

Project Objectives

The overall objective of the programme is to contribute to the elimination of the threat posed by HPAI due to cross-border activities in the Gangetic Plain Sub-region of South Asia.

More specifically, the project will strengthen the capacity of the countries sharing an epidemiological environment in the Gangetic Plain Sub-region to deal with the risks and threat of HPAI posed by cross-border activities.

Disease status in the sub-region

In the month of April and May, 2010, a few sporadic HPAI outbreaks were reported by Bangladesh and there were no outbreaks in Bhutan, India and Nepal. Meanwhile Bhutan submitted the final report to the OIE in May 2010, indicating that the country had become free of HPAI infection.

New outbreaks in Bangladesh:

The Bangladesh government confirmed six new outbreak of HPAI in poultry in various parts of the country in April and May 2010. While there were five outbreaks in the month of April, only one outbreak was reported in May in Bogra district. As per website of FAO technical unit, Bangladesh at <http://www.aitubd.org/>, since 2007 a total 357 HPAI outbreaks have been notified by the government till the end of May 2010, which included 30 outbreaks in the year 2010, 32 outbreaks in the year 2009, 226 outbreaks in the year 2008 and 69 outbreaks in the year 2007. Out of these outbreaks 303 were in commercial poultry farms and only 54 were in backyard poultry. In 2010, until

May, out of 30 outbreaks only two outbreaks were in backyard poultry farm, the remaining 28 were in commercial farms.

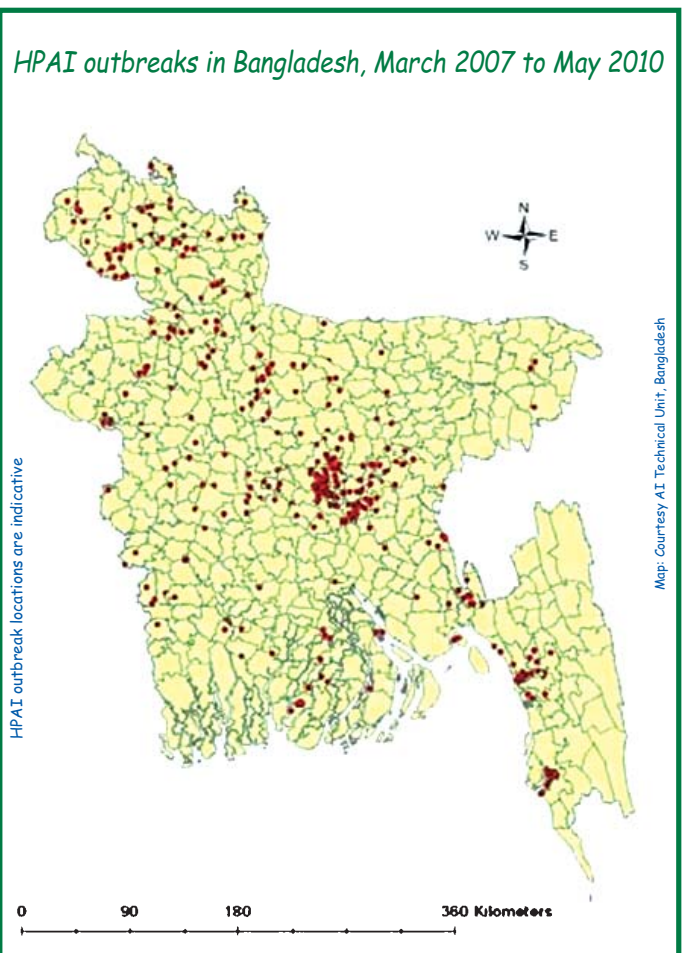
In April, the first HPAI outbreak was reported on 7th April in a backyard at Ganeshyampur Mantala, Mymensingh district, where 4 deaths were reported among 123 birds, the remaining 119 birds were destroyed by 9th April. This was followed by three outbreaks on 11th April in a row at Chhoto fausa, Narayanganj district at three different commercial poultry farms. Then on 16th April, an outbreak was reported at a Poultry Farm at Sultanpur Chauddasato in Kishoreganj district, where 462 deaths were reported among 1540 birds, the remaining 1078 birds were destroyed by 17th April.

In May, only one outbreak was reported on 20th May from Bogra poultry farm at Karbala, Shantahar Road, in Bogra district, where out of 5621 birds 332 deaths were reported and remaining 5289 birds were destroyed.

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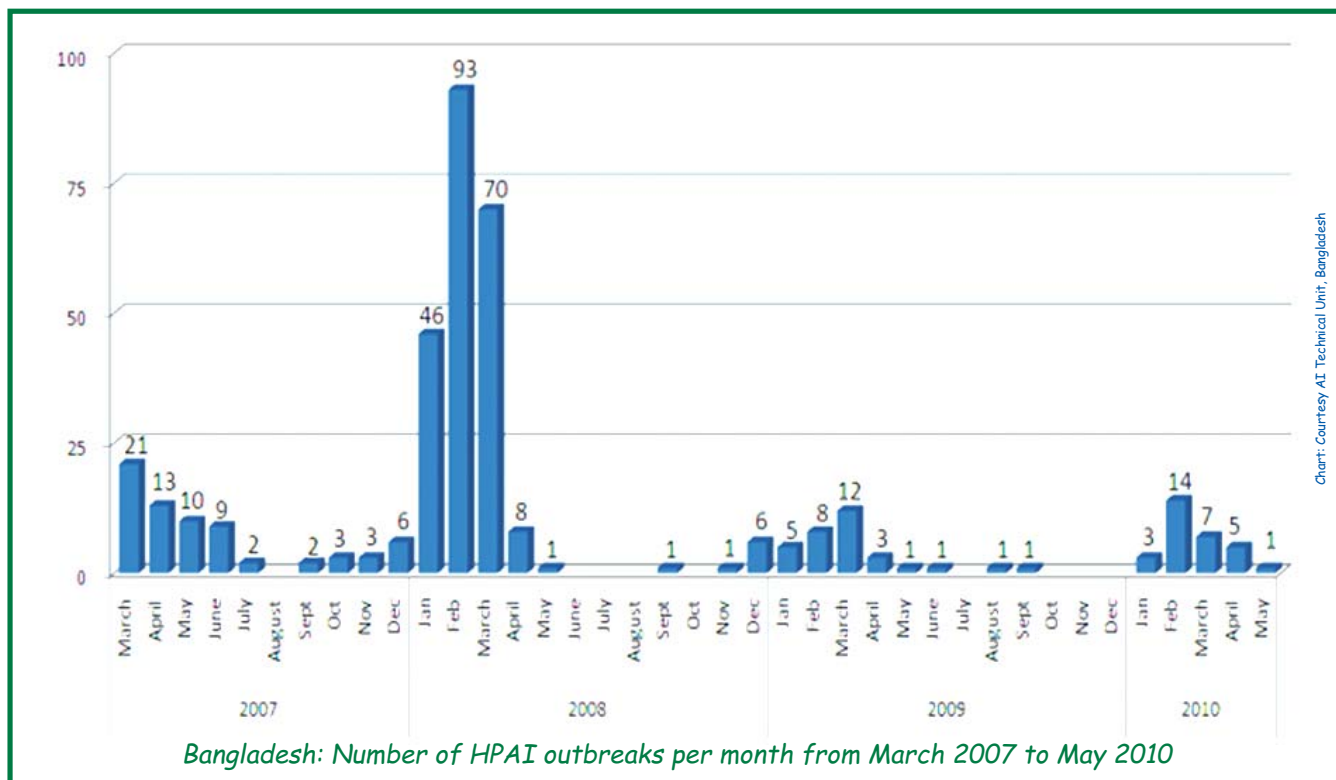


Chart: Courtesy AI Technical Unit, Bangladesh

Situation in Bhutan, India and Nepal:

No outbreak of HPAI was reported by Bhutan, India and Nepal in the month of April and May 2010. Meanwhile, Bhutan government submitted the final report to the OIE on 18th May, indicating that the all previous outbreaks were resolved and the country was HPAI free. The Bhutan virus belonged to 2.2 lineage and appeared to be similar to the viruses detected in India and Bangladesh.

Study tour in West Bengal, by officials of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar & Nepal

Considering the importance of sharing experiences and strengthening of cross border activities among Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Myanmar to control the cross border spread of HPAI, FAO ECTAD Unit (SAARC) organized a study tour of officials of these countries to West Bengal state of India from 26-29 April 2010. The objective of the study tour was to strengthen the emergency response capabilities in the participating countries to tackle outbreaks.

Four participants each from Bangladesh and Myanmar, five from India and six from Nepal participated in the study tour. The study tour was inaugurated by Mrs. Kalyani Sarkar, Secretary, Animal Resources Development Department (ARDD), Government of West Bengal. The participants

made presentations about HPAI outbreaks and response measures undertaken in their respective countries. Field visits were organised to the HPAI affected areas in West Bengal where the participants had an opportunity to discuss the issues with the local administration, government officials, cross section of people, affected farmers, laboratory technicians, representatives of poultry industries association, local public and private representatives. The affected areas visited

Activities undertaken

- Study tour in West Bengal, India by officials of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Nepal;
- Laboratory training on use of the AI Rapid Antigen Detection Kits, India;
- Participation at inception workshop on establishment of an epidemiology unit in India;
- Policy and Technical Committee(s) meeting at New Delhi



Participants at study tour in West Bengal-April 2010

were Haringhata farm of Nadia district and Khargram block of Murshidabad district. The Haringhata farm is spread over 1000 acres out of which about 300 acres is used for poultry hatchery and egg production activities. At Nadia district, the concerned district officers gave presentation about the ARDD and the HPAI outbreak containment activities undertaken during outbreaks in West Bengal in 2008-09. At Murshidabad the participants visited Khargram block where the concerned district officer made a presentation about outbreak of January 2010, the stamping out policy and problems faced during the outbreak containment efforts. The participants also visited the Khargram block and Panchayat Samiti offices. They also met the Additional District Magistrate, Zila Parishad Chairperson, Block Development Officer and other concerned officers and discussed about the HPAI outbreaks and methods of disinfections and sanitation. The participants were also taken to the area where the culled/disposed birds were buried.

④ The participants were also taken round the Institute of Animal Health and Veterinary Biological and the Eastern Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (RDDL), Kolkata to show the activities being undertaken there. The participants also had opportunity to visit the BSL-II and BSL-III laboratories at the RDDL. The RDDL provides support for the surveillance of HPAI to the whole eastern region of India including West Bengal.

④ The overall impression of the participants was that West Bengal Government had done a good work for effectively controlling HPAI due to existing strong chain of command along with administrative and political commitment. They felt that India has improved its veterinary capacity in terms of surveillance, laboratory capacity and human resources. The participants realized that capacity enhancement in the area of surveillance, laboratory, infrastructure, human resources were pre-requisite for ultimate success to control the HPAI in all the countries. Participants also felt that sustainability was an issue that must be addressed effectively through an uniform strategy formulation and for implementation in all the countries.

Laboratory training in India on use of the AI Rapid Antigen Detection Kits



A participant practicing use of the AI Rapid Antigen Detection Kit during the training

④ Under the project, FAO procured 7000 rapid antigen detection kits (25 tests/kit) at the request of Government of India (GOI) for use in the high risk areas of the country. The GOI further distributed these kits to the Regional Disease

Diagnostic Laboratories (RDDLs) and requested FAO for providing hands-on training at these laboratories so that all the state laboratory experts in the country could be trained. The RDDLs have a mandate to provide diagnostic support and trainings to five-six adjoining states and union territories. There are five RDDLs in the country for Northern, Southern, Western, Eastern and North-Eastern regions.

④ Trainings for use of the AI rapid antigen detection kits were held as per following schedule:

- February 8-9, 2010 at the Southern RDDL, Bangalore (Karnataka)
- February 11-12, 2010 at the North-Eastern RDDL, Guwahati (Assam)
- March 22-23, 2010 at the Eastern RDDL, Kolkata (West Bengal)
- May 3-4, 2010 at the Western RDDL, Pune (Maharashtra)
- May 6-7, 2010 at the Northern RDDL, Jalandhar (Punjab)



Participants at the Western RDDL, Pune, Maharashtra

④ Before the actual training at all the labs a series of presentations on the HPAI situation in South Asia and use of the rapid antigen detection kits were made to apprise the participants on the evolving situation of the disease in India and in its neighbourhood. The presentation on use and interpretation of the AI rapid antigen detection kits covered the principle, procedure, advantages, limitations and interpretation of the test. A brief account of other tests usually applied for the confirmation of HPAI was also given. This was followed by a presentation to describe the test protocol as it came along with the kits.



Participants at the Northern RDDL, Jalandhar (Punjab)

④ The presentations were followed by a demonstration on use of these kits, including mandatory precautions, disposal of used material and decontamination of the work surface etc. Each participant was given an opportunity to practice the test with a known inactivated H9N2 virus. The participants were asked to clarify their doubts on the procedure and principle of the test. A total of 80 participants from across the country were trained at all the RDDs. In January, 2010 during HPAI outbreaks in West Bengal these kits were effectively used to achieve early diagnosis, which resulted to launching of early response measures.

Participation at inception workshop on establishment of an epidemiology unit in India

④ A new project "OSRO/IND/802/USA - Immediate Technical Assistance to Strengthen Emergency Preparedness for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) to India" was launched on May 10-11, 2010 at New Delhi by holding an inception workshop with participation of high level officials (secretaries) from India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. The other participants included USAID, FAO India, FAO HQ, FAO RAP, FAO ECTAD Unit (SAARC), Ministry of Agriculture (India) and officials from various states of India. The Government of India reiterated its commitment to the regional approach to tackle the disease in the region. The secretaries from Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal expressed similar views.



Participants at inception workshop (New Delhi) on establishment of an epidemiology unit in India

④ Dr. Mohinder Oberoi, Sub-regional Manager, ECTAD Unit (SAARC), presented the cross border activities undertaken in the cross border project and highlighted several issues related to value chain and its role in the spread of the disease in the sub-region.

Policy and Technical Committee(s) meeting at New Delhi

④ Under the project "OSRO/RAS/701/USA", on periodic basis Technical and Policy Committee(s) meetings were planned for the high level government delegates from Bangladesh, Nepal and India. These meetings offer a platform to delegates

from the member countries to discuss "Policy" and "Technical" issues related to HPAI control and prevention in the Indo-Gangetic plains. As a result, such meetings provide opportunities to better understand the disease situation, legislative framework, compensation and other related issues in the sub-region including participating countries. At New Delhi on 12th May, a third meeting on policy issues and fourth meeting on technical aspects related to HPAI in the sub-region was held with objectives to:-

- Discuss sub-regional framework for information & expertise sharing and collaboration;
- Discuss animal health related acts and laws in the sub-region;
- Present the progress made under the FAO cross-border project in 2010;
- Share information on the current HPAI status in Bangladesh, India and Nepal;
- Discuss the lessons learnt during last three years on prevention and control of HPAI and way forward.

④ Overall 21 participants representing project related three countries, Bhutan (as special invitee) and FAO attended the meeting. The meeting was attended by the Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL), Bangladesh; Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Bhutan; Secretary, Joint Secretary and Chief Veterinary Officer, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries (DADF), Ministry of Agriculture, India; Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC), Director General, Department of Livestock Services (DLS) and Programme Director (Animal Health), DLS, Nepal; Chief Technical Advisers (CTA) FAO from Nepal and Bangladesh, and National Project Consultant (AI), FAO, India. Besides, representatives from ECTAD/RAP and ECTAD Unit (SAARC) also attended the meeting. The USAID was represented by Team Leader, Humanitarian Preparedness and Response, Avian and Pandemic Influenza, India. FAO India provided logistic support to the meeting.

Inaugural Session:

④ Dr. Mohinder Oberoi welcomed the participants and briefed them on the purpose of the meeting. He explained a brief history of the Technical and Policy Level Committee(s) meetings. He expressed his happiness over the highest level of participation for the first time in such meeting as secretaries of all three participating countries and secretary, Royal Government of Bhutan (as special invitee) were present together. He expected that the deliberation during the meeting will help to further push forward a regional approach for prevention and control of HPAI.

④ Dr. Subhash Morzaria, Regional Manager, ECTAD-RAP, FAO, Bangkok, thanked the Government of India for hosting the meeting. He briefly explained about the deliberation during the preceding meeting held on 10th-11th May, at the same venue as an inception workshop on "Immediate technical assistance to strengthen emergency preparedness for HPAI to India". He was glad that an epidemiology unit has been established in India, which he felt, will provide a good opportunity for capacity building of veterinarians in the sub-region on various aspects of animal disease, surveillance and improved understanding of epidemiology of HPAI. He expected that the epidemiology unit will serve as platform for a greater co-operation and synergy among the countries in the Sub-region for prevention and control of HPAI. Dr.



Participants during Policy and Technical Committee(s) meeting at New Delhi on 12th May 2010

Morzaria also briefly touched the issues discussed during the 'International Ministerial Conference on Animal and Pandemic Influenza' (IMCAPI) at Hanoi during the 3rd week of April 2010. He added that building on achievements through existing systems, sustaining momentum and augmenting cooperation among countries/regions will help in cementing the efforts to strengthen institutional capacity for planning and response towards Emerging Infectious Diseases (EIDs) threats through One Health strategy. He further said that there were clear indications that countries were realizing the need for One Health approaches with more interest towards social, economic and livelihood aspects.

including Bhutan discussed a sub-regional framework for information/expertise sharing and collaboration for prevention and control of cross-border HPAI threats. It was an interactive session in which all the countries spoke about the existing framework and how it can be strengthened. Discussions ended with a positive note that the HPAI outbreak problems is sub-regional and joint efforts can resolve the problem with better understanding and more interaction between the countries through the forum like policy level committee meetings.

The session was chaired by Mr. Rudhra Gangadharan, Secretary DADF, Government of India and he responded to the desire of Bhutan for inclusion into the FAO's cross-border project. Mr Gangadharan said "I second the desire of the Bhutan and they need to be included under the cross-border project". In context with some comments made during the preceding workshop (inception) at the same venue, Mr. Sharful Alam, Secretary, MoFL, Government of Bangladesh told the meeting that without any evidence scientists should not blame other countries for the movement of HPAI virus on cross-border corridors. Dr. David Castellan, Regional Veterinary Epidemiologist (FAO-RAP) said that capacity building among countries under the cross-border project was needed under the expertise sharing collaboration. Besides, countries must share experience with health authorities as well as findings of the epidemiological studies. He further said that need assessment must be carried out for the future training programme. Dr. Ian Robertson, Regional Veterinary Policy and Legislation Expert at FAO-RAP said that information and expertise sharing collaboration policies must be institutionalized among the countries.



Technical session during Policy and Technical Committee(s) meeting at New Delhi on 12th May 2010

Technical sessions:

🌐 During the first technical session participating countries

Dr. Prabhakar Pathak, Director General, DLS, Government of Nepal showed a concern about information sharing at grassroots and other levels between the countries. He gave the example of regular meetings between the border

district chiefs of India and Nepal, in which animal health officer from each side was never included. Mr. Arvind Kaushal, Joint Secretary (LH), DADF Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, informed the meeting about an institutional arrangement existing between Bangladesh and India, where Joint Secretaries of both countries are focal points and they communicate with each other in case of any HPAI outbreak and even before notifying the disease outbreak to OIE. He further said that a similar arrangement also existed with Nepal but so far that has not been activated at national level. Dr. Lal Krishna, Animal Husbandry Commissioner, DADF Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, said that comments made during the previous (inception) workshop on cross-border virus movement was on the basis of scientific information and resemblance of gene sequencing of virus between Bangladesh and India.

Dr. Oberoi said that more collaboration was needed between the countries on exchanging information and sharing experiences related with illegal poultry trade, research on virus, laboratory related capacity building and also SMS gateway systems of Bangladesh for effective surveillance and reporting. He also informed the meeting that with the support from FAO, Government of Nepal sent a team to Bangladesh to study the SMS gateway systems and also a FAO expert visited Nepal to support the government to start the SMS gateways project on pilot basis in a district. He offered FAO's support to Government of India, to arrange field visit in Bangladesh to study the SMS gateway project. He further said that there was always a 'fear' among technical people at grassroots level and this was mainly due to lack of sustainability of the institutional approach. He hoped that forthcoming 'Regional Support Unit' (RSU), at SAARC level may be able to resolve many issues related with information sharing. He elaborated a little on setting up of the proposed SAARC-RSU at Kathmandu. He said that under the overall objective of GF-TAD, the first meeting took place in 2003 in Ludhiana (India), in which FMD, HPAI and PPR were identified as priority diseases for regional interventions. In 2005, it was decided that in SAARC region a Regional Laboratory Network and quality assurance system to be set-up for the identified three diseases and it was agreed that HPAI reference laboratory to be set-up in Pakistan, FMD laboratory in India and PPR laboratory in Bangladesh and a Regional Epidemiological Unit to be set-up at Kathmandu for the SAARC countries.

Mr. Gangadharan informed the meeting about setting up of a National Animal Disease Reporting System (NADRS) in India for sharing of animal disease information from grassroots to national level. Mr. Gangadharan, summed-up the discussions and said "atmosphere for collaboration among countries in the sub-region is positive with a desire to adopt institutionalized approach to handle not only HPAI but other issues too". He further said that all the countries must take up the issues of creating awareness among backyard poultry farmers with emphasis on improved bio-security.

- ④ The second technical session on analysis of animal health related acts and laws in the sub-region was chaired by

Mr. Sharful Alam, Secretary, MoFL, Government of Bangladesh. Dr. Ian Robertson, Regional Veterinary Policy and Legislation Expert, FAO RAP, presented the analysis of animal health related acts and laws in the sub-region. The general discussions took place on that issue. Some countries pointed out a few gaps on the analysis. Dr. Anthony Howell Williams CTA (AI), FAO, Nepal raised pertinent question that why a legislation needed for reporting to OIE, he said "it is mandatory for every member country to report to OIE about any outbreak, hence separate legislation for reporting is not needed". This session was followed by a presentation by Dr. Oberoi on progress of FAO cross border project from January to April 2010. The presentation included all activities, series of workshops held for various stakeholders in the identified border corridors in Nepal and India, besides many other meetings, studies, knowledge management.

- ④ The next session was chaired by Mr. Nathu Prasad Chaudhary, Secretary, MoAC, Government of Nepal. All three countries, which are part of cross-border project - Bangladesh, India and Nepal, presented the status of HPAI in their respective countries and approaches adopted by each one of them for controlling the spread of HPAI. As Dr. Sunil C. Gain, DG, DLS, Government of Bangladesh could not come to attend the meeting, hence Dr. Mat Yamage, CTA (AI) FAO Bangladesh, presented the HPAI scenario of the country and the measures taken by the government for prevention and control. Mr. Arvind Kaushal, Joint Secretary, DADF, Government of India, presented the status of HPAI in India and control measures adopted by the government at the national and state level. Dr. Prabhakar Pathak, Director General, DLS, Government of Nepal presented scenario on status and handling of HPAI in Nepal.
- ④ In the afternoon session a group discussion took place on lessons learnt by the countries during the last three years on the control of HPAI and how to build-up further on that experience. Dr. Castellán, Regional Veterinary Epidemiologist from FAO-RAP facilitated the session. The discussion was aimed at policy and technical issues related with (a) Disease diagnosis; (b) Response (including culling); (c) Decontamination; and (d) Restocking.
- ④ Dr. Oberoi on behalf of the ECTAD Unit (SAARC) thanked the participants for attending the meeting.
- ④ Throughout the technical sessions, there was strong participation and healthy discussions among the representatives of four countries in the region and FAO, which demonstrated the strong interest and dynamism from countries for sustaining and enhancing the cooperation among themselves.

Upcoming Project Events

- ④ District level meetings in Bangladesh on advocacy, risk communication, poultry production systems, cross-border value chain mapping, disease investigation in June-September, 2010
- ④ Media sensitization workshops in West Bengal, India in July, 2010
- ④ Study on livestock marketing system in Bangladesh in July, 2010



Editor : Dr. Mohinder Oberoi, Sub-regional Manager,
ECTAD Unit (SAARC)
FAO of the UN, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-5010209; E-mail: mohinder.oberoi@fao.org
Compiled by : Jagmeet Uppal, Sub-regional Advocacy Coordinator