



Safeguarding Livelihoods - On-the-Ground Collaboration Points the Way

Unlike most of its South-East Asian neighbors, Sri Lanka has so far been fortunate enough not to experience an outbreak of H5N1. The emphasis of the AHI grant has been on preparedness. Even without an animal or public health crisis to provide urgency and focus considerable progress has been made and the country's capacity to monitor the situation and respond has been greatly enhanced. As in other countries, the grant has leveraged other funding sources, provided continuity and produced results on the ground.

An Important and Evolving Industry

Over the past two decades the poultry industry has grown in importance in Sri Lanka. Evolving from a predominantly state run sector, it is now 95% in private hands, involves around 85,000 farmers, and impacts the livelihoods of around one million people. There are currently around 14 million poultry on the island and a total of 40 hatcheries. As well as the backyard poultry found throughout Asia, the Sri Lankan poultry industry is based on a "buy-back" model where companies contract out poultry management activities to small farmers who are provided inputs. Since the 1990's several of these concerns have grown large, with typically 500-700 contracted farmers and potentially hundreds of thousand of birds. Many of the companies provide their own veterinary and lab services.

A great achievement of this project is that we now work together - the Animal and Health Ministries

- Dr. Dharshana Senanayake

Additional Director-General, Min. of Finance and Planning

Strengthening Preparedness

The emphasis in Sri Lanka has been on developing preparedness, strengthening the surveillance system, training and communications. Emphasis is given to 35 hotspots, areas identified as particularly at risk from an outbreak. Emergency response teams are organized at the Provincial level and typically include Veterinary Surgeons, Veterinary Investigation Officers (VIOs), Livestock Development Instructors and Public Health Officers.

As well as providing training, equipment including laboratory equipment, personal protection gear and vehicles to staff, improvements to the surveillance system include a hotline, a sampling program and a program targeting migratory birds.

Sri Lanka is on the migratory path of a large number of bird species. Training in migratory bird identification and handling was provided for Department of Animal



Production and Health (DAPH) offices and VIOs. The response required close collaboration between the DAPH and the Department of Wildlife Conservation, who have facilitated the collection of samples in return for training and improved emergency preparedness.

Training has been the most significant activity undertaken under the animal health component of the Project. Over 58,000 farmers, administrators, veterinarians, schoolteachers and schoolchildren have been trained to date. As in other countries, the reach of training has been extended by training of trainers. DAPH does note however that, with only 15% of farmers trained, more remains to be done.

The Department has developed close ties with local institutions. This "Links" programs includes collaboration with local universities, notably the Postgraduate Institute of Science (PGIS) at the University of Peradeniya. Courses developed included Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)/emergency preparedness for undergraduates, the application of disaster management principles in HPAI and a certificate course in epidemiology.

Communications materials are extensive. Care has been taken not to alarm the population ahead of an outbreak. Even the threat of an outbreak and several false alarms had a significant production and consumption impact. Communications materials that speak to outbreak response are available, if and when they are needed.

The Compensation Fund Guidelines have also been updated and a poultry farm registration program has been initiated to facilitate future payments.



levels. At the National level, a Ministerial Steering Committee meets bi-annually and a multisectoral Technical Steering Committee holds monthly meetings and maintains a regularly updated Emergency Preparedness Plan, prepared in collaboration with WHO, FAO and other agencies. At the local level, the extensive reach of public health officers and midwives is playing an important role. All have been trained to recognize the signs of HPAI and how to collaborate with their animal health counterparts. Capacity-building has largely been handled by the veterinary officers, was multi-tiered and included simulations across sectors. Rather than focussing only on avian influenza, the process was used to introduce concepts of emergency preparedness and other infectious diseases. The Ministry saw this as an investment that would strengthen overall response capacity.

Standing Ready with Work Still to be Done

The AHI Facility has leveraged other sources of funds and provided Sri Lanka the resources necessary to strengthen an already well developed animal health and public health systems, supported unprecedented collaboration across the sectors and at multiple administrative levels and has strengthened the surveillance system considerably.

On the animal health side, there remains important work to do to further motivate private sector poultry producers to take responsibility for their own preparedness. Rather than waiting for Government to lead, the producers have every incentive to establish their own awareness programs and emergency response plans.

Overall however, the main stakeholders are confident that Sri Lanka stands better prepared to deal with future outbreaks of HPAI and other infectious diseases.

Key Data

Grant Amount: \$1.43 million

Disbursement (to end March 2010): \$0.71 million

Closing Date: March 2011

In health, an existing IDA Project has supported the improvement of the surveillance system, including laboratory facilities, training and risk communications materials.

Isolation facilities have been constructed in 21 selected hospitals including the Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH). Equipment was also provided to high dependency and intensive care units and Personal Protection Equipment was distributed throughout. The Ministry notes that there are still gaps to be filled, notably the development of a high-risk lab (BSL3).

Laboratories have been strengthened and the country can now handle its own analysis as opposed to sending samples overseas. Over 2000 tests were carried out over the six month period when risk of an outbreak was at its peak and this program continues.

Cross-sectoral Collaboration on the Ground

There is good collaboration at both the national and sub-national

There have been different types of capacity building, many multi-tiered. In all cases, either health staff or animal health staff have been present as resource persons providing alternate perspectives on avian influenza

*- Dr. Pabha Palihawadena
Project Director
HSDP, Ministry of Health*