

Avian Flu *and the* Workplace Project



Briefing Note No. 15 - February 2008

ILO-IUF Partnership for Avian Influenza Prevention and Preparedness

Avian Flu Prevention: A Common Challenge for ILO and IUF

The “ILO Avian Flu and Workplace” project is the first of its type to respond to pandemic prevention and preparedness in the workplace by ensuring the participation of social partners. The project was approved in July 2007 by the UN Central Fund for Influenza Action, which is a gap-filling fund for critical activities that are not adequately funded. Funding was released in October of last year to carry out the first project in four provinces in Thailand.

The poultry industry was selected as a strategic sector, due to the sheer size of the industry (in terms of workers) and to the potential role as a key transmission point. The project goal is twofold: to promote best workplace practices in poultry production to limit the effects of avian flu, and to encourage behavioural change through awareness raising, capacity building, and training activities on preventative and protective measures in the workplace. The project targets an estimated 150,000 poultry workers in Thailand, both at the farm level through small enterprises and the informal sector as well as through large-scale commercial poultry-processing companies. For this reason, the ILO has decided to partner with the International Union of Food Workers (IUF), given its vast presence and reach. The also project availed itself of the UN System Influenza Coordination (UNSIC) and other UN partner agencies working on Avian Flu issues.

A communication campaign will also be implemented jointly by the ILO and the IUF. Once the methodology has been successfully tested in

Thailand, and subject to additional funding, the project will be replicated in Indonesia, where a national pandemic preparedness plan is currently under preparation. Unlike the project in Thailand, the target group will be the informal sector, as the majority of victims of Avian Flu were engaged in the home-based raising of fowl. The model plan will not only be applied in different countries but also adapted to the local contexts and needs.

Key Characteristics of commercial poultry sector:

- Low levels of trade union organisation;
- Extensive use of migrant workers;
- Significant number of women workers;
- Poor health and safety conditions, in particular injuries from knives and repetitive strain injuries.

These factors, combined with the fact that poultry workers are at the front-line of exposure to H5N1, makes them one of the points where the virus mutates into a form that becomes transmissible amongst humans. Capacitating poultry workers to protect themselves is key to prevent a pandemic.



Poultry farm in Vietnam, where OSH best practices were observed. The farmer moved the chicken cages away from his home after learning about bird flu.

Why Thailand as pilot country?

- Sheer scale and importance of the commercial poultry sector
- IUF estimates 150,000 to 200,000 workers in commercial poultry sector

Project Developments

As time is of essence (a one-year project), the joint implementation of the project is more efficient. While the ILO was establishing project office (recruiting local National Coordinator and Secretariat), IUF researches began mapping out the poultry sector, identifying trade union contacts, gauging current OSH practices, and taking stock of current Avian Flu awareness of its workers.

Simultaneously, the ILO Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Specialist for East Asia was touring neighbouring countries, Vietnam and Cambodia, and observing farmers techniques. Farmers that were aware of Avian Flu kept fowl in separate cages or even isolated them in separate rooms. He collected some practices, which will be incorporated in the existing OSH manuals, such as the *Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development (WIND)*, along with a checklist on bird flu prevention. These manuals, once tested, will be used to train local trainers in Indonesia. The trainers will then train workers, making it sustainable through a multiplier effect.



Poultry must be kept in closed sheds and regularly disinfected. When contact with poultry is necessary, farmers should be protected with safety equipment.

Sample illustration developed for the WIND manual for practical training for farmers.

ILO Activities

- Review and adapt existing OSH training materials
- Collect OSH best practices from neighboring countries
- Test training materials

IUF Activities

- Mapping out poultry and related industries
- Organising awareness raising/capacity building workshop for workers
- Training local trainers
- Advocacy, in order to inform donors and ILO/FAO staff

Tripartite (Employers, workers, and government constituents) consultations will be held at the end of February to define the direction and structure of training activities. ILO will concentrate its activities, tutorials and other project materials on farm-level SMEs, while the IUF will be implementing the component that targets the formal workers of the poultry industry, relying on its extensive experience in implementing training programmes to build trade union capacity to work on OHS at many levels. The success of the project will be assessed by revisiting workshop participants and observing their behavioural changes.

Areas of ILO-IUF Collaboration

- Training local trainers on OSH
- Hold seminar on workplace activities at National Safety Week in Thailand
- Holding national level workers' seminar
- Making policy recommendations at tripartite achievement workshop

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