

AVIAN AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN LAC

Ecuador Trip Report

Quito, Ecuador, February 15-18, 2009

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About Links Media

Links Media is a full-service communications company providing 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 is leading communication and advocacy efforts in support of the development and implementation of avian influenza and pandemic influenza communication strategies and collateral material development for the Latin American and Caribbean region, an initiative funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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ACRONYMS

Agrocalidad	Ecuadoran agency to ensure quality in agriculture
AI	avian influenza
AME	Association of Ecuadoran Municipalities
CONAVE	National Association of Poultry Farmers of Ecuador
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IICC	Inter-Institutional Communications Committee for Avian and Pandemic Influenza
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MAGAP	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture, and Fishing
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PI	pandemic influenza
SESA	Ecuadoran service for agriculture and livestock health
TA	technical assistance
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

BACKGROUND

Links Media provides expert consultation services to the U.S. Agency for International Development (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. In preparation for outbreaks of avian influenza (AI) or a possible human pandemic, the development of a comprehensive communication strategy and accompanying collateral materials for the region is pivotal. Such tools also support USAID's Avian and Human Pandemic Influenza Response Unit in helping missions and regional bureaus to 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.

Work to date on this task has resulted in initial national avian and pandemic influenza communication strategies in most LAC countries. The resulting communication strategies vary in terms of the level of detail they present. All strategies, however, lack operational plans enabling them to be quickly implemented when needed. They focus primarily on the pre-pandemic phases, which are characterized by a low risk of human AI cases.

During fiscal year (FY) 2008, Links Media, under contract with USAID and working in collaboration with partners in LAC countries, provided technical assistance (TA) for the development of several planning and capacity-building activities. Links Media has continued to support LAC's development, implementation, and monitoring of strategic communication plans for the pandemic alert phase, which is characterized by little or no human-to-human transmission, and the pandemic phase, during which efficient and sustained transmission of a new strain of influenza virus among humans occurs.

PURPOSE OF THE TRIP

From February 15 to 18, 2009, Links Media's Marisabel Sánchez and Fermín Lares traveled to Quito, Ecuador, to hold meetings with the Director-General of Health from the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), members of the MOPH's Technical Institutional Committee for Pandemic Influenza, the communication director of the same institution, the Inter-Institutional Communications Committee for Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IICC), and Daniel Sánchez-Bustamante and Paulyna Martínez, from USAID/Ecuador. (See Appendix A for the Agenda.)

The purpose of the meetings was to meet with in-country staff, USAID officials, government officials from the MOPH and other agencies to discuss the development of a communication strategy for avian and pandemic influenza in Ecuador, assess TA needs for responding to a pandemic, and plan future activities related to making this strategy operational.

Prior to the trip, Links Media had received and analyzed the existing national plan for pandemic influenza (PI) preparedness and response (August 2008), and the communication strategy, presented as a section of the national plan.

TRIP ACTIVITIES

Findings

Meeting with the Director-General of Health

Although a meeting was scheduled with the Director-General of Health, Dr. Carmen Laspina, we were received by Dr. Washington Estrella, direct advisor to Dr. Laspina, who acted on her behalf and apologized for the unavailability of the director-general at the moment due to a last-minute schedule conflict. Marisabel Sánchez and Fermín Lares from Links Media were accompanied by Paulyna Martínez from USAID/Ecuador. Margarita Salazar, responsible for the MOPH's PI communication strategy, also attended the meeting. Dr. Cecilia Paredes, leader in the ministry of all activities concerning PI, and Dr. Luis Flor, chief of Epidemiology, joined the group later on.

Marisabel Sánchez informed about Links Media's work in LAC to provide TA in communications for avian and pandemic influenza, and also to respond to crises caused by other diseases. She explained that in Ecuador, this TA could be channeled to (1) improve the PI communication strategy to make it more operational, (2) develop communication materials, and (3) develop capacity building for media relations concerning AI and PI.

Dr. Estrella showed interest in knowing the applicability in Ecuador of what has been done by Links Media and USAID in other LAC countries, and emphasized the need to help Ecuador be prepared and able to respond with a good communication strategy adapted to the diverse, multiethnic, and multicultural nature of the country.

Dr. Estrella mentioned the MOPH's need for improving its epidemiological surveillance system, the importance of connecting the network of services that the ministry provides all its programs, and the role that good communications play in all this. He also saw the need to enrich the communication component of the contingency plan to face a potential influenza pandemic in Ecuador.

Paulyna Martínez (USAID) reminded the attendees about simulations planned for July 2009 to test the contingency plan for PI in Ecuador, and the importance of including communications as part of these exercises. Margarita Salazar (Communications, MOPH) discussed PI-related media training received the week before by several of the ministry's directors and epidemiologists, and announced upcoming media training for health communicators the following week. She said that what communicators at the ministry need now is training or TA in monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Meeting with Members of the MOPH's Technical Institutional Committee for PI

This meeting took place as a continuation of the previously scheduled meeting with the Director-General of Health. Dr. Cecilia Paredes and Dr. Luis Flor discussed the activities of this institutional committee. Dr. Paredes explained that the committee reports to the Director-General of Health and that they started to work on PI in 2005. The MOPH developed a contingency plan for PI that should be reviewed, she said, and made part of an inter-institutional plan developed jointly with the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment. The other two ministries currently have their own PI plans. Dr. Paredes informed attendees about a recent evaluation of the

MOPH's plan for PI made by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), which regarded it as the second best PI preparation plan among the LAC countries. She also said that their PI contingency plan has helped in preventing other kinds of influenza in the country.

Dr. Luis Flor talked about the surveillance system they have in Ecuador, and the four sentinel units created across the country for surveillance. He said they would like to strengthen their operative units, do simulations, and inform the public about AI and PI. In particular, he stressed the need for the public to be able to distinguish among AI, PI, and seasonal influenza. Dr. Flor said information should start at the MOPH by cascading knowledge to all operative units. Dr. Paredes supported Dr. Flor and stated that it is also important to let the general public know more about what the MOPH is doing concerning PI prevention and response.

Dr. Estrella confirmed that the Director-General's office is very willing to support and strengthen what other departments in the ministry are doing in order to prevent and control PI. He acknowledged weaknesses in information and promotion and considered the TA that USAID and Links Media were offering in communications for PI a good opportunity. He called for coordinated work with the ministry, focusing on a plan with a timeline and evaluating what is needed and when. He asked for assistance in M&E, and for good communication between the technical committee for PI in the ministry and the communication subcommittee led by Margarita Salazar.

Meeting with the Director of Communication of the MOPH

This was a brief meeting with Margarita Cañar, Director of Communication. She gave her support to the work Margarita Salazar of the MOPH is doing for PI communications and welcomed any TA to be provided by Links Media and USAID. Marisabel Sánchez, Fermín Lares, and Paulyna Martínez attended this meeting.

Meeting with the MOPH's PI Communication Team

This was a preparatory meeting for the following day's meeting with the IICC. Enith Cevallos, from the MOPH's communications office and a member of the IICC, accompanied Margarita Salazar in her talk with Marisabel Sánchez and Fermín Lares. The meeting evolved into developing a work plan for TA in communications for PI for Ecuador, to be presented to the IICC.

An agreement was reached on the following objectives of the work plan: (1) make the communication plan for PI operational, and (2) strengthen the M&E process of the plan. To accomplish the first objective, it was deemed necessary to review the current strategic communication plan and make recommendations (Links Media); draft an operational plan (MOPH); and develop a 3-day workshop with the IICC to prepare an operational multi-sector and inter-institutional communication plan (in Quito, facilitated by Links Media). For the second objective, it was deemed necessary to identify monitoring activities for the first year of implementation (MOPH, Links Media); develop a methodology for evaluation (MOPH, Links Media); support tests of communication activities at the central level (Links Media); support tests of communication activities at the provincial level (Links Media); and support inter-institutional tests (table-tops) for the communication aspects of the plan (Links Media).

Meeting with the IICC

The IICC is composed of several government institutions and a representative of the private sector. Government institutions are MOPH; the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fishing (MAGAP); Agencia Ecuatoriana de Aseguramiento de la Calidad del Agro/Servicio Ecuatoriano de Sanidad Agropecuaria (Agrocalidad/SESA) (Ecuadoran agency to ensure quality in Agriculture/Ecuadoran service for agriculture and livestock health); the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of the Environment; the National Association of Poultry Farmers of Ecuador (CONAVE); and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). (See Appendix B for the list of meeting attendees.)

The meeting started with a presentation by Marisabel Sánchez that included the framework in which Links Media provides TA in communication for PI in LAC. Ms. Sánchez presented a table describing the work plan for TA in communication for Ecuador previously discussed with the MOPH communication team. The book *Communication Resources for Avian Influenza and Pandemic Preparedness and Response*, prepared for health communicators in LAC (in Spanish), was distributed during the meeting.

The work plan was validated by the IICC, and another objective was added: to make the IICC's activities operational by Links Media reviewing their work plan, making recommendations, and supporting some dissemination activities. (Appendix C shows the work plan agreed upon at this meeting.)

In addition, Links Media agreed to hold weekly conference calls with Margarita Salazar to update each other on the development of the plan and the workshop scheduled for May 5-7 (prior to the simulations for the general contingency plan set for July).

Meeting with Daniel Sánchez-Bustamante, Acting Director of USAID/Ecuador

On Thursday, February 17, Links Media staff briefed Daniel Sánchez-Bustamante about all meetings with MOPH officials to assess the status of plans and activities for PI preparedness and response in Ecuador. Paulyna Martínez also attended the meeting. Links Media staff discussed the work plan developed during the visit.

Meeting with FAO Representative

On Friday, February 18, Links Media briefed Dr. Iván Angulo Chacón, and Juan Pablo Viteri, FAO's Representative in Ecuador, and Information and Communications Technologies Assistant, respectively, about our activities in the country with the communication committee.

The FAO Representative expressed interest in actively participating in development and dissemination activities. Additionally, he offered support in the development and dissemination of materials and in establishing linkages with organizations such as the *Asociación de Municipalidades Ecuatorianas* (Association of Ecuadoran Municipalities, AME). Dr. Angulo extended an invitation to USAID and Links Media to participate in an upcoming demonstration of a virtual school designed by AME to disseminate information.

Recommendations and Next Activities

Meeting with the Director-General of Health

Links Media recommended including communications as an area to be tested in July 2009, along with the contingency plan for PI in Ecuador. The recommendation was well received by the office of the Director-General of Health.

Meeting with members of the MOPH's Technical Institutional Committee for PI

Links Media recommended disseminating the results of PAHO's evaluation of the MOPH's plan for PI among the general public, highlighting that it is the best PI preparedness and response plan in South America. Links Media indicated its availability to help in developing a work plan for TA in communications for PI in the country, which would include a timeline, assistance with M&E, and recommendations for improving communication between the technical committee for PI in the ministry and the communication subcommittee.

Meeting with the Director of Communication of the MOPH

Links Media recommended working immediately on a work plan to make the current PI communication strategy operational and to create mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of this plan. A meeting with the communication team for PI in the ministry was held right afterwards to discuss the work plan.

Meeting with the MOPH's Communication Team for PI

As described under the trip activities, Links Media discussed a work plan with this team and agreed on making the current communication plan operational, strengthening the M&E, and helping with actions necessary in reaching these goals.

Meeting with the IICC

Links Media recommended making the activities of the IICC operational. After reviewing their own operational plan, Links Media will make more recommendations if necessary. Another recommendation made during this meeting was to have weekly follow-up conversations with Margarita Salazar on the development of activities in the general TA work plan.

Meeting with FAO Representative

Links Media will maintain communication with FAO about country activities via email and will coordinate with USAID Ecuador for participation in the upcoming demonstration of a virtual school designed by AME to disseminate information.

APPENDIX A: AGENDA

AGENDA: AVIAN INFLUENZA COMMUNICATIONS ASSESSMENT February 16-17, 2009

Marisabel Sánchez
Fermín Lares

Time	Monday, February 16	Tuesday, February 17
8:00		
8:30		
9:00		Comité Interinstitucional de Comunicaciones en la PAHO
9:45		
10:00		
10:30	Dra. Carmen Laspina, Directora General de Salud, en el Ministerio de Salud	
11:00	Comité Institucional Técnico - Ministerio de Salud	
11:30		
12:00		
12:30	LUNCH	LUNCH
14:00		
14:30	Margarita Salazar, Ministerio de Salud	
15:00		
15:30		
16:00		Debriefing Daniel Sánchez-Bustamante, USAID Mission Director
16:30		

APPENDIX B: LIST OF IICC MEETING ATTENDEES

LIST OF ATTENDEES FOR THE INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE FOR AVIAN AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA MEETING

February 17, 2009 9 am

Name	Organization	Email	Phone
Gloria Huilca	Ministry of Education	gehuilc@yahoo.es	254 9906/ 092329071
Diva Altamirano	CONAVE- QUANTUM	daltamirano@quantum-informe.com	099725349/ 2448460/
Cardina Celi	Agrocalidad	cceci@sesa.gov.ec	091896597
Margarita Salazar	Ministry of Health	jormarsalazar@hotmail.com	096079425
Enith Cevallos F.	Ministry of Health	ecevallos@msp.gov.ec	098751869
Silvia Velasco	Ministry of Agriculture	comunicacion@mag.gov.ec	084674678
Cynthia Navas M.	Ministry of Agriculture	Cynthianavas07@hotmail.com	3960103
Juan Pablo Viteri	FAO	Juanpablo.viteri@fao.org	2905923
Marisabel Sánchez	Links Media	msanchez@linksmedia.net	(301) 987 5495
Fermín Lares	Links Media	flares@linksmedia.net	(301) 987 5495

APPENDIX C: WORK PLAN

ESTRATEGIA DE COMUNICACIÓN PARA LA INFLUENZA AVIAR Y PANDEMICA, ECUADOR

Plan de trabajo Feb-Sep 2009

Objetivo	Actividades	Pasos siguientes/tareas	Productos	Resultados	Recursos	Fechas de trabajo
1) Operacionalizar las actividades del comité técnico de comunicación	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Revisar el plan de trabajo del comité técnico de comunicación y hacer recomendaciones. - Acompañar el desarrollo del plan de trabajo. -Acompañar una de las actividades de divulgación. 	<p>El comité técnico inicia su borrador y envía el plan para su revisión a LM (dos semanas a partir del 17 de febrero)</p> <p>LM revisa el plan y hace recomendaciones</p>	Plan de trabajo de 12 meses del comité de comunicación.	Actividad de divulgación completada.	Revisión técnica, materiales y costos de una actividad de divulgación.	FEB-SEP 2009
2) Operacionalización del plan de comunicación	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Revisar el plan estratégico y hacer recomendaciones. - Elaborar el borrador del plan operacional -Facilitar una reunión de trabajo de tres días con el comité técnico de comunicación. -Revisión multisectorial. 	<p>Comité técnico de comunicación envía borrador existente del plan estratégico.</p> <p>LM provee herramientas de planificación para elaborar el plan operacional.</p> <p>Comité técnico de comunicación comienza a elaborar un plan operacional.</p>	Plan de comunicación interinstitucional y multisectorial	Taller de trabajo con el comité técnico de comunicación.	Revisión técnica, facilitación, materiales de la reunión y apoyo logístico.	FEB-JUN 2009

Objetivo	Actividades	Pasos siguientes/tareas	Productos	Resultados	Recursos	Fechas de trabajo
3) Fortalecer el proceso de monitoreo y evaluación del plan de comunicación	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Identificar actividades de monitoreo para el primer año de implementación. -Desarrollar una metodología de evaluación. -Acompañar ensayo de acciones comunicacionales en el nivel central. -Acompañar ensayo de acciones de comunicación en el nivel provincial. -Acompañar la simulación interinstitucional de la línea de intervención de comunicación. 	Comité técnico de comunicación envía ejemplos de planes de M&E de programas de comunicación del Ministerio de Salud.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Plan de monitoreo y evaluación. -Herramientas de monitoreo y evaluación. 	Acciones de comunicación probadas y validadas.	Revisión técnica, facilitación, materiales de la reunión y apoyo logístico.	FEB-SEP 2009