

Strengthening capacity to respond to animal disease emergencies through Good Emergency Management Practice in Eastern Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This report is subsequent to the workshop organized in Soroti District — Uganda on November 2018, as part of the effort from the FAO to strengthen field veterinary preparedness and enhance zoonotic disease surveillance capabilities in East Africa. Different activities organized in 4 countries, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda under the FAO's GEMP (Good Emergency Management Practice) targeted a wide audience of animal health professionals. The workshop was organized in Soroti District in collaboration with the project recipient country's ministries/departments of animal and veterinary services to learn best practices and share experiences about dealing with animal disease emergencies. The workshop brought together participants who were systematically selected depending on technical expertise, history of incidence of zoonotic diseases in their districts, and multi-disciplinary inclusion. The delivery was made through plenary and focus group discussions drawing from experience and technical knowledge. Thirty-one participants were trained and these were from various disciplines, and they were acquainted with knowledge and skill on one health approach. The permanent threats of outbreaks that face Uganda in its Northern and North-Eastern region were discussed and solutions were suggested for an improved capacity to respond promptly to epidemics. With the given recommendations, participants believed that a better outbreak response performance could be achieved in the region.

KEYWORDS: One health, epidemic surveillance, Good Emergency Management Practice, Uganda

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Introduction

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, within the framework of implementation of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA)-funded project “Strengthening epidemic surveillance capabilities and underlying regulatory frameworks in eastern Africa” is supporting several countries in Eastern Africa including Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia in strengthening their respective capacity in participatory surveillance, development of preparedness plans and their implementation for priority zoonotic diseases [1]. With respect to the inter-linking and cross transmission or spread of diseases between humans and animals, a one health approach highly embraced under the Global Health Security Agenda was integrated to best address zoonotic diseases and Trans-boundary Diseases (TADS) and build synergy and sustainable response to animal disease emergencies. The FAO’s GEMP, the Good Emergency Management Practice (GEMP) is an overall approach to preparedness and response for animal health emergencies, supporting veterinary services in increasing preparedness to animal disease outbreaks and cost-effective and timely control of animal disease disasters and crises [1]. The GEMP concept fully embraces a one health approach requiring multi-disciplinary involvement and collaboration to fully address issues affecting human and animal health, food security and food safety.

The GEMP workshop aimed to reach a wide audience of animal health professionals. It was organized by the FAO in collaboration with the project recipient country’s ministries/departments of animal and veterinary services. The objective of the workshop was to learn best practices and share experiences about dealing with animal disease emergencies. In the same vein, the FAO through the ECTAD (Emergency Center for the control of Trans-boundary Animal Diseases) in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) through the Department of Veterinary Services organized a multi-day workshop in Soroti, district to build capacity of practitioners for subsequent improvement of preparedness plans for zoonotic diseases [2]. The prioritized zoonotic diseases for Uganda included Anthrax, Zoonotic influenza viruses, Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers, Brucellosis, Trypanosomiasis, Plague, and Rabies [3].

Methods

The training was held at Akello Hotel, Soroti Town, from 12th to 16th November, 2018. The sub-national workshop brought together participants who were systematically selected depending on technical expertise, history of incidence of zoonotic diseases in their districts, and multi-disciplinary inclusion. The delivery was made through plenary and focus group discussions drawing from experience and technical knowledge. The facilitators of the multi-day workshop were from ECTAD-FAO, MAAIF and MOH and these shared on and demonstrated the multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral needed approach to good emergency management practices in handling animal disease outbreaks. Interactive and participatory approach that included a lot of simulation exercises on command structure, risk analysis, and information sharing to stimulate discussions on the improvement of animal disease preparedness and response were applied. Reference was made to the FAO’s GEMP manual, and lessons learnt from other countries where similar initiatives on GEMP were or are being implemented.

Results

Thirty-one participants were trained in GEMP. These were from various disciplines and about four sectors which exhibited the spirit of one health approach. The participants (about 95% in all themes) were acquainted with knowledge and skill in the following achieved outputs;

GEMP principles and their operationalization

Role of Veterinary Services in recovery,
Preparedness Planning, rehabilitation and the different phases of Emergency Disease Management.

Risk analysis, contingency planning and command structure during an animal disease emergency.

Recommendations and next steps

After a successful workshop in which the participants rated very high the overall quality, delivery and content of the training, several general and stakeholder recommendations were discussed to improve the preparedness, response and management of animal disease outbreaks in Uganda.

It was suggested to review the district Veterinary structure to accommodate more personnel in order to respond and control disease outbreak especially the inclusion of surveillance focal point person.

The National Livestock / animal health policy should be developed and implemented as appropriate especially in reference to disease control. The National Animal Diseases Diagnostics and Epidemiology Centre should develop and finalize laboratory Standard Operating procedures that should be shared with the Regional laboratories and District Veterinary officers.

NADDEC should establish Rapid Response and Emergency Response unit for purposes of responding to outbreaks in time.

Strengthen inter-boarder cooperation in disease control through working with other stakeholders like Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), East Africa Community (EAC) and Africa Union - International Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR).

Enforcement of cattle traders' act by ensuring that all cattle traders are licensed and regularly sensitized on disease control. MAAIF should write a communication to this effect to Chief Administrative Officers with copies to chairperson Local Council V, Resident District Commissioner etc.

There should be in place a reporting system that covers the whole country so that everyone is informed about outbreaks and other animal disease conditions on a weekly basis. Non-reporting districts should be fast-tracked and brought on board.

Establish mobile animal clinics for purposes of identifying infected animals.

There was also need to review the districts' veterinary services structure so as to provide for surveillance and veterinary epidemiologists in addition to continued re-fresher trainings.

Prioritize and conduct applied and translational research on PZDs and priority TADs.

Include more applied approaches like GEMP, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and Risk Analysis in training curricula at undergraduate levels.

Establish the Uganda GEMP network to share experiences and coordinate the multi-sectoral participation in response to animal disease emergencies in Uganda.

Provision of vaccine monitors for cold chain management for the livestock sector to maintain the quality of vaccines and also train DVOs and laboratory technicians in cold chain management protocols and Standard Operation Procedures.

Support the training of Field veterinarians in epidemiology in collaboration with FAO and Makerere University, COLLEGE of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resources and Biosecurity. This will ensure that credible and well documented surveillance information is obtained from the sector to decision makers for appropriate action in disease control.

Conclusion

For a sustainable response to Uganda's priority zoonotic diseases, a built capacity was needed among practitioners in animal health. In regions that record high incidences, surveillance and vaccination were needed especially in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda, in Cattle corridor. In addition, there was a need to put in place a reporting system that covers the whole Country so that every surveillance practitioner is informed about outbreaks including animal diseases on a weekly basis. Non-reporting districts in Uganda were to be fast-tracked and brought on board.

This report relates one achievement among many which were subsequent to effort from the FAO to strengthen zoonotic disease surveillance in East Africa. In the four beneficiary countries— Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Uganda, the aim was to strengthen national policy frameworks for epidemic surveillance systems to mitigate the threat posed by pathogens of security concern.

Zoonotic disease are permanent threats in the Northern and North-Eastern regions of Uganda. With this work, we share how stakeholders expressed the need to enhance surveillance capacity and the need to provide more resources — funds and trained personnel. The permanent threats of

outbreak that faces Uganda in its Northern and North -Eastern region was discussed and solutions were suggested for an improved capacity to respond promptly to epidemics. With the given recommendations, participants believed that a better outbreak response performance could be achieved in the region.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Authors' contributions

The author was part of the workshop and wrote the report as a personal output.

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