

Avian & Human Influenza and Humanitarian Action

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Issue paper 3. Community-level Action

Many NGOs and others have considerable experience in building the resilience of communities to deal with AHI. This discussion paper outlines issues and insights pertinent to advance action that can be taken to equip communities to deal with AHI both in the current pre-pandemic period and during a pandemic when it is possible that external help will be significantly limited. It includes insights on the different ways in which communities cope with threats and external shocks, insights gained from the HIV/AIDS experience, and preparedness issues that are additional to a routine multi-hazard risk agenda, that needs to be addressed within the context of AHI planning.

The pandemic threat is a threat which could have unparalleled consequences for our planet. It could not only cost the lives of many millions of people, but seriously destabilise economies, communities and political systems, including across borders in all parts of the world. Such a pandemic would have national and local impact, with consequent damage to the fabric of the international system within which we live today.

Responding to the challenge posed by this pandemic threat demands attention at all levels. From a Federation perspective we are supporting National Societies by setting up special web-based tools (see www.ifrc.org/what/health/relief/avian-flu.asp for information on avian flu and public health), and encouraging these Societies to provide their own tools in languages and formats which will work well at their own local levels. Clearly the real work must be done at the community and village level where the risk of contact with infected poultry or with contaminated clothing or other equipment is highest for farmers, other people and their families.

The Federation is currently engaged in a mapping exercise of Red Cross Red Crescent engagement status and activities which will enable us to identify clearly areas of need and solutions for support. Our global response plan will be based on several different scenarios for a pandemic, but it includes active collaboration with other agencies and with government, as well as such issues as the pre-positioning of stocks once vaccine is available and the needs can be identified with clarity.

All experience with other public health emergencies shows that effective governmental action requires an effective partnership with organisations with community outreach and the capacity to reach all people vulnerable to the risk without discrimination and in the shortest possible time. Warnings have to come from, be part of and involve the communities affected themselves.

We have drafted facts and recommendations to National Societies on what should be done, and are creating a generic Red Cross Red Crescent epidemic control guidance document for use by all National Societies in partnership with others. In addition we are refining a specific communications strategy concentrating on Outbreak Communication and Health Promotion. That aims at defining needs carefully and accurately and enabling the dissemination of what needs to be said to the right

people. Messages and media presentations that contribute to panic situations in some countries and localities must be avoided, yet realistic and practical information needs to be provided to persons at risk.

Many challenges remain:

- Dissemination of key messages on sanitation and hygiene to the whole affected population at the local level is a key preventive measure.
- The provision of psychological support to victims, survivors and their families.
- Providing support for the tracing of family members and survivors.
- Providing support for orphans and vulnerable children.
- Providing support to multi-hazard situations, where the pandemic may interact with and exacerbate other disasters situations and contribute to poverty with all its consequences - drought, HIV/AIDS, floods, etc.
- Providing support, where possible, in cases of socio-economic breakdown.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
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