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Reducing the burden of high-impact transboundary animal diseases through the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES)

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I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Agriculture, at its 27th Session,¹ recommended FAO to reduce the burden of high-impact transboundary animal and zoonotic diseases through the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES). This document provides an update on the progress of priority actions, and serves as an information document to the discussion document COAG:LI/2022/5 Strengthening national coordinated capacities to manage the risks of animal diseases and emerging zoonoses through the One Health approach.

2. The animal health component of EMPRES (EMPRES-AH), and its operational platforms – the Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD) and the Emergency Management Centre for Animal Health (EMC-AH) – have improved Members' capacity to effectively prevent and control high-impact diseases through One Health.

¹ C 2021/21, paragraph 18.

II. Enhancing animal health capacities for disease prevention and control

3. ECTAD's presence in 28 countries in Africa, Asia and the Near East² has strengthened the diagnostic capacities of 90 laboratories in 22 countries, supported response to 445 disease outbreaks in 19 countries, and trained almost 6 000 professionals, in surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory and response capacities from October 2020 to September 2021.

4. Animal health emergencies through virtual and field EMC-AH missions were supported in 14 countries. These included responses to African Swine Fever (ASF) in Nigeria, Togo, more recently in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and preparedness in Samoa; highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in Senegal, lumpy skin disease (LSD) in Bangladesh and Myanmar, and Rift Valley fever (RVF) in Madagascar and Mauritania.

5. Country capacities for risk management of priority diseases have been supported through the Virtual Learning Centers (VLCs)³ notwithstanding travel restrictions due to COVID-19. Courses on One Health, LSD and ASF have been delivered in English, Russian and Spanish, and on disease reporting in the field with the use of the Event Mobile Application (EMA-i).⁴

III. Strengthening disease intelligence, early warning and risk mitigation

6. FAO has upgraded the Global Animal Disease Information System EMPRES-i+⁵ to gain interoperability with public health and environmental-sector data platforms for rapid information-sharing and risk assessments. The integration of EMPRES-i+ with the Hand-in-Hand Geospatial Platform allows disease data to be linked with ecoclimatic and agroecological data sets for improved risk modelling and forecasting.

7. EMA-i, the field app of EMPRES-i+, is being used in 12 African countries⁶ for animal disease surveillance, ensuring transmission of health information from the field to the central level in real time. For example, in the United Republic of Tanzania, EMA-i has improved the reporting of disease events fourfold over the previous year, enabling rapid detection and containment.

8. EMPRES-AH has provided timely risk assessments and recommendations for control of emerging threats. These include risk assessments on LSD in Asia and on the introduction of ASF in the Americas.⁷ Following the spillover of SARS-CoV-2 in minks, an FAO – World Health Organization (WHO) – World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Tripartite risk assessment was conducted to provide guidance to Members. Recommendations on epidemiological investigation of SARS-CoV-2 in exposed animals, and risk mitigation measures for livestock professionals were published.

² Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam.

³ Regional VLCs have been established for Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East and North Africa. <https://virtual-learning-center.fao.org/>

⁴ EMA-i is a mobile app for timely animal disease field reporting to enhance surveillance. <https://www.fao.org/3/i4853e/i4853e.pdf>

⁵ Available at <https://empres-i.apps.fao.org/>.

⁶ Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe.

⁷ In press. Results have been disseminated through a regional webinar.

IV. Fostering global and regional coordination for disease control

9. EMPRES-AH has coordinated implementation of transboundary animal diseases (TADs) control strategies through the FAO-OIE global framework for progressive control of transboundary animal diseases (GF-TADs) strategy for 2021–2025.⁸ A Partnerships and Financing Panel has been established to aid sustainable partnerships and financing mechanisms for TADs control. Under the GF-TADs:

- a global coordination committee for foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) (GCC-FMD) was established to reinforce information exchange and coordination for the implementation of a Progressive Control Pathway (PCP-FMD);
- the GF-TADs initiative for ASF control was launched,⁹ and a Call for Action - public-private-partnership webinar promoted the engagement of the private sector in ASF control;
- the regional strategy for ASF control in the Americas was developed, and the results of the ASF risk assessment were shared in a webinar with member countries to enhance preparedness; and
- the Joint FAO-OIE network of expertise on animal influenza (OFFLU) has monitored emerging animal influenza viruses and has shared scientific data at the biannual WHO vaccine composition meetings for managing risks to global health and food security.

10. International coordination and scientific exchange on mitigating risks at the human-animal-environment interface has advanced with the organization of a Tripartite Global Technical Meeting on Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus and Other Emerging Zoonotic Coronaviruses, joint recommendations to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2 between humans and wildlife (in press) and monitoring of SARS-CoV-2 evolution in animals.

V. Conclusion and way forward

11. EMPRES-AH will be an essential component of the One Health Priority Programme Area of FAO's Medium Term Plan 2022-25, enhancing early warning and integrating One Health and biosecurity risk management approaches at the producer level for sustainable livestock production and One Health outcomes. Increased resource allocation for technological advancements for early warning, and for multisectoral coordination would allow FAO to strengthen support to Members to combat the emergence and spread of high-impact diseases.

⁸ FAO & OIE. 2021. *GF-TADs Strategy for 2021–2025. Enhancing control of transboundary animal diseases for global health* [online]. [Cited 13 January 2022]. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb6800en/cb6800en.pdf>.

⁹ FAO & OIE. 2020. *Global control of African swine fever: A GF-TADs initiative. 2020–2025* [online]. [Cited 13 January 2022]. <https://www.fao.org/3/ca9164en/ca9164en.pdf>.