

**DRAFT 10 March 2006**

**Avian Influenza Crisis Management and Communications:  
A Guide for USAID Staff**

**Introduction**

This Guide will help you think through elements essential to communicating about avian influenza if the virus strikes your country or region, or is spreading. Being prepared for this event is the most important thing you can do.

Crisis Management is based on the disciplines of response, control and decision making, all of which are based on the receipt of timely information and the recognition that there are situations where decision-making must be escalated to higher-levels. Crisis Management is also based on a team approach, eliminating individual decision-making. Stress, chaos and confusion will often exist in an outbreak situation, and this can place an extreme level of pressure on an individual and their ability to make rational, effective and timely decisions.

Because each situation is unique, it is important to keep in mind that this Guide is not a complete, step-by-step manual. However, the Guide will hopefully provide information and suggestions to ensure a timely and effective response to outbreaks of avian influenza in your area. This information can increase The Mission's confidence in its ability to manage this crisis in an appropriate manner when necessary.

Whatever the situation, members of your emergency response team must be honest, candid and flexible; they must combine a sense of urgency with sensitivity and a large measure of common sense. They must demonstrate that The Mission is a caring, competent and responsible organization. Doing so will go a long way toward comforting our various constituencies, preventing rumors and protecting the reputation of your office and staff.

## Step 1 -- Mobilize Crisis Communications Team and Support

*Timeframe: Within the first few days following outbreak.*

Following is a chart listing the types of expertise (and individuals) that your Communications Officer (or your internal Crisis Communications Team, if you have established one) will need access to as part of your emergency response to avian influenza. To augment the expertise of these individuals, you also will need to identify and communicate with members of international organizations that are already at the forefront of activities to control the spread of avian influenza. Ideally, The Mission should identify these individuals prior to an avian influenza outbreak.

<b>Expertise/Type of Individual</b>	<b>Sample Responsibilities</b>	<b>Potential National Counterpart</b>	<b>Potential International Partners</b>
Communication (internal and external sources)	Handle all communication, writing, media relations	Ministry of Information, Office of the President	U.S. Government Press and Public Affairs offices
Education or Health Officer for NGO relations, others with expertise in bilaterals and USAID platforms	NGO Relations, facilitating platforms for community-based communications and social mobilization, providing input/research on messages and materials	Ministry of Education or Health	USAID, other donors, NGO network officials
Human Health (Epidemiologist, Health Officer)	Human outbreak analysis, treatment advice	Ministry of Health	U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Animal Health (VDM, USDA Officer)	Veterinary medicine, advice	Ministry of Agriculture/ Animal Health	USDA
Country and Private Sector capability (Economic/ Policy Official)	Interface with host government and private sector, advise on agriculture and animal and human health regulations	Office of the President, business executive officers, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Public Health	U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USDA
Budget Resources (Finance Officer)	Budget and purchasing	Ministry of Finance	U.S. Government, donor governments and

			organizations (UN FAO)
Government relations (Deputy Chief of Mission)	Interface with host government	Office of President	
Evacuation/ Triage (procurement officer)	Evacuation, equipment and other procurement		
Logistics (Assistant to Crisis Team Leader)	Logistical and other support		

Issues that should be clarified among all of these Team members include:

1) Lines of authority for making decisions about:

- Actions
- Emergency regulations
- Financial obligations
- Communications to the public

2) The individual who makes the final decisions (has “sign-off”) for the above matters, and how authority is delegated in the absence of this individual.

### **Responding to the Media**

A key individual to identify at the beginning will be The Mission’s spokesperson. To provide consistency and avoid media confusion about whom to contact, you should appoint one program spokesperson. This person should be at a senior level and should not have to focus on other duties during the outbreak. Be sure to have a range of other experts you can call upon to handle specific subjects – such as animal and human health officials. Staff should be reminded that all inquiries from media or other agencies should be forwarded to the approved spokesperson.

## **Step 2 -- Conduct a Rapid Assessment of the Situation**

*Timeframe: Within 3-5 days following outbreak.*

This is essentially an analysis of the situation at hand. The team should first ask itself, “What do we know?” While gathering the information for your quick assessment, staff should also begin discussing the components of your Communication Plan of Act (See Step 4).

The following table outlines issues that should be addressed as part of this assessment, and examples of questions that can be asked.

<b>RAPID SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS</b>	
<b>Types of Issues to be Considered</b>	<b>Types of Questions to be Asked</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of birds have died or been</li> </ul>

<p><b>The number and type of disease outbreaks for both humans and animals</b></p>	<p>reported as ill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where have they been reported and by whom</li> <li>• Have any humans been reported as ill</li> </ul>
<p><b>What is being said publicly, and through which channels is the information being disseminated.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there rumors being circulated that contain erroneous information</li> <li>• Have there been news reports of outbreaks and what have they reported</li> <li>• How are people learning about the outbreak</li> <li>• Has the Government already said anything (or not said anything)</li> <li>• What channels have been used (e.g., TV, radio, hotline, newspapers)</li> </ul>
<p><b>The information that other organizations may have.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the NGOs in your area received updates or other notifications on the outbreak</li> <li>• Have NGOs communicated with their constituents about the outbreak yet</li> <li>• What have they seen and heard from people in the community or from other sources</li> </ul>
<p><b>The policies in place at USAID/the Mission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does The Mission have any procedures in place that will affect the way you respond to this outbreak</li> <li>• Do you have to obtain approval from the local or national government to undertake any actions</li> <li>• Does your office have existing evacuation or quarantine plans and, if so, in what situations should they be put into effect</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Government's position</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do they know</li> <li>• Are they doing anything in response</li> <li>• Have they asked for assistance or given other instructions on how to proceed</li> <li>• What are their policies on movement of poultry, quarantine, compensation after culling, or vaccination of poultry.</li> <li>• Are there existing government committees on vaccination or animal health on the state level that can be accessed</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communications capacity at The</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have enough people to carry out intended activities</li> </ul>

<b>Mission – both human and technological</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have sufficient communication tools such as mobile telephones, a telephone information hotline</li> <li>• Can you tap into the Government’s communication resources</li> <li>• Are you ready to begin dialogue with members of the media?</li> <li>• Do you have existing platforms and mechanisms that can be used to roll out communication activities</li> </ul>
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Keep in mind that, if possible, you should validate and record all sources of information if there is any doubt whatsoever as to its legitimacy. If any level of doubt exists, corroborate the information with other sources.

### **Step 3 – Determine The Mission’s Immediate Response and Make Assignments**

*Timeframe: Within the first week following an outbreak.*

Based on the rapid assessment, your internal Crisis Team or decision-makers can then decide on emergency actions you should and are able to pursue.

For example, if cases of avian influenza have been reported but not confirmed, it will be important to find out if a team of veterinary health officials have been dispatched to the site of the outbreak to confirm that it is, indeed, avian influenza. Your human or veterinary health officer could visit NGOs or other health officials in the region (or in the government) to get a status report and offer support.

Part of this Immediate Response is the Communication Plan of Action, which is outlined in Step 4.

### **Step 4 – Develop a Communication Plan of Action**

*Timeframe: Within a week following an outbreak.*

A Communication Plan of Action has essentially three main desired outcomes:

- 1) Determining what types of information will be disseminated by The Mission;
- 2) Determining who will deliver that information (e.g., a spokesperson); and
- 3) Deciding how to follow up on these activities. Following are steps to guide you through the process of undertaking communications tasks.

<b>PLAN OF ACTION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS</b>	
<p><b>Identify and Obtain Consensus on Communication Goals</b></p>	<p>These goals can include messages and activities conveying desired actions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to promote the prevention of animal to animal and animal to human transmission of avian influenza</li> <li>• to encourage the reporting of all suspected animal and human cases of avian influenza</li> <li>• to avoid the consumption of undercooked poultry</li> <li>• to emphasize the importance of culling and subsequent procedures (e.g. compensation) to control the spread of avian flu</li> </ul>
<p><b>Identify Target Audiences</b></p>	<p>It is important to identify the types of organizations or individuals that will need to receive information on an outbreak. These audiences can include: agricultural health officials, government information officers, Ministry of Health officials, community leaders (faith-based groups, women’s unions, child welfare officials), human and veterinary health officials, the media and journalists, and the general public. It will also be important to keep open the lines of communication with USAID for overall guidance, as well as with other international organizations you may have worked with in your region (e.g., FAO, WHO). These organizations have addressed avian influenza outbreaks in many other areas of the world, and will be a helpful source of information and guidance.</p>
<p><b>Identify Priority Channels of Communication</b></p>	<p>Once you identify your target audiences, the next step is to determine the best ways to reach them. Each audience may have a different channel through which to reach them. This can include an emergency telephone information hotline that people can call to obtain up-to-date information; community-based communications (community meetings, house visits, etc.); loudspeaker announcements, radio or television announcements, etc. Community organizations that can be engaged to help deliver messages include religious groups, women’s union members, or other community health workers.</p>
<p><b>Decide on the Messages to be Conveyed</b></p>	<p>You will need to decide which types of emergency messages you would like to communicate to various audiences. <b><i>To assist in this process, please refer to Annex A for Emergency Messages by Audience.</i></b> Regardless of messages, it is important to keep communications consistent and clear. If your messages are too complicated, they could lead to misinformation or confusion among your audiences.</p>

<b>Determine the Materials to be Distributed</b>	You will need to disseminate materials to your various audiences to provide information and guidance, as well as to motivate and reassure them.
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### **Important Points to Keep in Mind for All Communications**

1. Be calm when talking to the media or the public.
2. Don't over reassure
3. Acknowledge uncertainty
4. Share dilemmas
5. Acknowledge opinion diversity
6. Acknowledge fear and other emotions.
7. Do not ridicule the public's emotions or beliefs.
8. Tell people what to expect
9. Offer people things to do.
10. Apologize for errors.
11. Don't lie or tell half-truths – Aim for total candor and transparency. If you don't know the answer, don't say you do.

Also important to note is that each type of media will be looking at the situation from a slightly different angle. Television and radio reporters will have different needs and deadlines than newspaper and magazine reporters, and regional or national journalists will treat the situation differently from international reporters. It is important that your spokesperson understands the different requirements these media have and can anticipate and provide the appropriate information.

Materials that have already been developed and can be used or adapted by The Mission include:

- Posters
- Radio public service announcements
- Live-read scripts that can be used for radio, television or loudspeaker
- Messages addressing prevention and control of avian influenza between animals, between humans, and from animals to humans
- Frequently Asked Questions about Avian Influenza
- A leaflet for Community Workers on how to communicate about avian influenza (draft)
- Media training on avian influenza for journalists (*forthcoming*)
- A workplace guide to address avian influenza prevention and education for the workplace
- A brochure for farmers (*in development*)

## **Step 5 – Monitor Developments and Prepare for Longer-Term Strategy Development**

***Timeframe: Two weeks following outbreak, or after the initial phase of crisis/emergency response is completed.***

Once most of the immediate, emergency tasks have been completed, -- usually over the first week or two following an outbreak -- it will be important to look back on what you accomplished and whether it was successful in meeting your communication goals.

It is important to reflect on your activities with your internal Crisis Team and identify any lessons learned. These lessons will form the basis of what The Mission decides to do over the long term to help prevent and control the spread of avian influenza.

Moreover, when you are not in an emergency or crisis situation, you may have time to plan a process so that you are prepared for additional outbreaks or unexpected developments.

Steps in this process can include:

- Formally identify a crisis committee within The Mission to set longer-term strategic priorities and oversee the execution of activities.
- Hold Planning Discussions
- Set Strategic Priorities
- Assign Roles and Set a Schedule for Action
- Revise your communications strategy, if necessary.