

Toward a Coordinated IASC Approach to Avian & Human Influenza

Geneva, 22-24 February 2006

Purpose of the meeting

Background

The IASC Working Group of 21-22 November 2005 agreed on “the need for a coordinated IASC approach to prepare for the pandemic, in support of the Office of the UN System Coordinator of Avian and Human Influenza”. It also agreed on a two-step process, including a small technical consultation on scenario development and a subsequent, broader meeting on humanitarian preparedness for avian & human influenza. The outcome of these consultations will form the basis of (a) a preparedness package for IASC Country Teams,¹ and (b) decision-making by the IASC Working Group in March 2006 on preparedness measures to be taken at the regional and global levels.

A technical consultation was held on 12 and 13 January 2006 in Boston. Its purpose was to (a) benefit from the experience of the private sector and influenza experts in developing scenarios for a pandemic and planning for business continuity; and (b) define common scenarios and planning assumptions of relevance to humanitarian actors.²

Rationale

There is great variation among humanitarian agencies in the level of awareness of, and preparedness for, avian & human influenza. Some agencies have developed or are in the process of developing contingency plans and risk communication programmes. However many have only begun to reflect on the implications of avian & human influenza for humanitarian action and their individual programmes. Some agencies have focused almost exclusively on the implications of avian & human influenza for the health of their staff and beneficiaries, neglecting its broader implications for economic, social, and governance systems, which could be as devastating.

Preparedness is key to mitigating the impact of pandemic.³ Preparedness efforts should be informed by the principles of (a) national ownership and (b) sustainability. Governments have the primary responsibility in preparing for avian & human influenza: humanitarian agencies should support government efforts rather than attempt to replace them, and ensure that their own efforts fit within the national framework. Sustainability is a crucial concern, given that the timing of a pandemic

¹ This package will take into account existing tools and materials including, in particular, those of individual agencies and UNSIC.

² The agenda, background documents and presentations made at the meeting are available at http://nutrition.tufts.edu/research/famine/publications/avian_flu.html

³ There is an obvious need to address humanitarian issues relevant to the current pre-pandemic period, as well as issues that will arise during an actual pandemic. It is also important to plan for the humanitarian realities of a post-pandemic world but this is not the focus of this meeting.

cannot be predicted. One way to ensure that preparedness efforts are sustainable is to develop them within the context of a multi-hazard preparedness agenda.

Objectives

The overall objective of the meeting is to contribute to the development of a coordinated IASC approach to prepare for, and respond to, avian & human influenza.

The specific objectives of the meeting are to:

- (a) review the level of preparedness of IASC members for avian & human influenza, review constraints and share best practices
- (b) review a draft guidance note for IASC Country Teams on country-level contingency planning⁴ and discuss what other tools are needed and/or available to help IASC Country Teams prepare for avian & human influenza
- (c) identify, and make recommendations on, strategic issues to be addressed at the March IASC Working Group meeting
- (d) identify outstanding issues relating to humanitarian preparedness for avian & human influenza and review the modalities for addressing them.

Expected outcomes

It is expected that the meeting will result in:

- sharing of experience and best practices on humanitarian preparedness for avian & human influenza
- comments to the document “Humanitarian Preparedness for Avian & Human Influenza: Guidance for Humanitarian Country-Level Contingency Planning”, so that it can be finalised and presented to the March IASC Working Group meeting
- identification of other tools that are needed and/or available to help IASC Country Teams prepare for, and respond to, avian & human influenza
- agreement on the list of strategic issues and proposed policy positions to be addressed at the March IASC Working Group meeting
- agreement on the list of outstanding issues relating to humanitarian preparedness for avian & human influenza and on modalities for addressing them.

⁴ Humanitarian Preparedness for Avian & Human Influenza: Guidance for Humanitarian Country-Level Contingency Planning.