

Germany's commitment to the fight against bird flu: Supporting smallholders, maintaining biodiversity

In most developing countries the greater part of poultry production is in the hands of smallholders. Poultry-keeping is an important income and nutrition factor in these systems. Its particular significance lies in the fact that women play a key role in keeping the small livestock and in using the resulting income. In view of the large number of local poultry breeds, these stocks also represent a rich reservoir of animal genetic resources and thus make an important contribution to biodiversity. So far, strategies for tackling bird flu have focused primarily on the efficient implementation of disease control measures and have taken little account of other factors. The situation is exacerbated by unsupportive political influence at national level and the powerful economic interests of large-scale producers and the export industry. Smallholders and nature often have no-one to lobby on their behalf. Rural families suffer not only because of the losses caused by the disease; they are also hit particularly hard by radical control measures such as culling the stocks of entire areas quite often without adequate compensation. The previous level of breed diversity is usually lost when stocks are subsequently re-established. This loss of biodiversity reduces important animal genetic resources and destabilizes formerly stable production systems.

In order to support the United Nations to tackle these problems and to spearhead the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals the German government engages in several activities:

The German Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection

(BMELV) is financing food security projects through a bilateral trust fund operated jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). One of the tasks of this fund is to analyse the effects of bird flu on smallholders and their households and on the diversity of the poultry breeds kept by these farmers. The aim is to minimize the negative impacts and to assist member states in the prevention and control of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and other transboundary animal diseases.

In order to foster cooperation between agriculture, veterinary and medical experts to develop and implement preparedness and response plans in developing countries, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) established a task force. It was implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). Preventive measures to maintain smallholder animal production and to preserve the diversity of poultry species are one focus. This is essential to safeguard important local meat and protein supply from poultry in the countries concerned.

The task force and FAO combine forces and aim to identify the importance and future contribution of local poultry genetic resources and of small-scale poultry production to food security in order to guide efforts for restructuring the poultry sector as response to Avian Influenza. GTZ supports investigations in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam. Coherent strategies are needed which will facilitate the control of bird flu but nevertheless take account of the conditions in which smallholders live and maintain bio-



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diversity. Therefore Germany supports FAO's Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD). ECTAD combines emergency animal health measures with preventive strategies, draws up emergency plans and supports national animal health services. ECTAD has taken on the long-term task of addressing forward-looking issues, such as the future structure and management of the poultry sector as a whole. In addition to the communication and consolidation of results at regional and global level, one of its main roles is the coordination and management of pilot projects in selected countries for the development of appropriate strategies. In the end, HPAI prevention and control policies that are sensitive to smallholders and to biodiversity should be in place at national level, and these strategies should be having an impact both regionally and globally.

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Poultry play an essential role in the menu of poor farmers. Families often live in close neighbourhood to the animals.