

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia 12-15 July 2021

Background Note

Session 6

One Health in Europe and Central Asia – Regional priority 2

Regional Priority 2 Food system transformation and support in exploring new markets through the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies to meet World Trade Organization commitments and promote value chain development

One Health: Emphasis on the interfaces of human–animal–plant health.

Case study presentation:

E-learning on animal health issues for the better management of diseases in regional Member States

1. Introduction

Transboundary animal diseases (TADs) such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), *peste des petits ruminants* (PPR), African swine fever (ASF), lumpy skin disease (LSD) and avian influenza (AI) continue to be a threat to the livestock keepers of Europe and Central Asia. TADs not only cause sickness and death in animals (thereby destroying the wealth and livelihood of the rural poor), but also increase the cost of disease control for the country and deny trade opportunities for livestock owners and the affected countries. Furthermore, some TADs, such as AI, are zoonotic in nature and hence are a constant threat to public health.

With the increasing uptake of online methods during the COVID-19 pandemic, it became evident that e-learning and online training are not only a possibility but a real and valuable alternative to traditional capacity-building methods such as face-to-face workshops and training of trainers.

Capacity development on TADs among private and official veterinarians is in line with the recently published FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) strategy for animal health and production¹. It is also part of REU One Health emphasis under Regional Priority 2. Digital tools, such as e-learning, enable the training of multiple stakeholders simultaneously, in a standardized format, while ensuring that disease detection, prevention and control policies adapted by countries are in line with global control strategies.

This background paper provides our technical experience with e-learning methods and pinpoints possibilities for future use.

2. Description

To ensure optimal preparedness, early detection and rapid response against disease incursion, it is paramount to reach and train first responders – the veterinarians. Yet, field veterinarians, the arrowhead

¹ FAO. 2021. Animal Health and Production Strategy for FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia 2020-25 – A wake-up call for impact. <http://www.fao.org/3/cb2597en/CB2597EN.pdf>



among the first responders, are in the field all over the country, making the endeavour expensive and time-consuming to train them face-to-face – even through cascade or train-the-trainer approaches. Moreover, FAO could not keep up with requests for face-to-face trainings coming from affected and at-risk Member Countries.

An online format offers obvious advantages in overcoming these issues. Virtual training is easy and cost-effective to scale up, can reach hundreds of people even in remote locations (if an internet connection is available), and allows trainees to learn at their own pace and at the most convenient times. Moreover, with COVID-19 restrictions on travel and face-to-face meetings, online learning has allowed FAO to continue delivering much-needed preparedness training to Member Countries.

The training was developed using a combination of modalities, including interactive self-directed online modules, videos, live webinars, quizzes, and an online discussion forum. The interactive online modules utilize case study exercises and real-life examples.

This mix of learning modalities allowed participants to study at a time and pace that suits their busy schedules. Critically, the live webinars and discussion fora allowed participants and international experts to interact with each other, adding a vital “human element” to the training. Participants from different countries could exchange stories of challenges fighting diseases that often were similar, and participants from countries already affected by a particular disease have shared their experiences with others from countries not yet battling that disease. Participants were also able to pose questions to international experts.

Participants who go through all the modules, participate in the forum, and pass a final test receive official certification. Information about attendance and level of completion is shared with the nominating countries. In addition, each participant completes a feedback survey, sharing opinions about the experience and how the training could be improved.

During 2020, FAO REU has remotely trained hundreds of animal health professionals regarding ASF and LSD. The following courses were delivered by REU:

- ASF Preparedness course for Europe, April 2020, in English – 450 participants enrolled
- ASF Preparedness course for the Balkans, July 2020, in Serbian – 350 participants enrolled
- LSD Preparedness course for Europe, August 2020, in English, in collaboration with the European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (EuFMD) – 350 participants enrolled
- LSD Preparedness course for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, October 2020, in Russian, in collaboration with EuFMD – 400 participants enrolled

The adaptation of standardized online disease courses to the specific needs of a region or country – tailored to national emergency preparedness plans and delivered in local languages, while enabling dialogue to discuss local challenges and practices – is a powerful tool for reaching out and listening to hundreds of veterinarians who must respond to TAD threats in Member States.

The next steps include a Russian version of the ASF Preparedness course and the development and consequent delivery of courses on other TADs such as Avian influenza, on livestock killing and the disposal of animal carcasses during disease outbreaks, and on best practices in vaccination campaigns.

Finally, stand-alone, shortened, open-access versions of the courses also are planned, to increase outreach to all stakeholders involved in livestock production and disease prevention.

3. Guiding questions for discussion related to Regional Priority 2 and the One Health Approach

- What are the main obstacles that Member States face in implementing the One Health approach (SDG 3.d)?
- What are the expectations from FAO of Member States in engaging their stakeholders in the One Health approach?
- What are the criteria on which Member States evaluate and rate FAO achievements with respect to increasing the resilience of the poor to extreme events and disasters such as Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADs) (SDG 1.5)? “How do we know we (FAO) are doing a good job?”