



Facility Supports a Coordinated and Effective Response to H5N1 in Lao PDR

Lao PDR suffered its first outbreak of H5N1 in 2004 and has had a series of outbreaks since then, with two deaths being reported in 2007.

The Challenge

Situated in Southeast Asia between Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, The Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) is home to over 6 million people, including a number of indigenous and minority groups and around 47 distinct languages and dialects.

emerge as a regional epicenter for the disease, the Government responded at the highest level. The National Committee for the Containment of Communicable Diseases was established under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister and below this the National Committee for Communicable Disease Control. Monitoring and Information management was provided by the National Avian and Human Influenza Coordination Office (NAHICO). FAO and WHO procedures were implemented.

The Government moved rapidly to prepare a National Plan with five strategies and subsequently requested a grant from the AHI Facility, receiving an initial \$2 million and a subsequent grant of \$2.4 million. As in most countries these funds have supplemented, leveraged and provided continuity to programs supported by the donors and international agencies. The Facility and the Bank staff involved in supervising the funds have played an essential convening role and the funds have been used to plug gaps in resources provided from other sources. Lao PDR, through the World Bank, also received a further \$2 million PHRD (Japan) Technical Assistance Grant and a \$4 million IDA grant. Many donors have contributed directly to the effort.

We organized the Coordination Office and two weeks later there was an outbreak of Avian Influenza. Timely.

- Dr. Bounlay Phommasack

Dir. National Emerging Infectious Disease Coordination Office (NEIDCO)

Lao PDR has a per capita GDP of under US\$1000 with over 45% of the population living on under US\$1/day. Over 80% of the population maintain backyard poultry and mid-size operators manage duck and chicken farms. Over 60 large scale commercial operators provide breeding stock, broilers and eggs, predominantly for the urban market.

The H5N1 outbreak in 2004 affected primarily commercial farmers. While there was some response capacity on the animal health side, there was little coordination with health officials. Three provinces were affected and some 155,000 birds were culled.

Responding to the Crisis

Following the 2004 outbreak, and recognizing the severity of the situation, and the risk that Lao PDR could



In 2007, Lao PDR suffered a major H5N1 outbreak, which affected five provinces and over 230 villages. More than 350,000 birds were culled. Government reports that the response was significantly enhanced by the existence of the National Plan and the coordination office, recently reconstituted as the National Emerging Infectious Disease Coordination Office (NEIDCO). Since the June 2007 outbreak, approximately US\$500,000 has been paid for compensation.

NEIDCO moved rapidly to draw together the various stakeholders and donor agencies - a key factor in the effectiveness of the response. Together the parties were able to identify gaps and opportunities and refine the action plan based around the five strategies. Much of the success of this approach was due to the leadership provided by Government and the close alignment of the strategies with the mandates and capacities of both Government Departments and international donor agencies. All concerned have shown considerable flexibility and willingness to work together to address identified gaps.

An Effective Response

Significant progress has been made in the implementation of the strategies. Aided by its highly structured society, Lao PDR was able to rapidly organize stakeholder groups down to the village level and to use this network to diffuse messages and encourage behavioral change. Village chiefs and mass organizations such as the Lao Women's Union and Lao Front for National Construction were effective in reaching women and workers. Provincial authorities were required to develop Pandemic Preparedness Plans and have these approved by Central Authorities. In some cases, notably around the Capital, Vientiane, the government instituted a ban on poultry farming and the sale of live birds during one of the outbreaks.

With the assistance of FAO and WHO, laboratory capacities were strengthened to enable 24 hour turnaround on sample analysis and further upgrading is being supported by the Facility. The laboratory of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is being completed and the Ministry of Health laboratory will be undergoing renovation.

Response teams were established at the Provincial and District levels, namely, culling teams, checkpoint/movement teams, sanitary teams, information and communication teams and compensation teams. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Health and Agriculture sectors has led to a rapid and effective joint response to outbreaks without bureaucratic delays. A hotline was also established and was reportedly used by a Village Veterinary Worker (VWV) to report an outbreak.

Capacity building efforts supported by the Facility were carried out at a large scale, targeting Provincial and District officials, villages chiefs and teachers. As elsewhere, an emphasis on training of



trainers at the Provincial and District levels has effectively expanded available expertise and coverage.

Training has included biosecurity measures designed to minimize the spread of future outbreaks at the farm level and beyond. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry report that VWV in all Provinces have been trained (around 3500 persons) with the help of the Facility, and targets have also been reached for Provincial and District officers. Building on training provided by FAO, the Facility is assisting Lao to reach its coverage targets, specifically for commercial and backyard farmers (38% reached from a target of 80%) The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has also assisted specific target groups, including owners of fighting cocks, to form associations to better manage information flow and crisis response.

The Facility is also supporting the development of local training courses, most recently a 3-month epidemiology course. This will supplement a longer course, available in Thailand. The Facility is also supporting overseas training.

In one of the most successful components supported by the Facility, a Compensation program was implemented designed to offset the losses experienced by families and poultry producers. The program has evolved in several ways over the five years since the initial outbreak. The rate of compensation paid has evolved, from

40% of market value for live birds and 20% for dead (2004) to the current 60% live, 10% dead levels. A second change concerns time-to-payment. In early outbreaks, long lags occurred due to the verification process and related bureaucracy. This reportedly led to a considerable number of commercial farmers giving up the poultry business. This was resolved by payments being made directly by District authorities with subsequent reimbursement by the Central government.

Looking Forward

While it is challenging to assign direct causality, two H5N1 outbreaks in 2008 were contained to Feb-March and Sept-October and the system was generally reported to have responded well. There was no major production or consumption impact.

Challenges facing Lao PDR going forward include sustaining vigilance and response capacity in the face of diminishing outbreaks and evolving public health priorities.

Key Data

Grant Amount: \$4.4 million

*Disbursement (to end March 2010):
\$2.05 million*

Closing Date: June 2011