1. Country and Sector Background

Albania is an “Immanent Risk Case” for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), with the confirmation in March 2006 of two outbreaks of HPAI cases discovered among domestically reared poultry. The threat of new infection among poultry is great, and sporadic outbreaks of HPAI have great potential to spread if left unchecked. More than half of 323 wild bird species recorded in the country are considered migratory, frequenting wetlands bordering on farming communities. Albania’s poultry population is given as 6.275 million, of which over 85 percent are reared in a free-ranging environment on small household farms across the country.

The potential consequences of an unchecked outbreak, including transmission of the virus to humans and the appearance of a virus transmissible between humans, are well-documented.

The government of Albania, with the support of the international donor community in Albania, has focused on mounting a rapid response, improving surveillance, detection and containment measures. These efforts include adjusting legislation for control and prevention of communicable diseases, including influenza pandemics, in line with international legislation; establishing a National Influenza Pandemic Committee, or “Task Force,” as an inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral decision-making body; and establishing a working group between the

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1 See GPAI PAD p. 54.
2 The remaining 15 percent is reared on 32 commercial farms ranging in size from 500 to 220,000 heads.
3 See GPAI PAD p.1-3.
4 This Task Force was established by order of the Prime Minister on October 28, 2005. Membership of the Task Force includes the Ministries of Agriculture (chair), Health, Interior, Education, Environment, and Finance. Its main responsibilities include taking decisions at the national level for prevention and control of AI; coordination of the national contingency plan; and distribution of tasks to each ministry; ensuring implementation at the field level; preparing bulletins; informing the PM’s office; and communicating with national and international organizations.
Ministries of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection (MAFCP). The Ministry of Health has prepared and monitors implementation of a national contingency plan, and an Influenza Committee at the Ministry of Health is in continuous contact with the Civil Emergencies and Crises Committee at the Ministry of the Interior. The Institute of Public Health (IPH) is the National Focal Point for Influenza Pandemic (human public health). The Institute of Veterinary Research (IVR) in MAFCP is the National Focal Point for Avian Influenza (veterinary public health). Establishment of Avian Pandemic Influenza District Committees (sub-national level) is under progress.

However, there is an urgent need to improve Albania’s capacity to prevent, identify, contain and eradicate HPAI outbreaks, and deal with a potential pandemic should this contingency develop. In light of this and the need for institutional strengthening, greater public awareness, and the potential need for compensation funds, the government is urgently seeking to step up its response to the threat of HPAI, and has requested World Bank financing for its efforts.

Albania meets the eligibility criteria for financing under the GPAI as a newly infected country with an active outbreak of avian flu among poultry, but no human infection, with an appropriate program of rapid response, detection and containment measures, including appropriate implementation and monitoring arrangements that the international agencies and donor community, including the Bank, can support.¹

2. Objectives

The project development objective is to strengthen the country’s capacity to prevent the spread of avian influenza among poultry, to prevent the transmission of avian influenza from birds to other animals and humans, and to prepare for a potential pandemic of avian influenza transmissible between humans.

The key project outcome indicators will be:

With regard to awareness of HPAI threat and how to prevent it:

1. Behavior changes among key veterinary and public health personnel
2. Public awareness of how to prevent spread increases and behavior changes.

With regard to HPAI outbreaks among poultry:

1. Government culls birds at the infection points following international best practice
2. Government provides timely compensation to farmers for culled birds

With regard to HPAI outbreaks among humans:

1. Infection diagnosed and contained
2. Patients receive appropriate treatment for HPAI infection

¹ See GPAI PAD p. 14.
3. Rationale for Bank Involvement

This project will bring important benefits in the areas of strengthening veterinary and public health services and mitigating the social and economic fallout of a potential influenza pandemic.

The World Health Organization and other UN agencies have taken the lead in mounting the technical response to Albania’s avian influenza crisis. This Project Appraisal Document builds on prior work conducted by the Albanian government and these agencies. These agencies operating on the ground have already mobilized to respond and address some of the most critical needs that have been identified. Going forward, the World Bank anticipates that these UN agencies will continue to take the lead in providing technical assistance.

However, the scale of the response that is needed to contain and eradicate avian influenza outbreaks, and prevent transmission to humans, requires mobilization of financial resources beyond the mandate and means of these organizations, and well beyond the government’s emergency reserves. The World Bank is able to bring critical assistance to these efforts in the form of a financing framework (IDA credits and some grant money). This financial support is also important to lend credibility to the compensation scheme for culling poultry.

In addition, with experience of assisting other countries under the GPAI umbrella the Bank is able to bring valuable lessons learned from other countries facing similar threats and in similar operating environments. It also has important operational experience in mounting emergency response lending, and helping coordinate the assistance of other donors as part of emergency operations.

4. Description

The project will consist of the following four components:

**Component I: Public Awareness and Information**

This component will help develop and implement a communications plan to inform the public, particularly those more likely to be exposed to HPAI, about the threat of HPAI and how they can minimize the risk of transmission and spread of disease. A communications expert will be appointed within the Avian Influenza Task Force (TF) to manage a communications campaign to inform the general public about the status of HPAI in the country and actions being taken by the government. Key messages and materials will be developed and disseminated for

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6 This work, in the form of the “Support for Albanian Avian Influenza Control Program”, was prepared in line with the WHO, FAO, OIE and other relevant institutions’ documents and guidelines addressing ‘Global Avian Influenza Preparedness Planning and Response’, and information from the IPH’s National Contingency Plan.

7 The responses that will coordinate most closely with the World Bank’s project are continued provision of technical support by WHO to the government of Albania, and preparation, implementation and support to the government on a communications campaign, jointly managed by UNICEF and USAID.
different audiences, particularly key high-risk groups, such as farmers and children in wetland areas where probability of exposure is high.

**Component II: Animal Health**

This component will comprise three subcomponents:

The first subcomponent will focus on *HPAI prevention and preparedness capability*. It will strengthen the national policy and regulatory environment for veterinary service and inspection, and improve HPAI prevention and control planning.

The second subcomponent will focus on *strengthening disease control capacities, and improving surveillance, diagnostic capacities, and applied research*. It will strengthen veterinary epidemiological surveillance through the creation of a National Veterinary Epidemiological Unit (NVEU), operating at the central and field level. National diagnostic capacities and bio-safety levels at the Institute of Veterinary Research and the Regional Veterinary Laboratories will also be strengthened, through equipment and technical assistance. Animal disease information systems will also be improved.

The third subcomponent will focus on *strengthening HPAI control programs and outbreak containment programs*. It will target virus eradication at the source through culling and disposing of infected and at-risk poultry, and control of movement of birds, with the assistance of two mobile sub-units of the NVEU. Training and protective equipment will be provided to promote the safety of personnel dealing with potentially affected poultry. This subcomponent will also include a compensation fund, to improve the capacity and the credibility of the government’s commitment to compensate farmers for all culled livestock.

**Component III: Human Health Component**

This component will comprise three subcomponents:

The first subcomponent will *enhance coordination and program planning*, by: (i) strengthening intra-sectoral command and sector coordination mechanisms; (ii) identifying crucial gaps in human health infrastructure, equipment, human and other resources; and (iii) preparing a detailed plan defining operational priorities and clearly identifying roles and responsibilities at each level of the health system. This subcomponent will also finance development of a detailed implementation plan for “social distancing” measures in the case of an epidemic, and simulation exercises.

The second subcomponent will *strengthen the national public surveillance system* by: (i) providing the National Influenza Laboratory (NIL) with training,
equipment and facilities to contribute to up-grading its bio-safety level; and (ii) strengthening the capacity of the IPH and regional epidemiological investigation and response teams.

The third subcomponent will strengthen health care response capacity, by expanding regular seasonal flu vaccinations, supporting the purchase and distribution of anti-viral drugs and developing effective guidelines for their use, and strengthening the capacity of medical services to isolate and treat patients with severe communicable diseases.

**Component IV: Support to Avian Influenza Task Force**

This component will support the Avian Influenza TF in implementation of the government’s Avian Influenza response strategy (including components I-III above), and will comprise two subcomponents:

The first subcomponent will strengthen the TF by establishing a permanent Secretariat with full-time staff to manage the project, and clearly laying out their areas of authority (for more details, see C.1., Institutional and implementation arrangements).

The second subcomponent will support monitoring and evaluation capacities and activities at all administrative levels, and will develop an action plan for monitoring and evaluation. This action plan will include baseline studies, ongoing participatory monitoring and evaluation, and a final project evaluation. Specific surveys may be conducted to obtain data for this purpose. Project evaluation will include both quantitative and qualitative aspects and be conducted on a yearly basis.

One of the key characteristics of the HPAI threat is the difficulty in predicting the course the pandemic will take. An important feature of the project therefore is the flexibility to adapt to a changing situation, with the ability to reallocate funds between components and categories, and potentially to draw up new components if necessary.

5. Financing

<table>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>BORROWER/RECIPIENT</td>
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<td>INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION</td>
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<td>JAPAN: MINISTRY OF FINANCE - PHRD GRANTS</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Implementation
The Project will be implemented by existing governmental institutions. The two main implementation agencies will be MAFCP and the Ministry of Health, and their related central and regional agencies. Other governmental agencies and non government organizations and service providers (Regional Extension Service, private veterinarians, community-based organizations) will also be involved in the delivery of a variety of services.

Given the national importance and cross-sectoral nature of the project, overall responsibility for overseeing and coordinating institutional and implementation arrangements at the national level will be vested with the government’s Avian Influenza TF. Within the TF there will be a permanent Secretariat, located in MAFCP. The Secretariat will be led by an animal health expert in charge of coordinating the Animal Health component, and a physician to coordinate the Human Health component. The Secretariat will manage everyday implementation issues related to the project, and will coordinate the activities among all ministries involved such as Agriculture, Health, Environment/ Forestry, Interior (dealing with emergency situations), Education, Finance and donors community. The Secretariat will coordinate project activities with the departments in charge in each ministry, with their research institutions, and with sector staff in the Regions, Municipalities and Communes.

The two officials leading the Secretariat will be local consultants hired as Component Coordinators by the MAFCP and the Ministry of Health. They will initially be supported by project funds for the first year of the project only, after which they will be paid by the Government. Their specific responsibilities will be to manage and implement project activities within their sectors. Both coordinators will report directly to the TF Chairman, and they will coordinate project activities with other relevant government agencies. Moreover they will prepare annual work programs in their sectors and submit inputs to the Project’s quarterly and annual financial monitoring reports. They will be responsible for monitoring and will collect relevant data from their respective implementing ministries and agencies and compile them into progress reports, focusing on the status of physical implementation by component, the use of project funds, and monitoring indicators. They will be supported by a small staff and may be recruited as permanent staff of MAFCP upon project completion.

Fiduciary and procurement expertise, including responsibility for consolidating the annual Work Programs and budgets, and for the consolidation of quarterly financial management reporting and progress reports, will be sourced from existing capacity in MAFCP, with the help of additional staff/consultants recruited for overall administration of training activities, procurement, and financial management. The Project will adopt the operational manual of procedures of the existing PMU of the Water Resource Management Project, incorporating it into its operational manual and adding procedures for the operation of the Compensation Fund.

At the Region, Municipal and Commune levels, implementation will be the direct responsibility of the respective Region, Municipality and Commune agricultural and health departments and services. Small inter-agency coordination units will be assigned at the local level to work under the supervision and guidance of the Secretariat.

7. Sustainability
The Government of Albania has committed itself to a medium term strategy to address HPAI and other zoonoses in domestic poultry and to prepare for, control and respond to an avian influenza epidemic in humans. The strategy is endorsed by the World Health Organization and other donors. A multidisciplinary TF chaired by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture is coordinating these efforts and reporting to the Prime Minister’s office.

8. Lessons Learned from Past Operations in the Country/Sector.

The project has been prepared under the Global Program for Avian Influenza Control and Human Pandemic Preparedness and response (GPAI) and has incorporated the lessons learned for the preparation of that project.8

9. Safeguard Policies (including public consultation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safeguard Policies Triggered by the Project</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Assessment (OP/BP 4.01)</td>
<td>[X]</td>
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<td>Natural Habitats (OP/BP 4.04)</td>
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<td>Pest Management (OP 4.09)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projects on International Waterways (OP/BP 7.50)</td>
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<td>[X]</td>
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</table>

Since the Project supports investments in carcass disposal for culled poultry and investments in laboratories and hospitals it receives a B category for safeguard screening. The project operations manual (a condition of effectiveness) will include an environmental assessment (EA) and environmental management plan (EMP) to address these issues. A waiver for the requirement to complete the EA and EMP during project preparation has been sought and obtained per para. 12 of OP 4.01.

10. List of Factual Technical Documents


b. “Rapid Assessment of Preparedness and Response Albanian Capacities to confront a possible Avian Influenza Epidemic Breakdown (WHO September 2005)”;


* By supporting the proposed project, the Bank does not intend to prejudice the final determination of the parties' claims on the disputed areas
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