Protection Programme*, which grew out of FAO's response to the Philippines government's appeal for help. Supported by USAID and AusAID, the project was implemented by the government of the Philippines through the Department of Agriculture Bureau of Animal Industry, and the FAO. The project ran from June 2008 to May 2009, and covered two regions judged critical for HPAI prevention, Region II (Cagayan Valley) and Region XII (SOCSARGEN).

Among the project's activities, 13 local veterinarians completed an intensive five-month training in Applied Veterinary Epidemiology Training (AVET) from September 2008 to March 2009. These AVET graduates, together with vets trained earlier, will form part of country's field surveillance network, capable of swift response to outbreaks.

AVET graduates from Batanes, Bohol and Sorsogon share their experiences of the AVET training.

Keeping Batanes safe

Dr. Gilmour C. Ruiz,

Veterinarian II, Batanes

Batanes is one of a sprinkling of islands on the northernmost tip of the Philippines, where the Pacific Ocean meets the South China Sea. You could easily miss it on a map. Most would never guess that the island is a major livestock producer, with cattle as its main stock. Should the HPAI virus ever find its way to this isolated island, help from mainland Luzon would be hard to come by. In fact, **Dr. Gilmour Ruiz**, veterinarian and the youngest trainee at the second AVET program, would have his hands full if there ever was an outbreak.

Dr. Ruiz feels that the sea acts as a natural barrier to the entry of diseases from mainland Luzon. "An ordinance has already been already drafted to prevent entry of diseases," he said. "It is constantly followed



'I am now much better equipped epidemiologically, encouraged to do more, and fully empowered to implement whatever is necessary in case of an outbreak.'

Dr Enrique Espiritu
Sorsogon

monitoring to be basic in sustaining all their developmental efforts to develop Bohol's livestock industry to contribute towards the economic progress of the province.

"It was the right training for me at the right time," she says. "AVET not only empowered me as a veterinarian

up in the Sangguniang Panlalawigan."

"The training boosted my ability," he said. "We learnt not only about disease investigation but also decision making and prioritization of resources to contain and prevent further disease outbreaks."

The right stuff

Dr. Stella Marie D. Lapiz,

Provincial Veterinarian, Bohol

The most memorable words from the AVET training for **Dr. Stella Marie Lapiz**, Provincial Veterinarian of Bohol, were, "The best is the enemy of the good." She used to believe that having excellent, effective and award-winning programs was more than enough to serve the people of Bohol. "This mentality changed within just a few days of my attendance in AVET," she said. "I now realize that there's more to learn."

She now believes that the principles of epidemiology, which she once treated as peripheral, are crucial to ensuring the success of the livestock production, livelihood and poverty alleviation programs of their office. She now considers surveillance and

but I have also been able to give my staff the same confidence that together we can improve our service delivery."

Second time lucky

Dr Enrique Espiritu

Provincial Veterinarian, Sorsogon

The first time **Dr. Enrique Espiritu** was invited to apply for the first AVET Program, in 2007, a super typhoon had devastated Sorsogon province, cutting off electricity and communication, and forcing him to miss the deadline for applications. Fortunately, he made it into the next batch.

Sorsogon has two municipalities, Bulan and Matnog, which are among the 20 identified as critical for AI. Surveillance in these municipalities is crucial, specially as their ports serve as gateways to Visayas and Mindanao. Dr. Espiritu is sure that disease surveillance will be much stronger now all around after AVET.

He believes AVET has made him a better local government unit veterinarian. "I am now better equipped epidemiologically, and empowered to implement whatever is

necessary in case of an outbreak," he said.

There was one other small benefit for Dr Enrique. He once used to be a stranger to computers when first invited to AVET. "Today I can make my own Powerpoint presentations," he said.



'The AVET training was the right training for me at the right time.'

Dr Stella Maria Lapiz
Bohol