Concept Note

The rationale and objectives for the establishment of a Central Asian Animal Health Network (CAAHN)

TCP/SEC/3702: Establishing a Network on Priority Livestock Diseases in Central Asia (PLDCA)

Laboratory networks are central to FAO's mission

FAO's mission is to contribute to economic growth, food security, food safety and animal health through early warning and disease intelligence. This knowledge is built by working collectively and sharing information with governments and international organizations in a reliable, consistent and transparent manner.

Animal health networks offer a framework for building strong technical capacity, competency, leadership and a critical mass of regionally networked specialists in veterinary medicine, epidemiology, surveillance and diagnosis – all of which are essential to coordinate actions to manage the risks of transboundary animal diseases and zoonoses.

Experience from regional animal health networks in other regions has already proven successful. FAO has lead with other international agencies the establishment and support of several regional animal health networking initiatives in various regions of the world, e.g. RESEPI and RESOLAB in Western and Central Africa, EARLN and EAREN in East Africa, REMESA in Northern Africa, and also in Southeast and South Asia. The examples above are a valuable tool to build synergies and efficiency in terms of animal health expertise and to enhance transparency and mutual confidence in disease information exchange.

The imperative for a regional approach

Livestock diseases adversely impact the productivity of livestock production systems by reducing the quantity and quality of livestock-derived products. Doing so, they do not only challenge the livelihoods of the producers, but can have major socio-economic consequences for the wider population. Additionally, the trade restrictions that often accompany the reporting of livestock diseases, may add a considerable economic burden, particularly to exporting countries. Control measures, such as massive depopulations, will also add to the cost, both from the economic and the social points of view.

Wildlife and other vectors travel freely without awareness of or regard for the human race's creation of national boundaries. Also, domestic animals and their products move constantly across borders of neighbouring countries through formal and informal means. As a result, animal diseases often occur in ecosystems that span several countries, and evidence shows that their prevention, control and eradication can be effectively achieved using a regional approach. Best practices and lessons learned from a disease event in one country are particularly valuable to other countries that need to prevent or respond to similar outbreaks. Moreover, the chances of rapidly detecting, controlling or eliminating a pathogen increase significantly when neighbouring countries act in a concerted manner as part of a wider geographic strategy thus decreasing economic implications of animal diseases on producers and market regionally.

Network's objectives and activities

Regional animal health networks offer a framework for building strong technical capacity, competency, leadership and a critical mass of regionally networked specialists. A regional animal

health network will join forces to 1) exchange information and experience, 2) standardize laboratory, field prevention/control, operating, communication and other procedures, 3) harmonize policies and approaches, 4) identify gaps, weaknesses and priorities, and 5) fulfill these gaps, e.g. by providing training, capacity building. This can be achieved by means of enhanced cooperation between veterinary services, exchange of people, training and capacity building, organization of ring trials, joint work plans, etc.6) Efficient coordination of disease/theme specific sub-networks

More specifically within the animal health network, regional laboratory networks will help to: share and update information on laboratory diagnostic techniques and algorithms; Management of Laboratory Information generated in the laboratories; Biosafety and Biosecurity issues; Quality Assurance implementation with a view to achieve ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation status through involvement of member laboratories in harmonized quality assurance programs; Develop regional technical collaborations and catalyze experience sharing; Ensure a minimum and harmonized supply of reagents; Develop opportunities to participate in diagnostic proficiency tests; collectively benefit from international expertise (from OIE/FAO Reference Centres); and Assess the improvement of regional technical skills and continuous training of technical staff.

Similarly, regional epidemiology networks will assist in: Timely share outbreak and surveillance information; harmonize surveillance and platforms; Discuss prevention and control strategies; Coordinate, harmonize and plan interventions in the region, particularly in border areas; and Assess the improvement of regional technical skills and continuous training of technical staff and perform risk analysis for the region and beyond.

Network's structure and functioning

FAO, through its regional office for Europe and Central Asia (REU), will function as the initial driver of this animal health network, which will serve as an umbrella under which laboratory and the epidemiology networks operate. Countries constituting the network will include Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan that will also be hosting the Network meetings. Additional countries will get invited ad-hoc as the situation requires so, e.g. China, Mongolia or the Russian Federation.

The network will be expected to meet at least on an annual basis, plus ad hoc meetings. The Steering Committee would be all Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) of the region. Each country will nominate focal points for laboratory and epidemiology. The network will also include international world and regional FAO reference centres/laboratories. Also, representatives from the private sector (e.g. producer and veterinary associations, etc.) will be invited to participate in meetings/specific sessions/activities as needed.

Coordination with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) will be promoted. Any existing liaisons between the laboratories and veterinary services at the regional level will be taken into account, as well as close contact with existing networks and initiatives.

Most importantly, in order to be successful and sustainable, this regional network must be recognized and supported by intergovernmental organizations, national governments and regional economic bodies. Representatives of these will also be involved as required.

Stepwise Approach for the Progressive Control of Brucellosis (SPCB)

The initial driver of the network will be brucellosis, which is a high priority for all Central Asian countries. Bovine and small ruminant brucellosis can be controlled and, as the primary responsibility of all governments is to protect all people leaving no one behind, it is their duty to

give high priority to reducing risks associated with zoonotic diseases. FAO and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have jointly developed a Stepwise Approach for the Progressive Control of Brucellosis (SPCB) to aid countries along the progressive control process.