

Controlling Avian Flu and Protecting People's Livelihoods

DFID-Funded Collaborative HPAI Research Project for Asia and Africa

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Key Message #1

- HPAI (and LPAI) / AIV) control in domestic poultry poses an **unprecedented challenge** for the veterinary profession because of:
 - the genetic versatility of these viruses,
 - their invasion of large and geographically dispersed, high turnover domestic poultry populations, and
 - the possibility of asymptomatic persistence in domestic ducks and possibly other animal reservoirs.

Key Message #2

- Because of the scale of economic risk in their own countries, through a human-to-human transmissible HPAI virus, OECD economies have given primary global policy and financial impetus to risk reduction at HPAI sources. However, empirical evidence on actual and potential domestic damages suggests that the OECD, as well as China and India, should still make much **larger investments in risk reduction** in current and potential epicentres of AI virus evolution.

Key Message #3

- An important source of HPAI risk in the GMS stems from
 - the co-existence of diverse poultry production systems and species (ducks, quail, chicken, etc),
 - millions of households raising poultry primarily for home consumption,
 - an abundance of small-scale market-oriented poultry enterprises linked to consumers through complex market chains and live bird-markets, and
 - the covert transboundary trade that pervades the region,
 - while the role of wild birds in the spread of HPAI H5N1 in the GMS is negligible.

Key Message #4

- HPAIV H5N1 now appears to be endemic in parts of Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). We anticipate that it will be difficult to obtain the level of domestic and (especially) external public resources needed to sustain commitments to national risk reduction and coordinated regional control efforts need to be substantially strengthened.

Key Message #5

- Domestically, effective public and animal health policy must arise from and be sustained by sound institutions, with adequate capacity and coordination at the national, regional, and local levels. Unfortunately, governmental institutions in the GMS are very diverse in all these aspects, and HPAI risk management has in some cases been seriously compromised by institutional weakness. These weaknesses and the complexity to the structure of the poultry sector imply that OECD-style top-down disease control approaches are, in many instances, likely to fail.

Key Message #6

- Publicly funded blanket vaccination campaigns are costly and appear to be ineffective against HPAI in areas with a high prevalence of small-scale poultry keepers raising birds in 'traditional' ways mainly for home consumption. Targeted vaccination of specific high-risk groups can achieve comparable risk reduction at a fraction of the cost.

Key Message #7

- Radial approaches to culling birds and destruction of smallholder poultry infrastructure, which are very costly to communities, appear to contribute little to risk reduction and deter broad-based cooperation in HPAI control programmes. Culling should be limited to infected flocks and high risk contacts. Infrastructure can be disinfected, but should not be destroyed.

Key Message #8

- Attempting to improve the bio-security of millions of backyard producers is an ineffective use of scarce resources in the GMS countries, especially public funds in countries with many high priority development objectives. Interventions targeting market-oriented producers and management of the main poultry flows from production to consumption centres is likely to be more cost-effective.

Key Message #9

- Although they comprise the vast majority of poultry keepers in the GMS, smallholders do not presently have a voice in the design of short- and long-term HPAI control and mitigation policies. Omitting this stakeholder group is a mistake that seriously compromises policy effectiveness and legitimacy because smallholders play a crucial role in HPAI risk management due to their geographic dispersion and majority status even if their individual disease risk is comparatively low.

Key Message #10

- It is essential to recognize the smallholder poultry producers as part of a solution (effective disease defense) rather than a problem (infection risk), enlisting them with socially effective policies that recognize and reward their contribution to the national and global commons of disease resistance. Market-oriented policies offer vital opportunities for private cost sharing and self-directed poverty reduction. For example, certification and other product quality/safety initiatives can be self-financed and incentive compatible, a socially effective substitute for open-ended fiscal commitments to public disease monitoring and geographically extensive control measures.