



Impact of Avian Influenza on Smallholder Poultry Production in West Africa – the Need for Collaborative Regional Action

Workshop organised by the 'West Africa Poultry Network', in conjunction with the Network for Smallholder Poultry Development

Dates: 12-14 September 2006

Venue: Tamale, Northern Ghana, at the Radach Memorial Centre

Background

Since 2003, a number of countries have experienced outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). First discovered in Southeast Asia where millions of birds have died or been culled, several African countries now also appear on the list. So far, the disease has spread from birds to humans in relatively few cases, but this has given voice to fears that the virus may mutate and result in a human pandemic. However, the main threat from Avian Influenza seems to be its devastating effects on the village poultry sector and the livelihoods of the poor farmers engaged in small-scale poultry production. Their food security and income generation are at risk, not mainly because of actual outbreaks of Avian Influenza, but rather because the initiatives taken by the authorities to prevent the disease from spreading - e.g. mass cullings without economic compensation to smallholders and bans on livestock trading - have caused alarm and lead to major drops in poultry prices.

By uniting international experts as well as private and public stakeholders from a range of West African countries, the workshop intends to shed light on the Avian Influenza situation in both Franco- and Anglophone West Africa, particularly the impact on public health conditions and on rural smallholders' livelihoods. To most of the poor rural households in the region, poultry, i.e. mainly chickens and guinea fowl, plays an important role in assuring family protein intake and generating supplementary income. While the poultry sector has long fought to control and bring down recurring Newcastle Disease epidemics and their devastating effects on West African smallholders, Avian Influenza brings new challenges and raises questions in relation to a number of issues, including: How to train poultry keepers and sensitise populations on livestock management, hygiene and food handling issues in relation to Avian Influenza? What to do with ongoing poultry development interventions? When and where to vaccinate and/or impose restrictions on the marketing of poultry? How to increase bio security without destroying the poultry sector? How to coordinate actions at a regional level?

The three-day workshop is the sixth of its kind of interdisciplinary and cross-institutional annual gatherings held under the framework of the 'West Africa Poultry Network', all of which have taken a bottom-up approach to themes of relevance for the development of smallholder livestock production and the use of poultry as a tool for reducing poverty. The workshop follows immediately after the first consolidating general assembly of the 'West Africa Poultry Network' and as such it has the intention to kick-start this network as a central player in the organisation of collaborative regional action.

The workshop will consist of three thematic sessions (see below). Through clarifying presentations, field visits, group work and plenum discussions, participants will discuss different aspects of the Avian Influenza situation

in West Africa; including its impact at present and future scenarios, as well as ideas for ways forward and regional collaboration.

Translations will be provided to accommodate both English and French speaking participants.

Workshop sessions

Below is an introduction to the workshop sessions. A detailed programme is under preparation.

Session 1: Avian Influenza in a West African context - epidemiology, prevention and control measures

H5N1 initially broke out in Southeast Asia but has since then also been discovered in the West African countries of Niger and Nigeria. In order to have a common point of departure for discussion, the workshop will be opened by international resource persons presenting different approaches to the present Avian Influenza situation, in West Africa as well as internationally; i.e. what is known about the disease - its diagnostics and epidemiology - and what are the roles of, respectively, the village poultry sector, large-scale production units and wild migratory birds. Moreover, possible prevention and control measures are to be presented and discussed, including the experiences from Southeast Asia and how these may serve useful for laying down national strategy plans for disease prevention and eradication in West Africa. Are vaccinations or mass culling relevant instruments in the West African context, or do sensitisation campaigns present a better way forward? How should responsibilities for these initiatives be divided between veterinary authorities and private agents? Case material from Niger and Nigeria is to be presented.

References:

- H. Chen et al. (2006). Establishment of multiple sublineages of H5N1 influenza virus in Asia: Implications for pandemic control. PNAS, vol. 103, no 8. <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/103/8/2845>
- Webster R.G, Peiris M, Chen H, Guan Y. (2006). H5N1 outbreaks and enzootic influenza. Emerging Infectious Diseases [serial on the Internet]. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol12no01/05-1024.htm>
- GRAIN (2006). Fowl Play. The poultry industry's central role in the bird flu crisis. GRAIN briefing, February 2006. <http://www.grain.org/briefings/?id=194>

Session 2: Socio-economic and public health impact of Avian Influenza in West Africa

In West Africa, the majority of rural households keep poultry. Although the birds are raised mainly for consumption purposes, many poor smallholders – particularly women – also use their poultry production to generate income for investing into other agricultural activities or their children's schooling. Medium-scale production units are also, to a varying extent, found throughout the region. Regardless of the type and scale of poultry production within a given household, the outbreak of Avian Influenza, as well as initiatives to prevent such outbreaks, will have profound consequences for poultry production, commercialisation and consumption within the region. Through presentations and thematic field visits, the workshop will seek to illuminate the socio-economic consequences of outbreaks of Avian Influenza, including the attempts to limit the outbreaks and avoid an epidemic, now as well as in the future. Responses and strategies employed by the smallholders as well as by private veterinarians, local authorities, traders and other affected actors will be taken into consideration.

Another issue of concern is the implication of Avian Influenza for the public health situation within the West African region. Understanding prevailing practices and knowledge, both with respect to the management of poultry production at different levels and the handling of food and human hygiene, is key to preventing Avian Influenza from spreading from flock to flock and from animals to humans. What measures for tackling a human pandemic are envisaged within the West African region? What could be the role of public health systems and how will people react? Both the present situation and future scenarios are to be considered.

References:

-E. Guerne Bleich et. al. (2005). Socio-economic Impact of Avian Influenza in South East Asia. FAO, Animal Production and Health Division. Presentation held at the workshop 'Livestock as a Tool in Economic Development', Copenhagen, Denmark, 12 May 2005.

http://www.poultry.kvl.dk/upload/poultry/workshops/w23/emmanuelle_bleich.pdf

-WHO Regional Office for Africa (2005). Influenza pandemic risk assessment and preparedness in Africa.

http://www.afro.who.int/csr/epr/avian_flu/afr_avian_flu_31_10_05.pdf

Session 3: Collaborative regional action against HPAI – the role of the 'West Africa Poultry Network'

The problem of Avian Influenza is not only national but one of regional and international concern. Movements of people, livestock and food products (eggs, birds) within countries and across borders are potential channels for spreading the disease. However, the question is how to best coordinate preventive initiatives and assure collaboration at a regional level? In this respect, the formalisation of the 'West Africa Poultry Network' may open up to new possibilities for coordinating regional action. But which form should such action take and need it necessarily concern only Avian Influenza? What have been the lessons learned from other initiatives within the West African region? Examples of regionally coordinated action are to be presented and discussed. Working groups and subsequent plenum discussions will allow for the workshop to come up with suggestions for ways forward for the 'West Africa Poultry Network'.

References

- Network for Smallholder Poultry Development (2001-2005). Proceedings from the 1st to the 5th annual workshop on West African Smallholder Poultry Projects.

http://poultry.kvl.dk/Information_resources/Workshop_proceedings.aspx

Registration

Deadline for registration is 1 August 2006 on avianflu@kvl.dk

Registration fee: 30 EURO, payable upon registration in Tamale (alternatively, contact the organisers)

Please note that the organisers are not in a position to support you financially.

Papers from presenters

Full papers in English or French of maximum 10 pages (Times New Roman, 12 pts), including tables, illustrations and references, to be forwarded to avianflu@kvl.dk no later than 15 August 2006. Preferably, papers written in English should include abstracts in French and vice versa.