Avian Influenza Communication Challenges in West Africa: Results from rapid assessments during outbreaks

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CONTEXT

- ☐ UN and USG have encouraged all countries to establish Avian Influenza Strategic Planning Group – many have also created Communication Subcommittees or Communication Working Groups (CWG)
- ☐ UNICEF is global coordinator for Avian Influenza communication activities
- ☐ USG identified AED to be technical support for AI communication related to animal health – global contract is AI.COMM

Communication Assessments

☐ Outbreaks in the region in 2006

☐ USAID and host governments asked AED to conduct assessments

☐ Conducted in 2007 in West Africa

- Nigeria
- Cote D'Ivoire
- Ghana
- Niger
- Burkina Faso
- Togo

Assessment Methodology

- ☐ Interviews with key stakeholders involved in communication in the country
- ☐ Used common set of questions as discussion guide
- ☐ Observation of activities (when possible)
- ☐ Audit of materials, strategies, research, and training

What have we learned

1. Advocacy challenges
   - Need for AI preparation and response to be a high priority in policy and development agenda

2. Management challenges
   - Need to strengthen communication management issues

3. Technical challenges
   - Need for careful consideration of specific technical issues in communication plans and activities

Advocacy Challenges

- ☐ Difficulty in sustaining attention given competing priorities of key stakeholders
- ☐ Avian Influenza viewed as animal problem, not human one
- ☐ Lack of sustained advocacy for increased coordination among national, state/provincial, district levels
- ☐ Uneven funding and pace in implementation of plans at different levels (e.g. national, state, district)
- ☐ Involvement and coordination of a wide spectrum of stakeholders
  - ■ AI is a cross-sector issue, affecting many government units and social sectors (e.g. economy, finance, health, education, agriculture)

Management challenges

- ☐ Communication work plans developed, but they have not been implemented at a good pace

- ☐ Uneven and limited communication capacity across government ministries and agencies

- ☐ Lack of coordination within governments and among partners (international and country-level). Government leadership is key.

- ☐ Naïve understanding of "rapid" response.

Technical challenges

☐ Boilerplate approach to communication
- ■ Need to understand and address the specific communication challenges of AI

☐ Need to articulate communication goals more clearly with larger objectives and behavioral messages
- ■ What are communication programs expected to achieve? (e.g.
  - ☐ promote human disease prevention
  - ☐ encourage bio-security/animal health protection
  - ☐ promote surveillance and reporting of human and animal cases
  - ☐ inform and involve communities in compensation programs

Technical challenges (cont.)

- ☐ Need to understand complex uses of chickens and whether communities believe that there are alternatives
  - ■ Livelihood: source of income, mainly for education and health expenses
  - ■ Rituals: religious/social occasions (e.g. weddings, funerals)
  - ■ Medical purposes and beliefs about disease causation
    - ☐ E.g. "chickens as protective wall" between supernatural forces and human health
  - ■ Nutrition

Need to understand complex sharing of physical and social space by humans and chickens

Technical challenges (cont.)

- ☐ Need to understand and address motivations for desirable behaviors – not sufficient just to "tell" people what to do
  - ■ Address factors that resonate with different populations
  - ■ What will motivate communities to change current behaviors?

Positive Findings

- ☐ More funding for AI communication
- ☐ In many countries there is commitment and political will toward curtailing the virus
- ☐ National and community level activities can build on the past emergency response experience to measles, polio, dengue fever outbreaks
- ☐ Private sector is engaged – maybe more so than civil society and public sector

What can partners do?

1. Conduct Sustained Advocacy
- ☐ Raise awareness about gaps among key stakeholders
- ☐ Maintain risk perception and sense of urgency among decision-makers
- ☐ Continue to collaborate with media to produce fact-based and comprehensive coverage, particularly to maintain interest among policymakers
- ☐ Identify mechanisms to ensure sustainability of monetary and human resources
  - ◼ Challenges of short-funding to address long-term factors

What can partners do? (cont.)

2. Promote Effective Communication Planning – if time is not an issue

☐ Produce baseline data on priority populations and set up monitoring plans before launching activities

☐ Assess strategic issues (e.g. risk perception, fears, cultural/social/structural barriers to behavior change) and distill information for better planning

☐ Clearly define priority populations and desirable practices, and roll-out communication activities through various and complementary interventions

What can partners do? (cont.)

3. Promote Enhanced Coordination

- ☐ Advocate and facilitate integration and coordination of activities at international, national and state levels

- ☐ Support and participate in discussions and plans to mainstream AI communication into existing development programs

- ☐ Unique opportunity to strengthen communication capacity, particularly management issues