

Avian and Human Influenza: Role of Humanitarian Agencies

1. The purpose of this paper is to map out the role that the humanitarian community should play in dealing with avian & human influenza.
2. Governments have the primary responsibility in tackling 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.
3. In light of the scale and cross-cutting nature of the threat, humanitarian agencies should strive to tackle avian & human influenza
 - jointly (in the IASC framework)
 - at all levels (national, regional, global, and at the agency level)
 - in close coordination with all relevant actors (governments, the private sector, the media, civil society, etc.)
4. The humanitarian community can act at four levels: national, regional, global, and agency level.
 - ✓ At the **national level**, existing humanitarian coordination mechanisms (such as an IASC Country Team) are the natural mechanisms to mobilise inter-agency humanitarian action with respect to avian & human influenza, taking into account plans and actions initiated by the Government and all other relevant initiatives.
 - ✓ At the **regional level**, so far formal coordination mechanisms for avian & human influenza have been established by the UN in Bangkok for Asia,¹ and in Nairobi for Central and East Africa.² OCHA and UNDP plan to establish four other regional hubs.
 - ✓ At the **global level**, a dedicated IASC mechanism for avian & human influenza does not exist. This issue needs to be addressed by the IASC Working Group.
 - ✓ While agency activities are expected to feed into the inter-agency framework at all levels, a number of additional measures will need to be taken specifically at the **agency level**.
5. When considering what measures are needed to deal with avian and human influenza, the humanitarian community should take into account:
 - the **fact** that we are currently facing an avian influenza epizootic (UNSCIC's Model One: Phase 3 with continuing outbreaks of avian influenza);

¹ A UNDP/UNOCHA Avian Influenza Regional Office has been established.

² A Task Force led by WHO and FAO and coordinated by OCHA has been set up, with participation of UN agencies, international NGOs, IFRC, IOM, ECHO.

- the **possibility** that the situation might evolve into a localised human influenza epidemic (UNSCIC's Model Two: Slow-onset Phase 4-5 with moderate and localised impact);³
- the **possibility** that the situation might evolve into a human influenza pandemic (UNSCIC's Model Three: Rapid-onset escalation to Phase 6 with widespread impact).⁴

What should humanitarian agencies do now?

6. At the national level, the following measures should be envisaged:

To address the avian influenza epizootic:

- a) **help the government/local authorities deal with animal health issues**, as appropriate
- b) **help the government/local authorities deal with human health issues**, as appropriate
- c) **raise public awareness** of avian influenza and of measures to mitigate its impact
- d) **monitor outbreaks** in areas where populations of humanitarian concern live
- e) **advocate** for appropriate policies, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups

To prepare for a localised human influenza epidemic and a human influenza pandemic:

- a) **plan** for an epidemic/pandemic by developing a contingency plan in close coordination with the government and other actors, as appropriate
- b) **prepare** for an epidemic/pandemic by:
 - monitoring early warning indicators and WHO triggers
 - developing stand-by arrangements
 - making an inventory of available resources
 - forging partnerships with non-traditional actors⁵
 - testing and updating the contingency plan
- c) **raise public awareness** of the threat and of measures to mitigate its impact
- d) **advocate** for appropriate policies, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups
- e) **build resilience** to an epidemic/pandemic at all levels within the country as part of a multi-hazard risk management framework

7. At the regional level, the following measures should be envisaged *to address the avian influenza epizootic, prepare for a localized human influenza epidemic, and prepare for a human influenza pandemic:*

³ According to UNSIC, "Depending on how it evolves the influenza disease itself may be relatively benign (similar to a "normal" flu) or it may be relatively deadly and result in significant social and economic impact." See UNSIC, United Nations System Pandemic Planning and Preparedness Guidelines, draft, 10 February 2006. We are considering here only the latter case.

⁴ According to UNSIC, "Depending on how it evolves the influenza disease itself may be relatively benign (similar to a "normal" flu) or it may be relatively deadly and result in significant social and economic impact." See UNSIC, United Nations System Pandemic Planning and Preparedness Guidelines, draft, 10 February 2006. We are considering here only the latter case.

⁵ These include the military, security forces, the private sector, the media, etc.

- a) **support** and backstop the country-level efforts of IASC Country Teams
- b) **coordinate** the regional-level efforts of IASC members, which should include:
 - [regional-level measures for responding to the avian epizootic?]
 - developing a regional contingency plan
 - monitoring early warning indicators
 - developing regional stand-by arrangements
 - making an inventory of resources available at the regional level
 - forging partnerships with new actors⁶ at the regional level
 - raising public awareness at the regional level
- c) **liaise** with the regional coordination mechanisms established in other regions to maximise synergies.

8. At the global level, the following measures should be envisaged *to address the avian influenza epizootic, prepare for a localized human influenza epidemic, and prepare for a human influenza pandemic*:

- a) **define an overall humanitarian strategy and an action plan** to address the humanitarian implications of avian & human influenza
- b) **provide guidance** to IASC Country Teams and Regional Coordinators on:
 - their role and responsibilities vis-à-vis avian & human influenza⁷
 - how to carry out these responsibilities
- c) **respond** to the avian influenza epizootic by:
 - ?
 - ?
- d) **prepare** for a localised human influenza epidemic and a human influenza pandemic by:
 - monitoring early warning indicators
 - agreeing on how to forge partnerships with new actors⁸ at the global level
 - agreeing on how to raise public awareness at the global level
- e) **advocate** for transparent, impartial and equitable distribution of resources for epidemic and pandemic preparedness at the global level.

9. In addition to the measures listed above, the following measures should be envisaged at the *agency level*:

- a) **plan** for a localised human influenza epidemic and a human influenza pandemic by developing a business/operational continuity plan⁹
- b) **prepare** for an epidemic/pandemic by:
 - training and cross-training staff
 - developing stand-by arrangements
 - making an inventory of resources available in house
 - testing and updating the plan.

OCHA/PDS, 16 February 2006.

⁶ These include the media, the private sector, etc.

⁷ This includes defining minimum preparedness standards to be met by IASC Country Teams.

⁸ These include the media, the private sector, etc.

⁹ This is a plan whose objective is to ensure that the essential functions of an organization can continue during and after a disaster. Typically it covers all the key personnel, resources, services and actions required to ensure continuity of organizational services in the event of a disaster.