

PS3.5 Gaps and barriers that impede effective cross-border preparedness and response planning for infectious diseases

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The livestock sector is rapidly growing to satisfy a vigorously expanding demand for animal food products. The growth of this sector has the potential to unleash a number of important socio-economic benefits such as improved livelihoods, steady economic development and strengthened food security. However, the expansion of this sector is also continuously threatened by biological hazards that have the potential to spread along the entire food chain.

In particular, infectious diseases of transboundary nature have been repeatedly incriminated as one of the major impediments for the sustainable development of livestock production, especially in poor rural areas. Their control requires coordination at international, regional and local levels among a wide variety of partners.

At the same time, Globalization has led to more and intensified trade in livestock and livestock commodities, followed by regional specialization and mutual dependencies between livestock production and consumers centres across borders. A direct consequence of these global and regional changes has been an increased likelihood of contagious livestock disease introduction and cross-border spread and the need for more cooperation between public administrations and a wide range of civil and private partners.

Cross-border collaboration is therefore essential and aims to retain the economic advantages of cross-border trade in livestock and livestock commodities while maintaining a low risk of highly contagious livestock diseases. While such collaboration already exist and is framed by international standards, as well as regional or ad-hoc bilateral agreements, effective cross-border cooperation and communication between countries is often constrained by different national policies and trade activities that occur outside of a legal framework. The understanding of key socio-economic and cultural drivers is also lacking.

Based on regional initiatives and recent HPAI cross-border projects, it has become apparent that a better understanding of the rapid structural changes of livestock production resulting in high geographical concentrations and regional specialization independent of national borders, is needed. “Managing” trade instead of banning, along with building sustainable partnerships and trust between public and private stakeholders are some of the lessons learned from these initiatives. International organizations such as the FAO have also a specific role to play in fostering cross-border dialogue and providing a platform for information exchange, access to regional animal health and production networks and facilitate joint surveillance and cross-border simulation exercises.

Ultimately, a paradigm shift would be required to address cross-border trade through an integrated approach, considering a region (involving 2 or more countries) as one eco-epidemiological system where multidisciplinary expertise (veterinarians, medical doctors, wildlife specialists, customs, etc) and resources could be shared to answer the challenge of cross-border spread of infectious diseases.