

**The OIE Regional Communications Workshop
– a Strategy for Animal Health Communication**

As of 10 November 2009

Background & Context

Challenges

Member countries in the Asia and Pacific region are operating in a complex communication environment. The challenges are numerous, including:

- An increasing range of animal disease threats, including zoonotic diseases, each with its own epidemiology and associated complexity;
- Communicating with a large diverse population with different languages, cultures, social norms and animal health challenges, especially subsistence farming systems;
- Comparatively poor animal and human health infrastructure, highlighted by poor sanitary systems, under-developed food production methods (and practice), limited numbers of trained communications staff (in particular, veterinary services) and low participation in animal health programmes by farmers and industry (in particular, hobby and subsistence farmers who are not members of national bodies and fall outside traditional target audience);
- Low levels of investment in animal health communication resulting in too few communication specialists with little or no resources to deliver communication programmes;
- Poor risk communication during emergencies;
- Little (or no) social marketing activity aimed at promoting behaviour change in support of animal health outcomes;
- Difficulties in maintaining political commitment and investment, in the absence of immediate threats, on critical issues in animal health and related communication strategies;
- Bridging communication levels between subsistence and commercial farming systems;

- Poor accessibility of veterinary services in remote areas, in particular in relation to migratory farming systems;
- Risk perception of consumers with regard to the safety of livestock and related products.

Opportunities

It was also noted that there were a number of opportunities that the region could maximize, including:

- An increased appreciation by veterinary services for the role of high quality communication to promote animal health, and welfare, thereby improving livestock product standards;
- The presence of emerging zoonotic diseases in the region, providing a platform to raise awareness and understanding of animal health issues;
- The ability of countries within the region to work more collaboratively to solve common issues and share resources where possible;
- The willingness of other countries (and international organisations – including OIE, ASEAN, FAO) to provide communication expertise and financial assistance;
- Work with other agencies and the private sector in the context of “One World, One Health” concept (including wildlife, environment, public/human health) to leverage and share resources, as well as communication opportunities;
- Invitation and participation by consumer groups to communicate their requirements and demands for levels of products;
- Improve animal health and livestock product standards, pushing the limits of livestock industries to meet requirements, while appealing to and maintaining expectations of consumers;

- Leverage on new media for the purpose of horizon scanning and dissemination of information.

Purpose

The purpose of the regional communication strategy includes:

- Providing a common vision for animal health communication for the region;
- Outlining a road map for the change by identifying five strategic communication goals;
- Focusing on the integration of communication resources, policy, and delivery of functions in the collective pursuit of positive animal health outcomes in the region;
- Identifying the communication roles and responsibilities for the organisations contributing to animal health programmes in the region and assisting decision-makers to better appreciate the role of the communication function;
- Receiving and disseminating scientific information with regard to an outbreak in a timely, accurate and accountable manner for a prompt response;
- Providing a strong platform from which to lobby for continued and supplementary financial support/investment from donors and governments;
- Minimizing the risk and potential negative impacts of emergency disease outbreaks.

Benefits

The expected benefits from this strategy include:

- Clear direction for the development and delivery of animal health communication;
- Increased awareness of the general public of the importance of the role of Veterinary Services
- Increased understanding of the role of communication within the Veterinary Services;
- Increased political commitment and support;
- Increased investment in animal health communication programmes and infrastructure, thereby improving animal health outcomes;
- Increased numbers of communication specialists in Veterinary Services;
- Improved transparency and quality of communication and information management, in particular during crisis situations;
- Improved international collaboration and sharing of information among member countries and multi-sectorial coordination;
- Better recognition of animal health issues amongst the media and public;
- Increased public and stakeholder involvement in policy and programme development and delivery;
- Changes in the behaviour of the public, stakeholders, and the veterinary staff to support improved animal health outcomes;
- Minimize risk of animal disease outbreaks through greater awareness and adoption of preventive measures;
- Promote the development and implementation of national disease control and eradication plans or strategies.

Vision

The vision for a successful animal health communication is improved animal health risk mitigation and response through increased understanding and

proactive preparedness and response in dealing with animal disease outbreaks.

Successful animal health communication will result in:

- The **Public** having a better understanding of animal health issues. They will proactively participate in animal health programmes and encourage others to do so. The public will provide feedback on proposed animal health policy and help inform the design (and assist with the delivery) of new animal health programmes. They will appreciate the risks involved in their animal health-related activities and will behave in ways that mitigate those risks;
- **Stakeholders** appreciating their vital role in supporting the design and delivery of animal health policy and programmes. They will work together (in a coordinated) manner to maximize the use of available communication resources. Stakeholders will act as advocates and influence decision-makers to reprioritize animal health communication and to release vital resources. They will proactively work together, share information and look for joint opportunities to share expertise across functions, jurisdictions and the sector.
- **Staff** being fully involved in the development and delivery of animal health programmes. They will proactively build and maintain relationships with stakeholders and seek opportunities to increase their communication skills through training. The veterinary staff at all levels will increase their levels of reporting because they will understand the importance of sharing their expertise and experience.

Goals

The strategy has five goals:

1. Ensuring communication strategies and approaches are built, continue to evolve, and are fully integrated with policy development and programme delivery of the VS.
2. Improving risk communication approaches both prior to and during an emergency event.
3. Improving and strengthening communication resourcing (including staff capacity and capability building) and improving the quality of systems.
4. Improving national coordination across jurisdictions, sectors and stakeholders groups.
5. Sharing of information about internationally relevant animal health issues (and communication approaches) within the region and globally.

Objectives

Goal 1

Ensuring communication strategies and approaches are built, continue to evolve, and are fully integrated with policy development and programme delivery of Veterinary services

Objectives

- To identify authorities, organisations and other partners with whom animal and veterinary public health messages can be supported and coordinated.
- To obtain greater political support and commitment from decision makers for animal health programme communication
- To increase involvement of the public, the media and stakeholders (including the broader animal health services sector) in policy development and program design/delivery (clear direction in implementing the programs)
- To increase the focus on behaviour change and audience-focussed communication in the animal health programs

Goal 2

Improving risk communication approaches both prior to and during an emergency event

Objectives

- To improve the preparedness and response of the animal health services for times of emergency through best practice communications.
- To improve the understanding of the public, the media, stakeholders and staff (including leaders and spokespeople) of concepts of risk in

relation to animal health emergencies in an accurate and timely manner.

- To obtain better support, acceptance and participation from the public and other stakeholders for animal health programs to prevent the occurrence of disease, and minimise the impacts of disease if they arise.
- To have risk communications recognised as a high priority activity, and ensure that the required resources are identified and mobilised.

Goal 3

Improving and strengthening communication resourcing (including capacity and capability) and improving the quality of systems

Objectives

- To institutionalize the communication function within animal health services, recognizing the different structures within countries
- To increase communication resourcing (including resource sharing, additional personnel and programme costs) for animal health programmes
- To increase the number of communication specialists within the animal health and associated sectors
- To increase the communication skills levels of staff within animal health and associated sectors

Goal 4

Improving national coordination across jurisdictions, sectors and stakeholders groups:

Objectives

- To better co-ordinate communication delivery including messages, materials, activities and training across the animal health and related sectors to increase reach to target audiences
- To improve communication between programmes, sectors and within governments to avoid duplication and maximize economies of scale
- To ensure alignment and integration across sectors, jurisdictions, international agreements and mechanisms, including “*One World One Health*” at a national level.

Goal 5

Sharing of information about internationally relevant animal disease issues (and communication approaches) regionally and globally:

- To ensure alignment and integration across sectors, jurisdictions, international agreements and mechanisms, including through *One World One Health*, at regional and international level.
- To enhance public communication across the region and internationally to mitigate the risks of transboundary animal diseases.
- To develop channels for animal health communicators to share information about communication approaches.
- To encourage information sharing between animal health agencies in different countries to mitigate the spread of animal diseases