

## **Building the Capacity of the Animal Health System in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam**

The USAID Avian and Pandemic Influenza Initiative aims to strengthen the capacity of the Government of Vietnam and its counterparts to identify, prevent, and control outbreaks of avian influenza and other emerging infectious and zoonotic diseases in animals and humans. The project's intervention to build the capacity of local animal health networks in Quang Tri province is three-fold: 1) improving the knowledge, skills and practices of local animal health workers, 2) building the capacity of civil society to address animal health, and 3) improving community-level inputs into national infectious disease surveillance.

Vietnam has been one of the countries most affected by avian influenza and is located in one of five global hotspots for new and emerging infectious diseases. With poultry production predicted to double in the coming decade to meet local consumer demand, Vietnam requires strengthened animal health services at all levels to protect human health and support the livelihoods of smallholder producers.

Vietnam's national animal health agency has worked closely with international partners in the fight against avian influenza. Strengthened national policies have been developed and the country is working towards a new Veterinary Law. However, putting these policies into practice in the populous country's 63 provinces remains difficult in a context of limited human and financial resources. Key challenges faced by provincial animal health systems include enhancing the skills of local animal health workers, registration, establishing effective animal health networks down to village level with good links to district veterinary stations and ensuring that local animal health workers report suspected disease outbreaks into the national animal disease surveillance system.

Quang Tri is one of Vietnam's poorer provinces, and is located in the central coast region. Over 600,000 people live in the province, and there are an estimated 1.6 million poultry being raised.

### **Description of the animal health capacity-building activities in Quang Tri province**

**a. Local animal health worker capacity:** Based on the standard training manual issued by national animal health authorities in 2010, the project worked with local animal health authorities and national consultants to develop and test a comprehensive Animal Health Worker training package, including lesson plans, presentations, visual aids, practical exercises and pre- and post-training assessments. Additional modules were also developed on biosecurity, basic surveillance and zoonotic diseases. A group of 25 master trainers were trained and then provided successive 30-day training courses to village animal health workers. The project also supported animal health authorities in Quang Tri province to introduce licensing for animal health workers. Refresher training for animal health workers has also been introduced, combined with monthly meetings for organized at the district veterinary station.

**b. Building the capacity of civil society:** Working through the national Vietnam Veterinary Association, the project provided training to the Quang Tri Provincial Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Association on animal health worker licensing and on development and financial self-sufficiency of an animal health network. The provincial association was also supported to set up district branches and to enroll new members.

**c. Improving grass-roots disease surveillance:** Using the village animal health worker network of Quang Tri, a system for community-based surveillance (CBS) was developed to assist with detection of suspected animal disease outbreaks. A complementary system was developed with village human health workers to detect influenza-like illnesses in humans. Training on surveillance and the use of CBS tools was provided.

## **Impact and Success**

Training, certification and monthly meetings have strengthened the linkages within the animal health system in the province: local animal health workers receive information about national and provincial activities and the updated disease situation, and can contribute to surveillance for animal disease outbreaks. Capacity assessments conducted before and after the 30-day training indicated that village animal health workers had improved their diagnosis, treatment, vaccination, surveillance, reporting and communication skills. Initial results also indicate that incomes for local animal health workers have increased.

The innovation of combining refresher training with monthly commune animal health worker meetings has been well received by local authorities and by the animal health workers themselves, and has contributed to bringing around 40-60% of private animal health workers into regular contact with district veterinary stations.

The role of civil society has been enhanced. Quang Tri Provincial Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Association was revived after being mostly dormant for several years, and district branches were established. The capacity of association leaders has been enhanced. More than 130 new members have joined the association. Based on the lessons learned in Quang Tri province, a handbook on animal health network development was prepared and used to replicate this association in another province.

Suspected animal outbreaks or human cases have been reported to the national surveillance system for diagnosis and response. The CBS in Quang Tri province has contributed to detecting several disease outbreaks in poultry that were later confirmed as highly pathogenic avian influenza.

The project was able to achieve these successes for two reasons, the political will of the province and our approach to providing capacity building and technical assistance.

Firstly, provincial authorities were committed to improving the animal health system. Over an 18-month period the village animal health worker allowances and training costs initially supported by the project have been progressively taken over by the province in pilot districts, and the same activities are now being rolled out to all communes in five of the eight districts in the province using provincial funds. The province has allocated provincial funds for training of animal health workers. In addition, funding for the monthly animal health worker meetings is now increasingly coming from local sources.

Secondly, project staff approached providing technical assistance to provincial counterparts in a respectful way, engaging them in a discussion of the challenges they face and finding solutions together. This collaborative relationship started in the first half of 2010 when the project carried out a training needs assessment for local animal health workers and began to develop the capacity-building approach jointly with local animal health authorities.

Initially the AHW training and CBS pilot were implemented in Trieu Phong, Hai Lang and Gio Linh districts. From mid-2011 these were rolled out to Dak Rong district and Dong Ha town. By late 2012 local animal health authorities expect to have rolled out these models in all nine districts of the province. Despite the ongoing challenges, for example moving over time to a market-based animal health system where the role of authorities is focused on certification and quality management, as well as the need for improved information flows from the national diagnostic system in response to suspected disease outbreaks picked up through the CBS, this planned roll out demonstrates the models' scalability and sustainability.