

The continuing outbreaks of cases of avian influenza have prompted worldwide concerns of possible pandemic human influenza. This is because as the number of cases of infection in humans increases, it becomes easier for the virus to mutate, so that it spreads efficiently amongst people, something which could lead to a human pandemic.

In response, a pilot project entitled "Avian and Pandemic Human Influenza and the Workplace" has been initiated by the ILO's CRISIS Department in Geneva and the Subregional Office for East Asia, based in Bangkok. This project has two main objectives: to promote the preparedness of the business sector for a pandemic, in particular small and medium enterprises, and to prevent the spread of and reduce the risk of avian influenza infection amongst poultry workers and farmers who have low to minimal bio-security.

A key project activity is the development of training materials to promote safe practices at the workplace and encourage businesses to identify preparedness plans. The training manuals are the product of several field visits to observe good avian influenza prevention practices in the poultry industry, and consultations with key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

The research on these good practices began when the ILO's Occupational Safety and Health Specialist for East Asia, Dr Tsuyoshi Kawakami, toured some of Thailand's neighbouring countries, such as Viet Nam and Cambodia, to observe the farmers' techniques. Prevention practices were also examined at the national level. These observations formed the basis of the illustrations and contents of the training manuals.

The two manuals, one responding to pandemic human influenza and the other to avian influenza, are user-friendly and practical, with a checklist of various prevention measures, explanations and descriptions. The application of these newly-developed training materials is also covered by the project, and aims to promote understanding and encourage behavior changes amongst the target population. It draws on the unique participatory training methods developed for the ILO's Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development (WIND) and Work Improvement in Small Enterprises (WISE) programmes.

Pilot and training of trainers (TOT) workshops were successfully organized in August and October respectively. Most of the workshop trainees developed the expertise and confidence to become trainers and more than 10 proposals for further training sessions were submitted to the ILO at the end of the workshop. These subsequent sessions were held in the first half of November.

Each training session averages approximately 40 participants so this translates to the immediate dissemination of the easy-to apply training materials to about 400 people within a month of the TOT workshops. This multiplier effect is an important element in the project's sustainability.

Similar pilot and TOT workshops to launch the avian influenza training materials took place around the same period. Improvements and modifications to the training materials continue to be made. Throughout the year project staff conducted fact-finding trips to businesses in Thailand's Nonthaburi and Supanburi provinces. They also organised workshops during the National Safety Week, and surveys of pre and post workshop evaluations. To assess relevance and practicality many consultations were held with specialists from key organizations such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the UN System Influenza Coordinator and Thailand's Department of Livestock Development.

The application of the project's training materials will not be limited to Thailand. They will serve as a model that can be adapted to different countries' conditions and needs. They have already been shared with a sister project in Indonesia, and eventually they will be modified to suit that country's conditions.

An important element in the implementation of the project is the use of the ILO's unique tripartite mechanisms that promote the involvement and cooperation of government, employers and workers.

The ILO has also partnered with the International Union of Food Workers and shared the training materials with IUF Thailand in an effort to promote best workplace practices in poultry production to limit the effects of avian influenza and to encourage behaviour changes. This is done through awareness raising, capacity building, and training activities that focus on preventative and protective measures.

This project is funded by the UN Central Fund for Influenza Action (CFIA). CFIA was established after a request by donors to the United Nations Development Group, through the UN System Influenza Coordinator, to establish and design a central financing mechanism that enhances inter-agency coordination.