

QUARTERLY ACTIVITY REPORT

AVIAN AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR LAC

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About Links Media

A full-service communications company, Links Media provides organizations with an array of technologies and methods to influence behavior, communicate risk, and mobilize resources to generate positive change. Links Media's services include market research, strategic communications, multimedia production, partnership building and advocacy, and knowledge dissemination. Currently, Links Media provides expert consultation services to USAID in support of the development and implementation of an avian and pandemic influenza communication strategy and collateral material development for the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AI	Avian influenza
API	Avian and pandemic influenza
CONE	Comisión Nacional de Emergencias (National Emergency Commission)
CTO	Cognizant Technical Officer
IEC	Information, education, and communication
IICC	Inter-Institutional Communications Committee for Avian and Pandemic Influenza
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOHSA	Ministry of Health and Social Assistance
NEMO	National Emergency Management Organization
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
Op-Ed	Opinion editorial
PI	Pandemic influenza
Q&A	Question and answer
SOPs	Standard operating procedures
SOW	Scope of work
STOP AI	Stamping Out Pandemic and Avian Influenza
TA	Technical assistance
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Background

Since 2003, a growing number of human H5NI (avian influenza, or AI, virus) cases have been reported in Asia, Europe, and Africa; most of these cases are believed to have been caused by exposure to infected poultry. If the virus evolves such that it is capable of sustained human-to-human transmission, a pandemic could begin. Preparing for and responding to a pandemic requires coordinated actions and communications by all levels of government and all segments of society. To address this need, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through its 16 missions in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, and its U.S. government partners are working with host governments to raise awareness and plan for a potential influenza pandemic, and to coordinate international preparedness and response measures.

Links Media provides expert consultation services to USAID in support of the development and implementation of AI and pandemic influenza (PI) communication strategy and collateral material development for the LAC region. These services are essential in supporting USAID's overarching goal of successfully containing the H5N1 virus within the animal population over the next 24 months. The recent human-to-human spread of the A(H1N1) virus has stressed the need for operational preparedness and response resources to help lessen the devastating effects of a pandemic. Additionally, development of a comprehensive communication strategy and accompanying collateral materials for the region has become pivotal in preparing for an outbreak or a possible human pandemic. The communication strategy specifically provides a conceptual framework and sound operating principles for increasing awareness among key target audiences (particularly back-yard farmers, consumers of poultry, health care and veterinary staff, municipality officials and families) of high-risk behaviors for contracting AI, practical preventive measures, and how to recognize, respond to, and, in humans, treat AI. The strategy also provides tools to support the implementation and monitoring of the proposed communication interventions to ensure full utilization for the LAC countries.

Such tools also support USAID's Avian and Human Pandemic Influenza Response Unit in assisting missions and regional bureaus effectively achieve two broad objectives: 1) Strengthen capacities to rapidly detect and respond to the current AI problem in animals and humans; and 2) Continue preparing for a possible human influenza pandemic.

This report describes Links Media's activities for this project for the period April 1 to June 30, 2009. Also included is a summary of achievements and results, as well as suggested future activities and challenges and solutions.

Activities

During the period of April 1 to June 30, 2009, a team of communication professionals from Links Media conducted various activities in support of the development and implementation of avian and pandemic influenza (API) communication strategy and collateral material development for the LAC region. Updates about the team's activities were regularly provided to the Cognizant Technical Officer (CTO) through verbal and written briefings. Following is a summary of the key activities conducted during this period.

- Updated the strategic work plan in order to ensure 1) needs and emergencies are aggressively monitored; and, 2) appropriate and timely response is provided to the field, including the provision of relevant technical assistance (TA).
- Conducted research of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials and resources on API for the purpose of updating the current inventory of communication resources available to LAC.
- Finalized the fifth edition of the Communication Resources for Avian and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response in English and Spanish. This document was disseminated in both languages to health communicators in LAC.
- Provided TA to Ecuador for improving their communication strategy for API. Activities included conducting a second onsite assessment. This assessment included conducting a small sample public opinion poll to determine the effectiveness of messages regarding A(H1N1) disseminated by the Ministry of Health (MOH); and, 2) an onsite situational analysis based on observations of MOH's actions in response to the A(H1N1) outbreak and interviews with members of the PI inter-institutional communications committee and authorities. Assessment results were used to draft an operation plan to be used during an upcoming working meeting in July to ensure there is a written protocol for communication activities, and a Monitoring and Evaluation plan.
 - Activities also included the planning and coordination of a working meeting in Quito, Ecuador, to be conducted on July 14 to 16, 2009. The objective of the working meeting is to assist the PI inter-institutional committee in enhancing their current communication strategy and developing a standard operating procedures (SOPs), as well as review their current operational preparedness and response plan. Materials for this meeting also were developed.
- Conducted telephone interviews with USAID country missions and country government officials to assess the status of national pandemic planning activities in the midst of the A(H1N1) virus outbreak. These calls aimed to identify specific needs for technical support and risk communications tools and resources.
- Conducted an onsite meeting on April 2, 2009, in Castries, Saint Lucia, to review the country's communication strategy and SOPs.

- Participated as observers on April 17, 2009, in Saint Lucia, in a table-top exercise organized by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Agency and the U.S. Southern Command.
- Continued to coordinate all production activities for the PI preparedness and response toolkit for use by mayors and local jurisdictional government authorities. Activities included leading the editorial and translation processes, developing the risk/crisis communication tools, as well as the designing the layout for the toolkit.
 - Activities also included developing and presenting various concept design options to package the toolkit to USAID. Once revised, based on USAID feedback, initiated testing of the three top concept designs in five countries in the LAC region.
 - Also prepared for the toolkit pilot test to be conducted in Saint Lucia on July 27 to 31, 2009.
- Developed Pandemic influenza project Web site (www.influenzalac.org/project) for CTO-review. Upon approval, site will available to the public at www.influenzalac.org.
- Regularly provided updates to USAID Headquarters and Country Missions, Ministries of Health and Agriculture, Communications Committees for Avian and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response, communications professionals, and nongovernmental organizations' (NGOs') partners, on the media coverage of the A(H1N1) virus outbreak in the LAC countries to USAID. Initially, updates were provided daily; then, weekly. Currently, these updates are being provided monthly.
- Disseminated key AI contacts communications materials to LAC countries, such as an opinion editorial (op-ed) article about the importance of PI preparedness in the country, a question and answer (Q&A) document with basic information about API, a technical bulletin about how to develop and place editorial articles in the media, and various materials on risk communication related to the A(H1N1) virus outbreak.

Tasks Performed

During this period, the team updated the strategic work plan for the 2009 API Communication Strategy for LAC, which provides information regarding all tasks, activities, events, deliverables, and important deadlines, such as kick-off and brainstorming meetings, clearances, and reviews in calendar form. During this period, adjustments to the work plan were made to ensure appropriate response to the communication needs in the field in response to the recent A(H1N1) outbreak, which included: 1) targeted identification and dissemination of IEC and crisis communication materials, media materials, media messages, spokesperson resources in the field; 2) monitoring and analysis of media coverage; and, 3) weekly briefings and discussions about messaging and materials distribution with directors of communications of national emergency response committees, ministries of health and Agriculture, members of communication subcommittees for avian and influenza preparedness and response, and NGOs.

1. Task 1: Needs Assessment

- 1.1. The English version of the fifth edition of the Communication Resources for Avian and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response was finalized and disseminated among LAC countries.

2. Task 2: Communication Strategy

- 2.1. Initial versions of national API communication strategies and supporting materials in a number of LAC countries, in close collaboration with USAID staff, partners, key in-country stakeholders, as well as communicators representing various country sectors, and federal and local levels of government. Most strategies, however, lack operational plans needed for rapid implementation. Future work will be done to refine, complete, and standardize the different countries' strategies; to develop complete operational details so that the strategies are ready for implementation when needed; and, to provide TA to participating countries to strengthen their capacity to implement effective communication responses to AI or pandemic outbreaks.
- 2.2. Country-Specific TA. During this period, Links Media conducted telephone conversations with USAID country mission API contacts and country government officials from Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Saint Lucia regarding PI communications and TA. The interviews served various purposes, including the following:
 - To conduct a preliminary assessment of the status of the country's pandemic planning activities and available materials.
 - To attain accurate contact information for the country's pandemic planning and response to facilitate collaboration.
 - To determine possible dates for country visits.
 - To follow up on previous conversations about TA.

Key findings from these communications are detailed below.

- All countries: Communication materials, such as the op-ed article about the importance of PI preparedness in the country, the Q&A document with basic information about API, the technical bulletin about how to develop and place editorial articles in the media, and various materials on risk communication related to the A(H1N1) virus outbreak, were disseminated to country contacts and partners.
- Bolivia: Communicated and initiated two conference calls with Horacio Espinoza, Bolivia's point of contact for API and the regional technical supervisor for STOP AI/PROSALUD¹, and Stanley Blanco, USAID/Bolivia health advisor. Based on these discussions, the country's current communication strategy was determined not be well-defined and lacks structure. H. Espinoza indicated that the country currently

¹ PROSALUD is a Bolivian non-profit private institution that provides community services within the framework of the Bolivian health national policy.

lacks resources to produce and distribute IEC resources to prepare and respond to an influenza outbreak. S. Blanco also indicated that a national network of risk communicators and an API technical committee are consolidating their members as well as their specific functions to streamline efforts.

- Dominican Republic: Communicated with director of epidemiology in Ministry of Health and Social Assistance (MOHSA), Dr. Raquel Pimentel, who agreed to review and submit a completed assessment tool for further discussion on TA needs. Submission of the completed assessment tool is still pending.
- Ecuador: Continued to work and have frequent communication with Margarita Salazar, from Ecuador's Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and leader of the inter-institution communications committee for PI. In coordination with M. Salazar and USAID/Ecuador, team members conducted a country visit to Quito, Ecuador, from May 25 to 29, 2009, to acquire information from local health authorities through interviews and surveys for the development of a PI communication strategy and SOPs. The information collected has served to further develop and prepare content for the working meeting to be held in Quito on July 14 to 16, 2009.
- Guatemala: Communicated with Lily Quintanilla, health promoter for the USAID-sponsored project Calidad en Salud who was referred by Elena Hurtado, a leader of this program in the country. As agreed, the assessment tool was sent to her to review and complete. The completed assessment and the national plan were submitted and are undergoing review.
- Panama: Continued to communicate with Edwin Avila, communication official for Panama's MOH and responsible for the communication plan and the sub communication committee for API in the country. E. Avila submitted a completed assessment tool, which demonstrated that the strategic communication and operational plans exist and are pending approval by the National Committee for API. Also communicated with E. Avila about the country's preparation activities to respond to the A(H1N1) virus outbreak and provided him with various risk communication materials.

In addition, through emails and phone conversations regularly updated Nilka Varela (USAID/Panama) about the communication and TA provided to Panama via E. Avila, and to attain up-to-date information about the country's needs and activities conducted to respond to the A(H1N1) virus outbreak. Also maintained communication with N. Varela to determine what advocacy activities were needed for outreach to political actors and government officials.

- Paraguay: Continued to communicate with Ivan Allende, director of epidemiology for Paraguay's MOH, and Ana Maria Paredes, director of communications for Paraguay's MOH, to determine the TA needed to develop country's communication strategy and SOPs.

I. Allende and A. Paredes have been invited to attend the working meeting to be held Quito, Ecuador, on July 2009, in order to present Paraguay's experience with A(H1N1), dengue, and yellow fever outbreaks, and to promote collaboration between the two countries. Additionally, the country representatives will be reviewing the first draft of the communications protocol for Paraguay's command center.

- Saint Lucia: In collaboration with the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO), conducted a meeting in Saint Lucia on April 2, 2009, to review the communication strategy and SOPs developed during a previous working meeting organized and facilitated by Links Media in July 2008. During the recent meeting, participants representing 12 government sectors, that are a part of the national PI preparedness and response communications committee, provided valuable feedback and updates to the existing version of the communication strategy and the SOPs. The main meeting objectives were to finalize the country's communication strategy and SOPs, develop a monitoring and evaluation plan, and develop a dissemination plan. The country's updated communication plan has been approved by its Government. The National Influenza Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan can be found: www.stlucia.gov.lc/docs/nemo/nrp/plans/influenza_plan/national_influenza_plan.htm.

Links Media also participated in a table-top exercise, which was organized by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Agency and the U.S. Southern Command, in Castries, Saint Lucia, on April 17. The main objective of this exercise was to test the national PI strategy and communication plan. Links Media participated as observers to monitor and evaluate the execution of the communication plan during the drills. (For observations regarding the table-top exercise, please refer to Annex 1.)

3. Task 3: Translation of Existing Materials into Spanish and Other Languages Spoken in LAC

- 3.1. The English version the fifth edition of the Communication Resources for Avian and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response was translated, finalized, and disseminated among LAC countries.

4. Task 4: Design and Development of Messages and Materials

- 4.1. The first draft of the National API Communication Strategy and SOPs Planning Working Meeting Facilitator's Guide and the How to Develop a National Pandemic Influenza Communication Strategy and SOPs Facilitator's Handbook was finalized. These materials will be used during the upcoming Ecuador meeting; additional revisions will be made based on observations and feedback.

5. Task 5: Dissemination of Materials

- 5.1. The database of key country contacts from USAID missions, government agencies, and other professionals working on the issue of API in the represented countries, including representatives of NGOs and other international or regional organizations, is continuously updated. The database is used when sharing materials and promotes sharing of information and materials among the countries.

Future Activities

1. Task 1. Needs Assessment

- 1.1. Assess and monitor communication needs of 22 countries in the LAC region with special attention to Bolivia, Guatemala, Haiti, Guyana, Paraguay, Ecuador, and Eastern Caribbean Countries, including Saint Lucia, Dominica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. Assessments will be conducted on a monthly basis using the rapid assessment tool (Communication Needs for API Response in the LAC Region Rapid Appraisal Instrument). Activities also will be monitored of activities will be conducted. Results will be published in the next Quarterly report.

2. Task 2. Development of Communications Strategy

- 2.1. Work with Saint Lucia's NEMO to get government approval of the protocol for the national crisis communications plan entitled National Influenza Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan, Volume 3: Communications Strategy. Co-host a meeting with high level authorities and multisector partners to share the plan and get commitments for securing needed resources for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the protocol. Plan and implement comprehensive knowledge dissemination activities targeted to local governments.
- 2.2. Update Ecuador's national crisis communication plan and protocol to include lessons learned from the recent outbreak of A/H1N1, and develop a monitoring and evaluation plan with members of the multisectorial communications technical group. Plan knowledge dissemination activities targeted to local governments.

- 2.3. Complete Paraguay's Ministry of Health crisis communication plan and protocol, develop the structure and protocol for the crisis response team of the command center of the Office of Surveillance, and obtain approval of the Minister of Health for the submission of the plan and protocol to the National Commission for Preparedness and Response of Avian and Pandemic Influenza. Plan knowledge dissemination activities targeted to local governments.
- 2.4. Work with to communication technical working groups of the countries of Bolivia, Guatemala, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua in the updating, completion and dissemination of the crisis communication protocol to the National Commission for Preparedness and Response of Avian and Pandemic Influenza and local governments.

3. Task 3. Translation of Existing Materials

- 3.1. Translate into Guaraní H1N1 low literacy materials planned by MOH Health Promotion in Paraguay focusing on symptoms, covering cough and care of the sick.

4. Task 4. Design and Development

- 4.1. Develop the sixth edition of Communication Resources for Avian and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response in English and Spanish.
- 4.2. Develop virtual tools for crisis communication design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A series of crisis communications tools have been developed and used in previous training and capacity building activities conducted by the team. Due to the increasing demand for reviewing and updating crisis communication plans and existing resources, there is a need to create virtual tools for self-administered training. These tools will be accessible via the project's Web site (www.influenzalac.org), as well as through email and CD-ROM distribution.

5. Task 5. Dissemination of Materials

- 5.1. Disseminate the sixth edition of *Communication Resources for Avian and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response* in English and Spanish via the Web and email to 20 countries in the LAC region including: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and the Eastern Caribbean countries of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines. Recipients targeted include: health communication professionals, health promotion and education professionals, health policy makers, crisis response authorities, communication staff members at the offices of leaders or decision makers, health professionals, and professionals from the media. All levels of government are included in this dissemination strategy, including Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Education, Essential Services, Security, Tourism, Fishery, Transportation, Emergency Response, Trade and Commerce, and others. In addition, target professionals from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector and large business organizations,

civil society, academic institutions, telecommunications, mass and local media. In addition, every in-country activity that is executed will promote this resource in the field.

- 5.2. Promote virtual tools for crisis communication design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation on the project's Web site (www.influenzalac.org), as well as through email and CD-ROM distribution.
- 5.3. Email and Internet-based promotion of virtual library of resources accessible on the project's Web site (www.influenzalac.org).
- 5.4. Develop a dissemination and promotion plan to generate interest and encourage adoption of the *Surviving a Pandemic: What Your Municipality Can Do* tool kit.

Challenges

The recent outbreak of A/H1N1 have raised a number of critical issues related to the application of effective communication actions specifically in regards to 1) the need for supporting and promoting political discussions at international, national and local levels countries; 2) the imperative to establish protocols that enable international, national and local level collaboration and solidarity; 3) the necessity for multisectorial and local governments participation; and 4) the requirement for updating and fine tuning public education messages to ensure that individuals understand what to expect (i.e. diagnostic tests, availability of vaccines, level of virulence), how to recognize symptoms, when to get medical care, how to prevent the spread of the virus by adhering to prescribed hygienic practices.

One of the biggest challenges in the fight against the ongoing H1N1 virus is going to be effectively communicating crucial information about the virus in a timely manner. The recent fast-spreading outbreak of swine influenza A (H1N1) is causing concern across the LAC region among the general population and news media. With no vaccine in place, WHO recommends proactive measures as the best solution to preventing more illness and loss of life, making rapid and pervasive communication critical. Various governments in our region are sending health alerts about contagious diseases to its constituents and to the public to educate them about preventative measures and guidance when symptoms appear.

Currently, many crisis communication plans are outdated and lack well defined protocols for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The need for multimedia materials continues to be critical, as well as the necessity for rapid and continues exchange of information, resources and materials across the Region.

In support of these needs, Links Media plans to focus our resources in these principal areas: 1) creation of virtual TA tools, 2) outreach and partnership building, 3) promotion of south-to-south collaboration in the development, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and exchange of information and materials with an emphasis in local municipal governments,

private sector, and multisectorial involvement in Bolivia, Guatemala, Haiti, Ecuador, Paraguay, Guyana, and Eastern Caribbean countries, and 4) marketing and promotion of web-based repository of information and social networking.

Financials

Report on accrued expenditure will be submitted separately.

Annex 1



FA HUM TABLE TOP EXERCISE Saint Lucia, April 17, 2009

Links Media Observations

Prepared by: Marisabel Sánchez, MPH, Senior Advisor for Avian and Pandemic Influenza Communication Technical Assistance; and María Recio, MA, Project Manager for Avian and Pandemic Influenza Communication Technical Assistance

Prepared: Friday, April 17, 2009

Submitted to: NEMO, Saint Lucia, WI

1. Objectives for the exercise were met particularly those related to determining potential problems and selecting corrective actions. Communicational gaps between Ministries and Government Information Services (GIS) were identified as significant. It was determined that GIS has an important role to play but greater definition of timing and specific action is needed.
2. Information dissemination and feedback within Ministries seems to work well. However, gaps and significant delays in information sharing and feedback across Ministries are present. Better communication coordination across Ministries is required.
3. Efficiency of the information flow across some Ministries was not as fluid as it should be and clear lines of communication and the timing on when, how, and who makes decisions needs to be better defined among sectors.
4. Personnel within Ministries, with the exemption of a few Ministries, namely National Security, Air and Seaports, seemed well aware of the communication protocols.
5. WebEOC was an important tool for information exchange. Electronic and print versions of pre-produced (templates) communication materials should be made available for efficiency during an emergency. Ministries were developing content for press materials on the spot, taking too much time from the communicators who were not properly immersed in the content.

6. Lack of understanding or agreement in having all Ministries go to NEMO for coordination of the National EOC was the communication response's greatest weakness. The NEOC should be confirmed as the primary command center and source of information.

7. In summary, overall communication flow was efficient and timely. The teams were extremely professional and cooperative. They were committed to dialoguing and finding solutions. They were critical of themselves and each other but always acted in a positive and collaborative manner. When disagreements emerged, they seemed to always keep it positive, though a stress management team could have been useful to help ease anxiety and stress. There are a few gaps that need to be worked out, particularly about the communication role of the National EOC, the need for a National EOC communication team with clearly defined lines of responsibilities, the relationship between the Ministry-based EOC and the NEOC and its communication staff, and better definition of cross-Ministry communication flow.