

Session 3.3: Coordination, Monitoring and Governance – Australian comments

AI as a development issue

The threats posed by avian and pandemic influenza are such that much of the discussion on the response is taking place among experts in animal and human health. Of course this is entirely appropriate – but it's also worth bearing in mind that this is also a development issue, with actual and potential impacts on poverty, living standards and income distribution.

- The Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s stalled poverty reduction efforts by several years in the worst affected countries. An influenza pandemic would have even more devastating development impacts.

While avian influenza has the global limelight at present, most developing countries face a range of other on-going animal and human health problems.

- It may be inevitable that some resources get diverted into short-term emergency responses
- But as others here have pointed out, we mustn't lose sight of the longer term development issues. Measures taken to prepare for AI and pandemic influenza should also be strengthening the underlying national systems for animal and human health, quarantine, disaster preparedness, etc.
- If we can achieve this, then AI could be seen as providing an important 'opportunity' to boost global health expenditure.

Aid effectiveness & monitoring

If we approach avian/pandemic influenza as a development issue, then it makes sense to apply the standard principles of aid effectiveness to any programs targeting this issue.

Others have mentioned the Paris Declaration of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD. There is broad agreement and recognition on principles of aid effectiveness and donor harmonization – including ensuring country ownership; aligning aid with partner countries' priorities, systems and procedures; eliminating duplication of efforts and rationalising donor activities; defining measures and standards of performance and accountability of partner country systems.

To monitor the effectiveness of any development intervention, we need first to be clear on what it is trying to achieve, and how we will recognize 'success'. Good quality aid activities have appropriate objectives and design, are professionally managed, achieve their objectives and have sustainable outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks need to be developed during the initial program design process and provide clear mechanisms for assessing progress against objectives at various levels.

While avian influenza is clearly something that needs urgent response, we do need to avoid compromising the quality - and therefore the effectiveness - of our interventions.

As mentioned by my colleague from the UK, accountability is a key requirement. As a bilateral aid agency, AusAID is accountable to the Australian public through Parliament, and we must be able to justify our expenditure and point to concrete achievements and outcomes.

Coordination

Much has already been said on the coordination issue and I don't have much to add.

Everyone agrees on the need to coordinate donor assistance. And there are lots of organizations offering to take on coordination roles. So one of the critical issues now is how best to coordinate the coordinators.

As others have noted, none of this is easy.

The country-level financing and support framework presented this morning and David Nabarro's presentation this afternoon help to sift through the complexities. We also need to recognize that the key technical coordination agencies operating in-country are themselves being stretched and are being required to take on additional unfamiliar roles.

Existing work & models

We agree with this morning's presenters that needs have to be met both at country level and also in relation to broader global and regional approaches - and that any attempt to straightjacket the donor community into a single financing mechanism would be futile. This certainly fits with Australia's approach to date, and how we would envisage organizing any future assistance in this area.

Australia has been providing assistance since 2003 for several activities targeting emerging infectious diseases such as SARS and AI. So far we have spent, or committed, around A\$41 million. Much of this has been channeled through country offices of the WHO or through country-specific FAO programs. We are also supporting the regional role of the ASEAN Secretariat, and have recently committed funding for a joint WHO-FAO-UNDP program in Vietnam. We mentioned yesterday some of the approaches being considered through APEC. In addition, our Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and the Australian Department of Health and Ageing are working in several countries in Asia, providing very practical, on-the-ground technical assistance and advice.

While it's important to agree on overall coordination and governance frameworks, it's important to recognize work such as this that is already underway and achieving results.

There are also other existing models that could be built on.

For example, Australia's Department of Agriculture is closely involved in supporting the OIE in implementing the South East Asia Foot and Mouth Disease program - SEAFMD.

This program has been very effective in providing training in FMD detection and response in rural areas. Many of the techniques and protocols put in place in relation to FMD would also be relevant to AI. There have been suggestions that the existing SEAFMD program could be broadened or expanded to address AI. We will be discussing options in this regard with our OIE colleagues in coming weeks.

We mentioned another example yesterday, of regional cooperation in the Pacific: the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network (supported by WHO and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community). This was established in 1996 to improve communicable disease surveillance and response, includes early warning systems, regional coordination of laboratory facilities and regional response planning.

Concluding comments

Before I finish, just a quick word on one practical coordination tool. I understand that WHO here in Geneva intends to put together a comprehensive donor coordination matrix covering current and planned activities and identifying gaps. This is a challenging undertaking but we would be happy to collaborate and share information. A list of current and planned Australian aid activities is already on the AusAID website.

Some similar work is also going on at the country level. UNDP in Vietnam has apparently undertaken to put together a matrix capturing all AI & human pandemic support provided or pledged so far. This is a welcome step in a hopefully on-going process of improved donor coordination.

Finally, I'd just like to reiterate that Australia supports the lead role of the relevant technical organizations and multilateral development banks. We also welcome the appointment of David Nabarro to the UN System Coordinator role. He has a challenging task ahead of him – as do we all.

Thank you.