

BMZ supports developing countries in the fight against bird flu

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is supporting efforts to limit the spread of bird flu. It is promoting cooperation between agricultural and veterinary experts and specialists in human medicine in drawing up and implementing emergency plans in developing countries. Since 2003 the highly infectious bird flu virus H5N1 has spread rapidly from Asia as far as Europe and Africa. There are warnings of a possible pandemic, because already 225 cases are known of people catching the disease; 56.9 percent of these victims have died. Further spread of the virus among wild birds, poultry and humans in particular regions increases the ever-present risk that the virus will mutate. Mutations could arise that cause droplet infection to spread from person to person, leading to an explosive spread of this highly virulent infectious disease. This risk must be combated by all available means.

If a pandemic should nevertheless occur, affected and threatened countries must be in a position to put measures in place immediately to control the spread of the disease. They must also have essential resources such as vaccines, drugs and protective clothing ready for use. In developing countries, however, serious institutional and material bottlenecks often hinder the implementation of necessary preventive and emergency measures.

Only limited amounts of the 1.9 billion US dollars in funds provided by international donors since the Beijing conference (January 2006) have yet been made available to the affected countries. These countries are often unfamiliar with the distribution mechanisms and planning, implementation and monitoring systems required by multi-sectoral disease control strategies. Where such mechanisms and systems are in place, they may not meet the relevant quality requirements. As a result, veterinary authorities in the affected countries are unable to set up the procedures necessary to ensure prompt identification of an outbreak of bird flu and the implementation of appropriate control measures.

Four million euros for preventive measures

Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has made 4 million euros available for a period of two years. The funds are to be used to promote the development of sustainable national and regional capabilities for planning and implementation of the measures required to prevent a pandemic and to tackle local outbreaks of bird flu in poultry in developing countries. This support is to be channelled through the GTZ sector project «Tackling poverty in rural areas».

The BMZ funds will be used to set up networks of experts and specialist institutions to provide the affected countries with fast, efficient and needs-oriented advice. National and international expertise will thus be mobilised; this will help to develop the necessary structures in partner countries and prepare for intervention and preventive measures.

In particular, the project aims to promote the following activities:

- Planning and setting up of systems to provide early warning of local bird flu outbreaks and/or cases of the disease in humans;
- Development of local health services and provision of drugs, vaccines etc. for humans;
- Advising on and drawing up plans for community-oriented prevention and control measures, such as vaccination of animals and humans;
- Placement of specialists and specific measures, and prompt procurement of equipment and materials needed in an emergency;
- Support to partner countries and their relevant ministries in the development of national models to compensate affected poultry farmers;
- Adaptation and cataloguing of multi-sectoral information, education and communication strategies (IEC) and behavioural change communication (BCC) methods and materials;
- Development of a knowledge management system.

As well as facilitating improved access to bi- and multilateral funding sources and resources, the advisory measures also help improve country-specific multi-sectoral «influenza preparedness and response plans» and strengthen the necessary institutions.

The BMZ contribution will thus protect regional economic cycles, trade and tourism, and prevent the impoverishment of poultry farmers. It also has significant consequences for maintaining the biodiversity of domestic poultry and wild bird populations and for safeguarding poultry stocks, particularly those belonging to small-scale farmers. The active involvement in emergency and rapid-response measures in the event of an outbreak of bird flu is also intended to reduce the severity of any crisis situation that arises.

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Photo: Smallholder Poultry Network