

A photograph showing three women wearing traditional conical hats (non) sitting on the ground at an outdoor market stall. They are handling several pieces of poultry, including ducks and chickens, laid out on a white cloth. The woman on the left is wearing a blue shirt and is holding a duck. The woman in the middle is wearing a blue shirt and is also handling a duck. The woman on the right is wearing a light blue shirt and is holding a chicken. In the background, there are bicycles parked against a stone wall. A red plastic basket is visible on the right side of the frame.

Gender Aspects of the Avian Influenza Crisis in Southeast Asia

Thailand, Vietnam and Laos

Objectives of the Study

- **Analyse and compare the gender dimensions of AI** in three Southeast Asian countries: Thailand, Vietnam and Laos, and
- **Draw lessons and conclusions** that can serve as planning reference in **mainstreaming gender in planning AI actions and strategies.**

Thailand

- As a major poultry-meat exporter (5th largest worldwide), medium and large commercial enterprises dominate the sector.
- Before 2004 AI outbreak producing approx 1 billion chickens/year with 400,000 people employed in the industry
- Thailand has experienced 5 waves of HPAI outbreaks between January 2004 and February 2008.

Male-female involvement in the poultry industry (Thailand)

- In 3/4 commercial farms interviewed men were found to be the farm managers. Men were also mainly responsible for feeding birds, collecting eggs, cleaning sheds, selling manure, transporting and selling chickens/ eggs.
- Many women are employed in layer and broiler farms, responsible for collecting and selling eggs, cleaning poultry sheds and premises

- Majority of workers in poultry slaughter houses (for export and domestic markets) are men
- Men, almost exclusively, are involved in activities related to breeding birds for cockfighting including selling, transporting and gaming activities

- Market sellers (mainly women) purchase dressed poultry or poultry parts from wholesale companies, or live birds, and slaughter and prepare the birds themselves
- Women primarily perform tasks related to feeding and caring of the small-scale backyard poultry, and preparing them for cooking
- In family-owned poultry enterprises women are responsible for keeping income and, usually, play an equal role in decision making on use of income

- Government veterinarians, livestock authorities and staff, and village livestock volunteers are predominantly male
- Village health volunteers are mostly women

Perceived links between gender and AI

- Most farmers and government authorities interviewed considered there to be no gender implications in the AI epidemic and crisis.
- After probing, they acknowledged that women may face more risks
 - because they are directly involved in less bio-secure backyard poultry keeping
 - because men have better access to information and training on animal health care including AI, and can therefore protect themselves better
- Men involved with raising & transporting fighting cocks were also considered to be at high risk

Gender in AI Actions (Th)

- No specific strategy or defined component on gender in AI initiatives of UN agencies and NGOs interviewed
- Only AusAID's ASEAN Plus Three Emerging Infectious Diseases (EID) Programme has a gender component

Vietnam

- Poultry sector is dominated by small-scale backyard keeping (70%) and is an important source of cash and food for the family, especially among the poor
- About 8 million house-holds are estimated to be engaged in poultry rearing – 40 million people

- Vietnam remains one of the worst affected in terms of AI human infections and deaths - to date 106 cases are confirmed, of which 52 were fatal
- The government aggressively reacted through nation-wide poultry vaccinations, massive culling, and prohibiting raising of free-range poultry

Male-female involvement in the poultry industry (Vietnam)

Women are:

- mainly responsible for managing small-scale backyard poultry keeping, and to a lesser extent, medium-scale poultry enterprise (ownership is mostly with men)
- involved in poultry marketing
- often employed on large-scale farms as labourers

Men are

- usually managers of large-scale poultry farms
- mostly responsible for transport and trading of poultry and poultry products for commercial enterprises
- usually responsible for veterinary care of poultry

- men dominate veterinary fieldwork and livestock extension services
- most members of the Farmers Union and Village Committees are men (thus limiting women's access to decision-making in community affairs and issues concerning their farming livelihoods)

Gender and AI observations (Vn)

- In general, only men attend training in AI control and prevention – they are better educated, and tend to exercise authority on information and decision-making on family health concerns.
- AI awareness has generally improved but women's knowledge on AI prevention and control is limited (Phuong, 2006)

- Women are a high risk group as directly involved in poultry production (caring, selling, transporting and slaughtering)
- Govt policy of enhancing bio-security measures for more profitable poultry enterprises may disadvantage poorer backyard poultry keepers (mostly women), possibly making them a) more vulnerable to AI and b) discouraging them altogether from backyard poultry activities

(Monitoring observations made by VNRC have raised concern about decreased involvement of women in poultry keeping because of fear of AI)

Gender in AI Actions

- Key government agencies in AI control and preparedness (MARD, MoH and responsible depts) do not recognise gender as an important determinant in AI prevention and control
- Vietnamese Women's Union is strong driving force in community-based AI campaigns, and in bringing AI messages to women.

- UN Joint Programme on AI has included gender capacity building and gender integration in the M&E system in Phase II Plan - aiming to improve women's knowledge on bio-security and strengthen capacity to manage the disease
- Hanoi-based ADB Greater Mekong Sub-region Communicable Diseases Control Project has developed a Gender Action Plan. The Plan has identified gender objectives and activities for each project component

Lao PDR

- 80% of the poultry production is small-scale backyard raising, mainly managed by women
- 95% of population is engaged in poultry raising in one form or another. In rural areas, 100% of the population raises poultry, mostly for family consumption

- Laos recorded its first outbreaks of HPAI in early 2004 in Vientiane Municipality
- Majority of the cases were in small commercial enterprises
- Last two AI outbreaks involved backyard poultry

Perceived links between poultry and gender

- Poultry is important source of cash for women, contributing to nutrition and food security
- Women are responsible for care, slaughtering and cooking of poultry
- In many ethnic groups ownership of poultry is a wealth indicator, especially for women

- Large-scale commercial production is either a family enterprise or a male business
- Traders are usually men but market sellers of poultry/poultry products mainly women
- Decisions related to poultry production and use of proceeds from sale are often shared between husband and wife

Gender and AI observations

- Training courses on poultry production and AI prevention and control usually provided for men as household heads, better educated and with Lao language skills
- All IEC materials to date is in the Lao language while ethnic minorities, particularly women, seldom understand or speak Lao

- Lao Women's Union has been actively involved in trainings and communication campaigns on AI
- Evaluations revealed however that these courses have had little or no impact - the contents not understood, and women said not to be interested or to have time to look at AI messages

- Most of the farmers interviewed think that there are no gender issues in the AI crisis
- However, Govt authorities think that because women play a major role in poultry production they are at higher risk of AI infection and that this risk is increased due to women's low levels of education

Gender in AI Actions (Laos)

- Gender is not a key focus area in any AI action or programme
- There are some initiatives to hold women-only meetings for AI campaigns in remote ethnic communities, and to increase female recruitment among village vet workers

Common findings

- Significant gap in AI knowledge between women and men.
- Women face particular constraints: low education, less time and mobility, excluded from agricultural training and services, etc
- Recognition of key roles women play in small-scale backyard poultry production, and their disadvantages in accessing information and training on AI, have not translated into the design of specific measures to address women's barriers in AI communication campaigns.

- AI trainings and communication campaigns rarely take gender into account
- Related KAP surveys barely explore gender differences
- Gender and ethnic cultural factors are not taken into account in AI actions and communication campaigns

- Dual roles of women as health care providers and poultry raisers increases their vulnerability to AI infection

but

- most analysis on the impact of AI on gender focuses on effects on livelihood and food security

Possible reasons for gender omission

- Planners and implementers of AI actions lack understanding and knowledge on gender, and are not able to analyse the differential impact of the AI crisis on women and men: their different needs, interests and constraints

- Agencies and programmes dealing with AI do not have a defined strategy/component that address gender issues
- Lack of gender-segregated information and data on AI
- Low participation of women and women-focused agencies in planning and implementation of AI actions

Recommendations

Women are important stakeholders in the AI crisis – they comprise the largest number of people involved in backyard poultry, their contribution going beyond food production and income-generation -

So, women should be recognised as major players in the agricultural economy and in ensuring public health

Therefore positive actions should be taken to ensure women's involvement in preventive measures

Research

- More evidence-based quantitative research is needed to statistically establish the gender differentials in AI crisis
- Studies needed to determine the gender impact of national policies on bio-security controls on poultry production and marketing

Training

Competence development on gender should be aimed at policy-makers, planners, programme/project managers and officers

Institutional mechanisms established to support gender mainstreaming including developing gender action plans and allocation of budgets

Social and gender focal points established in AI programmes and in responsible government agencies with clear mandates and resources to support gender mainstreaming

Suggested measures to address gender issues

- Targeted AI campaigns for women can make a difference in reaching those at greatest risk – children and backyard poultry keepers
- Improving women's knowledge about AI can strengthen their poultry management, protect livelihoods and sources of income, ensure the food security of the family, and enhance women's capacity to protect their families against AI

- Mass organisations, farmers unions, youth unions should be encouraged to actively recruit female members (especially targeting male-dominated bodies)
- Capacity of women's mass organisations (VWU and LWU) and women's NGOs encouraged to carry out AI campaigns particularly in rural and remote areas
- Local women trained to become agents for AI campaigns

- Ensure that AI campaign messages are women-friendly: easy to understand, with balanced gender portrayals, culturally-appropriate, and delivered at a place and time that allows women optimum participation

Gender and AI Indicators

- Gender differences in income from production of poultry and poultry-related products
- Gender differences in control and decision-making over poultry resources
- Gender differences in AI knowledge and preventive behaviour

- Proportion of women and men participating and actively involved in community-based trainings and AI communication campaigns
- Proportion of women and men participating in AI surveillance, response and preparedness activities
- Extent of use of participatory approach in AI actions and campaigns

- Gender differences membership in farmers' organisations
- Gender differences in access to credit
- Gender differences in access to technology
- Gender differences in village-based human and animal health workers

A photograph of a woman in a blue jacket and purple boots riding a motorcycle through a market. The motorcycle is heavily loaded with live chickens and ducks. The woman is wearing a black and white polka-dot headscarf and a colorful patterned face mask. In the background, another person wearing a large conical hat is visible, and there are more cages of ducks. The scene is set outdoors on a dirt or gravel path.

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