CMC-AH Crisis Management Centre Animal Health

Sida and the CMC-AH, 2008-2010

Supporting global response to animal health emergencies

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AN OVERARCHING THREAT

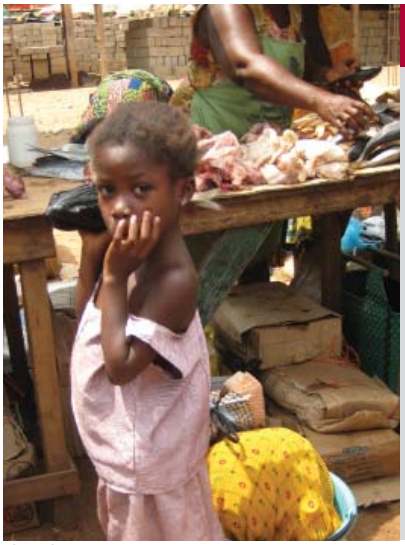
Transboundary animal diseases (TADs) disregard borders, threaten large numbers and varieties of animals and can often endanger human lives. While each individual disease is unique and affects different victims, TADs represent a global problem that invades countries, spreads through populations and kills animals and sometimes people with speed and efficiency.

Animal diseases also inflict long-lasting devastation on livestock-related livelihoods. TADs endanger the animals upon which vulnerable people depend and can destroy critical sources of food and income. Animal diseases hit developing nations hardest, since poor households use livestock for food, draught power and animal products to help cope with vulnerability, especially in the face of drought, conflict, natural disaster and climate change.

RAPID SUPPORT FOR GLOBAL TAD RESPONSE

FAO and OIE created the Crisis Management Centre – Animal Health (CMC-AH) in late 2006 to help countries respond to TADs. Established in direct response to avian influenza, the CMC-AH assists with emergencies involving any critical animal disease threats.

Since inception the CMC-AH has supported over 30 countries with more than 40 missions deployed both for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and other diseases. A lack of funds not tied to HPAI during the first year of operations required FAO to mobilize separate resources for each non-HPAI response. This represented a challenge to providing countries with the rapid support they needed, especially in the event of multiple emergencies involving TADs other than avian influenza.



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SIDA: A STRATEGIC DONOR

Recognizing the requirement for swift action in the face of all critical disease outbreaks, the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) provided USD 450 000 in support of CMC-AH deployments for non-AI crises. As the sole donor supporting missions for TADs other than avian influenza, Sida enabled the CMC-AH to more efficiently respond to animal disease emergencies threatening lives and livelihoods.

Sida funding directly supported 13 CMC-AH missions to assist governments responding to animal diseases other than HPAI. These events included high-profile TADs (like pandemic H1N1) as well as lower-visibility diseases that, despite lacking international interest, can cause irrevocable devastation for vulnerable families and communities.

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EMERGING DISEASES WITH GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES

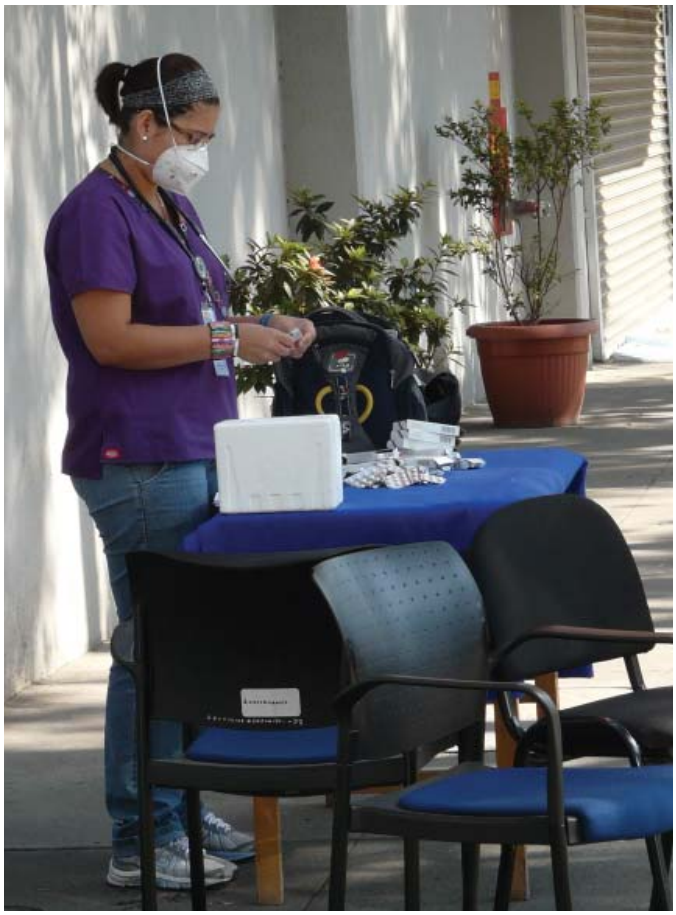
Seven years after its emergence, avian influenza remains a potential starting point for a global flu pandemic. However, the April 2009 outbreak of pandemic H1N1 in Mexico reminded the world that HPAI was not the only pandemic threat.

In response, the CMC-AH deployed a team of eight experts from four organizations to assess the animal situation within days of the first confirmation of human infection by the World Health Organization (WHO). The CMC-AH worked with the government, international and regional organizations to build national prevention and diagnostic capacities, increase global disease knowledge and mobilize follow-up funding for improved surveillance in the region.

H1N1 spread across the global human population in just weeks. By the end of the emergency, the virus had killed over 17 000 people.

Months before H1N1 arrived on the scene, the CMC-AH responded to another potentially global threat. The Philippines had found Ebola Reston virus in pigs. ERV was previously known to affect (and kill) monkeys and cause antibody production (but no sickness) in humans. This first ever detection of ERV in a production animal created serious concern. The nature of ERV in swine was unknown, and the virus could have entered the food chain with potentially disastrous effects.

The CMC-AH coordinated a multidisciplinary, FAO-OIE-WHO team that provided technical assistance on animal health, the animal-human health interface, communication, sampling and control. The mission laid the groundwork for new studies and a follow-up CMC-AH mission to better understand ERV and its ramifications for global health.



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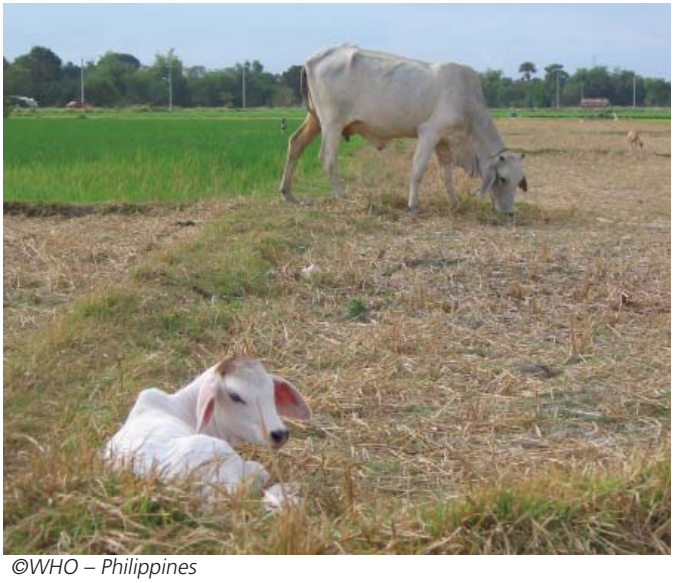
FORGOTTEN DISEASES AFFECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

In addition to supporting global responses, Sida funding also proved essential at the local level. Weakened by years of conflict, Cote d'Ivoire's veterinary services reported intensifying cattle deaths during the 2008 rainy season. The CMC-AH helped investigate the cause, which was likely a combination of TADs circulating in the area. To prevent the spread of these dangerous but largely forgotten diseases like contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, the team promoted surveillance, lab networks and public communication to protect vulnerable groups and limit livestock losses.

Cattle are fundamental to Ivorian nomadic herders and are key draught animals for agro-pastoralists. Thanks to Sida, the CMC-AH was able to react quickly when TADs threatened their livelihoods.



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West Africa has long been a hotbed for TADs, including African swine fever (ASF), a non-zoonotic disease causing high mortality in pigs. Pigs are a main source of savings for extremely poor, backyard herders, the majority of whom are women. ASF strikes these poorest of smallholders where they are most vulnerable.

FAO also used Sida support to provide regional assistance. When Togo suspected new outbreaks of ASF in previously unaffected areas and trade routes, the government requested assistance from the CMC-AH to mitigate the threat in Togo and West Africa. The resulting mission found Togolese backyard farmers were most affected and had little or no knowledge of the disease or methods for its control.

ASF has no vaccine or cure, so the CMC-AH focused on communicating the risks of the disease as well as methods for its prevention. To deliver these messages to smallholder farmers, transporters, traders and sellers, the team produced printed leaflets and radio announcements while in country. The Centre then followed up with a regional mission to Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. This second mission developed a regional ASF strategy with the potential to improve pig production through enhanced biosecurity.

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Different but equally devastating, *peste des petits ruminants* (PPR) is a highly contagious and pathogenic viral disease with harsh socio-economic consequences. When Morocco detected the first instance of PPR in the Maghreb, a CMC-AH team, which included one of world's foremost PPR experts, worked fast to put together a vaccination strategy and emergency recommendations while in-country. The mission proved a catalyst for a follow-up project from FAO, funding pledges from the European Union, France and Spain and a ground-breaking regional meeting of Chief Veterinary Officers. Contributing to regional PPR preparedness, the meeting enabled all five Maghreb CVOs to gather together for the first time.

The CMC-AH also assisted one of the most impoverished nations on the planet: Haiti. Months before the disastrous earthquake hit Port au Prince, porcine teschovirus – a rare pig disease thought nearly eliminated – began killing the backyard herds of poor farmers. The CMC-AH provided immediate assistance through a team supported by one of the world's few existing experts on the disease.

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ZOONOTIC DISEASES THREATENING ANIMALS, HUMANS AND LIVELIHOODS

Sida support has also been crucial in responding to zoonotic TADs, such as Rift Valley fever (RVF). When RVF resurfaced in Madagascar two years since its last occurrence, the CMC-AH deployed an initial mission to design an emergency response plan and a follow-up mission to help authorities implement the plan. Coordinating the animal- and human-health response, the CMC-AH, WHO and the United Nations Resident Coordinator developed a joint strategy proposal. The proposal secured upwards of USD 400 000 in funding and technical support to defend vulnerable livelihoods from RVF by building capacities in early detection, diagnostics and control, biosecurity, human case management and public awareness.

Spread primarily by mosquitoes, RVF thrives in the wetland areas of sub-Saharan Africa, especially during times of exceptional rainfall and low animal immunity. RVF infects and kills animals and people, causing pastoralists to lose entire herds and family members while bringing market systems to a halt.

The CMC-AH also helped the remote island nation of Fiji defend its fledgling dairy industry from an outbreak of brucellosis, which affects both animals and humans. With CMC-AH support, Fiji responded quickly and kept the disease under control, avoiding the detrimental effects a major drop in dairy production would have had on industry-dependent livelihoods.

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STRENGTHENING COORDINATION FOR MORE EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

Beyond the mission outputs, Sida-funded work has expanded and strengthened CMC-AH partnerships for rapid response, particularly with OIE and WHO. Deployments and follow-up activities for ERV in the Philippines and H1N1 in Mexico made coordination mechanisms more field-focused, functional and adapted to the sensitive realities of emerging infectious diseases. The involvement of many international and regional entities in these global initiatives helped the large organizations fine-tune their engagement procedures, technical policies and operational approaches for improved future responses.

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Other missions also enhanced collaboration capacities. Responses in Morocco and Haiti required coordinated support with key, international technical institutions to ensure outputs contributed to the protection of vulnerable livelihoods. Through strengthened linkages, these organizations stand ready to support the CMC-AH and its missions in future.

Sida has been crucial to strengthening the partnerships so essential to holistic rapid response, enabling the CMC-AH to mount, coordinate and follow-up on events requiring unprecedented international and local collaboration. As initiatives like One World One Health strive to bring animal and public health partners together, the CMC-AH stands ready to lead coordinated, rapid responses, having laid the groundwork for emergency coordination through field experience.

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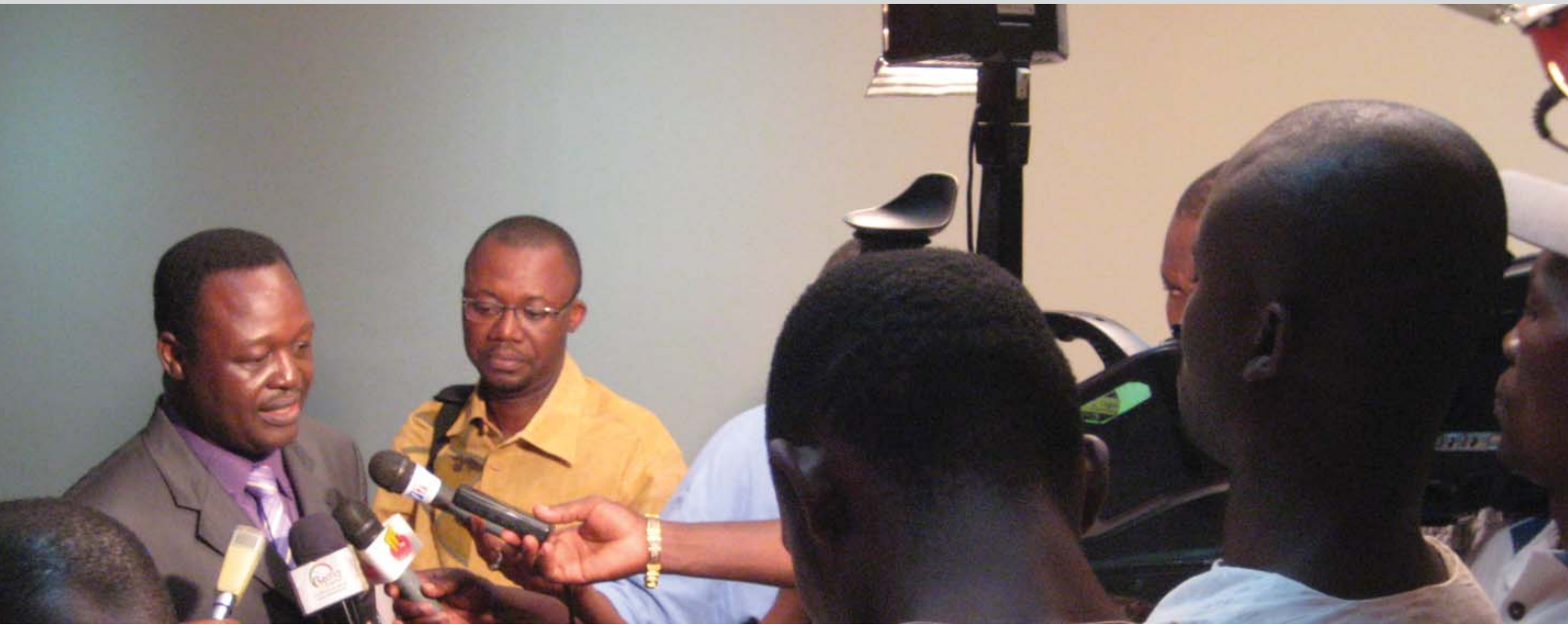

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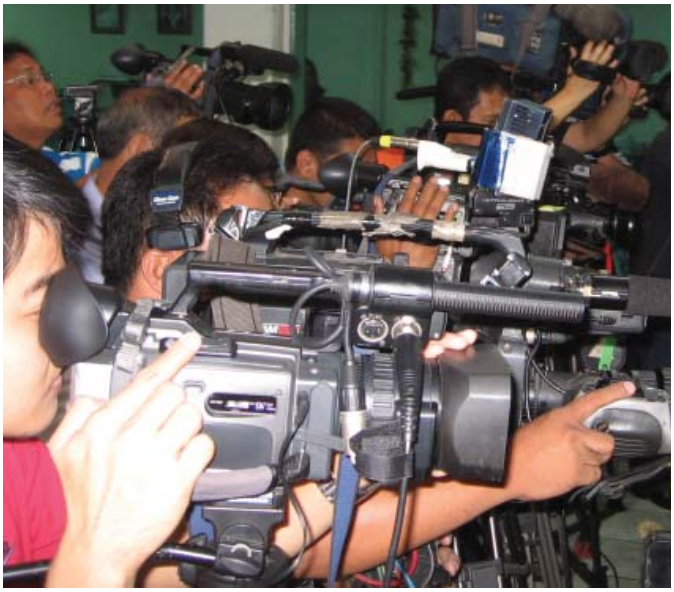
OUTBREAK COMMUNICATION EXPERTISE IN ACTION

Revealed through early missions as a major gap for many countries responding to TADs, outbreak communication became a standard component of CMC-AH support thanks to Sida funding. CMC-AH missions have since utilized communication as a tool to empower smallholders to protect their herds and families from encroaching animal diseases.

Previously rabies-free, Bali requested CMC-AH assistance after experiencing an outbreak in local dogs. The CMC-AH mission developed communication materials and assembled FAO teams to create buy-in for participation in a mass vaccination campaign also designed by the Centre. Communication ensured dog owners took appropriate steps to help limit disease spread. In addition to an operational plan for eradication, the mission developed a concept note which secured key funding for continued prevention and control activities.

Taking mission-specific support a step further, the CMC-AH developed an outbreak communication toolkit to support immediate disease control, social mobilization, media management and broader communication with public and partner audiences. To ensure communication can better support future outbreak responses, the CMC-AH plans to integrate the toolkit into a holistic, emergency management guide for partners and countries.



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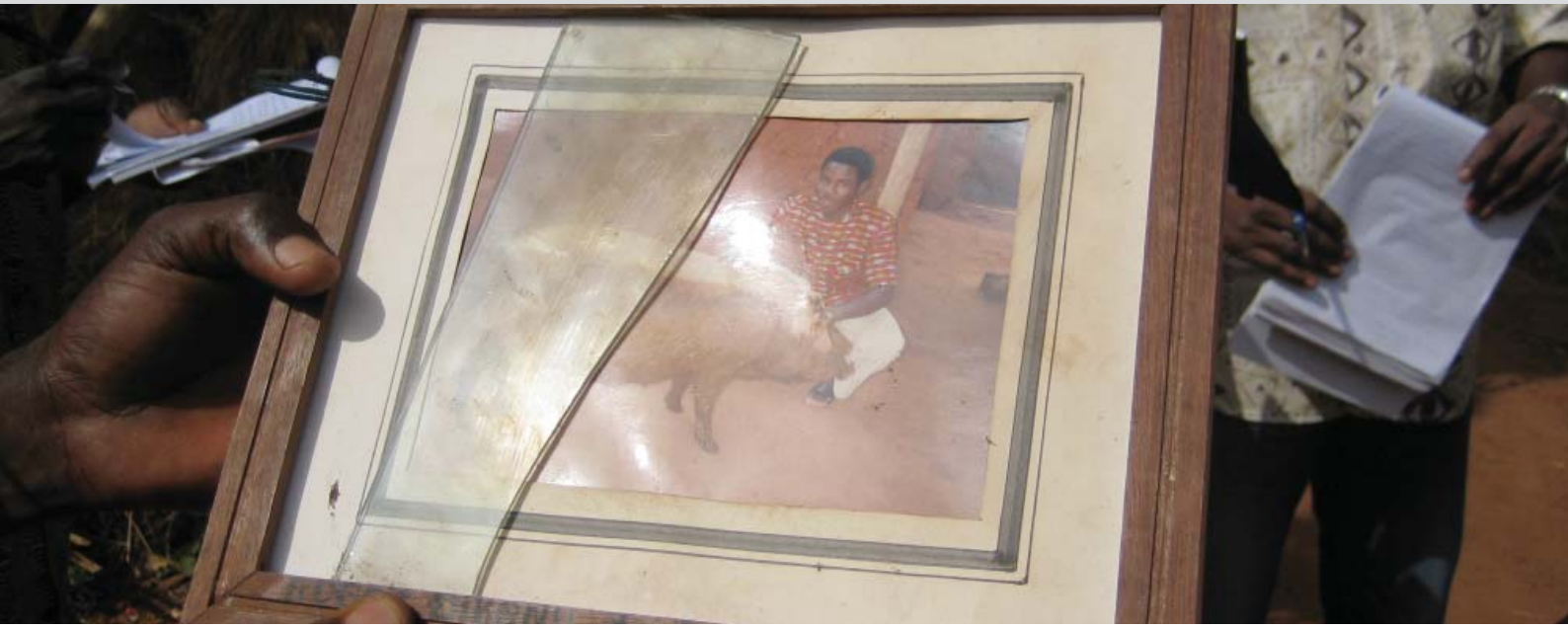

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CONTINUING CMC-AH SUPPORT WORLDWIDE

While TADs represent a collective threat, response support has rarely been unified against this common and global foe. Historically, funding for response has concentrated on specific diseases in particular places.

Diseases like avian influenza and pandemic H1N1 captured the world's attention and attracted significant support – and rightfully so. However, other equally devastating animal diseases, all but forgotten by the international community, continue generate crises that wreak havoc on vulnerable livelihoods worldwide.

Sida support filled this gap. Improving the Centre's flexibility to respond, ability to coordinate and capacity to communicate, this strategic funding enabled the CMC-AH to better assist countries responding to emerging and previously undefined disease threats. The Centre also addressed critical gaps in national and regional capacities through missions supported by an expanding network of regional and national partners.

Formal and informal collaboration has been critical to all aspects of CMC-AH work. Generous donors, committed partner agencies and critical elements of FAO's animal health programme have played essential roles in maintaining and supporting the Centre's capacity to plan, deliver and follow-up on rapid response assistance funded by Sida and other projects.

Compounded by natural disasters, conflict and climate change, animal diseases continue to strike at the most vulnerable, most impoverished people on earth. Lives and livelihoods hang in the balance.

With continued support, the CMC-AH will be able to maintain its assistance to governments responding to animal health crises as part of the international effort to prevent and control disease, safeguard animal and human health and protect vulnerable livelihoods.

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