



**Regional Workshop on “Strengthening Capacity to Respond to Disease”
26 –28 May 2014, Kathmandu, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal
FINAL COMMUNIQUE**

The regional workshop on ‘Strengthening capacity to respond to disease emergencies’ was jointly organized by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Crisis Management Centre for Animal Health (CMC-AH) in collaboration with the FAO office in Kathmandu, Nepal and the FAO regional Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD), utilizing funding provided by the European Union. The workshop took place at the Himalaya Hotel in Kathmandu from the 26th to the 28th of May 2014. Twenty veterinary officers, livestock officers, provincial directors and epidemiologists from regional ECTAD offices and veterinary services of the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, the People’s Republic of Bangladesh and Nepal involved in disease control attended the workshop. The FAO team comprised of one technical expert (from FAO-AGAH) and one communications officer from CMC-AH.

The aim of the workshop is to present to participants the FAO’s Good Emergency Management Practice (GEMP) manual, a manual of accumulated knowledge on the efficient management and amelioration of animal disease outbreaks in emergency situations. The GEMP manual provides guidelines to animal health officials on preparing for, and responding to, animal health emergencies, and also defines global best practice for emergency animal disease preparedness and response.

The workshop was officially opened by Dr Mohinder Oberoi, the Sub Regional Manager of the ECTAD Regional Support Unit/Sub Regional ECTAD Unit.

Introducing animal health officers worldwide to the GEMP principles is likely to assist the officers and their respective countries in preparedness and contingency planning. The workshop and the seven modules covered over the two and a half day workshop focused around the following topics:

- A general Introduction of the GEMP Manual and its principles,
- The five phases of emergency disease management;
- Key elements of preparedness planning and the required elements in a preparedness plan;
- The three levels of command and the roles and responsibilities of each level;

- The internationally recognized Incident Command Structure and the concept of a single line of command;
- The nature of a risk analysis and risk assessment approaches;
- Preparedness and emergency contingency plans, and all they ought to contain;
- The primary principles of infectious disease control;
- The role of veterinary services in recovery and rehabilitation; and
- Requirements and challenges for verification of freedom of disease.

The GEMP workshop was designed, planned and delivered as an interactive workshop. Short presentations were made, covering each module of the GEMP Manual. Then, the participants split up into groups and worked on exercises revolving around each modules' principles. Group discussions were held after each exercise.

Throughout the workshop, the following points were discussed:

- The overall cultural and political difficulties facing the South Asian regions when dealing with animal health emergencies;
- The importance of a clear command structure and clarified roles and responsibilities for all officers responding to an emergency;
- The possibility of including the private sector as a source of emergency funding;
- Preventative measures that are taken in the participants' respective countries;
- The role of the media in animal health emergencies, both beneficial and detrimental; and
- The importance of teamwork in responding adequately to emergencies.

Following the presentations, exercises and group discussions, the participants recognized the difficulties they face in responding to emergencies, and the gaps that need to be addressed:

- The legal powers of certain countries are not adequate in controlling illegal trades;
- The cultural mores may prohibit certain effective disease responses, for example, culling;
- The difficulty in convincing field veterinarians to consider epidemiology for adequately detecting the diseases;
- Even if a disease is diagnosed quickly, the veterinary services do not always have the necessary equipment and man power ready to respond;
- The media may scare the public over a disease that may very well be endemic or common in a country, based on one extraordinary case on which they report;
- The unavailability of vaccines, and the quality of those available;
- The inexperience of technicians when dealing with vaccines;
- Contingency plans should always be updated, and even when that process is on the agenda, it takes a very long time to complete, if at all;

- Insurance policies as a means of recovery are a good idea but may only be useful for prized animals;
- Tracking back and forward is valuable but practically challenging;
- Problems are faced with farmers and ministry officers when having to explain why seemingly healthy animals must be culled;
- Jobs may be lost or put in jeopardy if markets are closed or quarantined; and
- Legislative frameworks need to be improved for movement restrictions.

Overall, the participants seemed most interested in topics concerning command structures, legal/illegal trade between neighbouring countries, communication and the role of media in disease emergencies and recovery plans.

Kathmandu, 28 May 2014