

MONTHLY ACTIVITY REPORT

AVIAN AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR LAC

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Links Media, LLC
707 Conservation Drive, Suite 300
Gaithersburg, MD 20878
T: 301-987-5495
F: 301-987-5498
dfreitas@linksmedia.net
www.linksmedia.net

Submitted by Debora B. Freitas Lopez and Maria Recio
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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 months of August and September, 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.
- Initiated work on the development of the sixth edition of the *Resources for Preparation and Response to Pandemic H1N1 and Avian Influenza, A Virtual Library* in English. Upon CTO review and approval, this document will be translated into Spanish. Both versions will then be disseminated to communicators in LAC.
- Continued to provide TA to Ecuador for improving their communication strategy for API. Activities were based on the results of a third onsite visit to conduct a working meeting in July, 2009. The objective of the working meeting was to assist the pandemic influenza National Inter-institutional Committee of Communication in further developing their Operational Communication Plan that will include Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan, and Work plan, as part of the national strategy for API preparedness and response. A trip report of activities conducted during this visit, as well as conclusions and recommendations was also developed.
- Provided TA to Paraguay's Multisectorial Sub-Communications Committee and the National Network of Health Communication (Red Nacional de Comunicación en Salud) to 1) review their current operational preparedness and response plan and, 2) develop a M&E plan and an information protocol for the command center.
- Continued to conduct conference calls with the USAID country missions and country government officials to assess the status of national pandemic planning activities in the midst of the A(H1N1) pandemic. These calls aimed to identify specific needs for technical support and risk communications tools and resources.

- 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 process, revising the risk/crisis communication tools, as well as the conducting a concept testing of the layout for the toolkit in Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru and Saint Lucia. Activities also included preparation for the toolkit pilot test conducted in Nicaragua on August 18 to 21, 2009.
- Submitted the project Web site (www.influenzalac.org) to the CTO for review and approval. Upon approval, the 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 API Preparedness and Response, communications professionals, and nongovernmental organizations' (NGOs') partners, on the media coverage of the A(H1N1) pandemic in the LAC countries to USAID. Initially, updates were provided daily; weekly; then, monthly. The media monitoring report are now being provided quarterly.

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. Adjustments to the work plan were made to ensure appropriate response to the communication needs in the field, 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) regular 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.

Task 1: Needs Assessment

- 1.1. Links Media team began work on the development of the English version of the sixth edition of the Resources for Preparation and Response to Pandemic A(H1N1) and Avian Influenza, A Virtual Library.

Task 2: Communication Strategy

- 2.1. A number of LAC countries count on initial versions of national API communication strategies and supporting materials developed 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 and require refinement, completion, and standardization. Links Media continues to work with LAC countries to provide TA to update current Information, Education and Communication strategies for API, support implementation of country-specific operational and M&E plans, and assist countries in developing specific strategies targeted to vulnerable populations for PI caused by A(H1N1).
- 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, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, 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.

- Bolivia: Communicated and initiated three conference calls with Horacio Espinoza, Bolivia's point of contact for API and the regional technical supervisor for STOP AI/PROSALUD¹, Stanley Blanco, USAID/Bolivia health advisor, and Susana Hannover, Bolivia's focal point for PAHO and health communicator. Based on these discussions, the country's current communication strategy was determined not be well-defined and lacks structure. Hence, in agreement with Espinoza and Hannover, it was determined that the most suitable TA required from Links Media at this moment should focus on supporting the National Communications Committee for Pandemic Influenza to develop a national risk communication strategy for PI. Currently, Links Media is coordinating with Espinoza specific dates to conduct and facilitate a three-day working meeting with the Committee for January 2010.

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

- Ecuador: Continued to work closely and have frequent communication with Margarita Salazar, from Ecuador's Ministry of Public Health and leader of pandemic influenza National Inter-institutional Committee of Communication, as well as with Juan Pablo Viteri, member of the committee and communicator from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Team members provided the committee with a thorough review of the first draft of the communication strategy and SOPs developed by the country.
- Guatemala: Initiated and maintained communication with Baudilio Lopez, USAID/Guatemala health advisor, to identify TA needed to improve the current communication strategy and operational preparedness and response plan. In previous communication with Lopez, the importance of working closely with the director of health programs at the Ministry of Health (MOH), Maria Marta Tuna, was expressed. Lopez offered to facilitate the scheduling of the initial meeting with Tuna. Links Media team maintained in communication with Lopez in order to ensure the coordination of this conference call. In recent communication with Lopez, Links Media was informed that the call be postponed indefinitely due to the country's current delicate political situation with regards to the health sector (the Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Cerezo, was removed from his position by the President. As a result, several key contacts suggested by the Mission also were removed from their positions.)
- Guyana: Continued to communicate with Dr. Zoila Fletcher, Pan American Health Organization in Guyana, to define TA for the country. Links Media team is currently coordinating and planning a site visit for early 2010 to 1) review the PI national plan and the communication strategy, and 2) assist the MOH in strengthening the newly-established social mobilization committee to provide effective communication services to programs and departments in the MOH in support of the national health agenda.
- Haiti: Communicated with Jorge Velasco, USAID/Haiti Head Health and Education Office, to determine the TA needed to support the development of messages and materials for communication activities.
- Panama: Communicated with Nilka Varela (USAID/Panama) to confirm contact information for the new authorities in the MOH. Also, provided Varela with IEC materials developed for Central American countries in collaboration with Panama's MOH.

- 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 1) finalize the development of the country's communication strategy and SOPs, the M&E plan, and the information protocol for the command center; and 2) plan and coordinate a working meeting to introduce these documents to Multisectorial Sub-Communications Committee and the National Network of Health Communication (Red Nacional de Comunicación en Salud).

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

3.1 Translation activities will be initiated once the English version of the *Resources for Preparation and Response to Pandemic A(H1N1) and Avian Influenza, A Virtual Library* has been approved by the CTO.

Task 4: Design and Development of Messages and Materials

4.1. The final draft of the project Web site was submitted to the CTO for review and approval. Currently, revisions are being made to the Web site based on CTO feedback. A final version will be submitted to the CTO for review and approval. Upon approval, the Web site will be made live.

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.

5.2. The toolkit dissemination plan was updated by Links Media team to offer diverse alternatives to promote and distribute this product among target groups in the LAC countries. The plan presents additional dissemination opportunities that will replace the proposed dissemination conference for Spanish speaking countries in the region, originally scheduled for October 14 and 15 in Panama City.

Future Activities

Task 1: Needs Assessment

2.1 Continue to assess and monitor communication needs of 22 countries in the LAC region with special focus on Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Paraguay, and Eastern Caribbean Countries (Saint Lucia, Dominica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago). Assessments will be regularly conducted using the rapid assessment tool (Communication Needs for API Response in the LAC Region Rapid Appraisal Instrument). Results will be published in the next Quarterly report.

Task 2: Development of Communications Strategy

- 3.1 Finalize the sixth edition of the *Resources for Preparation and Response to Pandemic A(H1N1) and Avian Influenza, A Virtual Library* in English and Spanish, and disseminate it to health communicators in LAC
- 3.2 Co-host a dissemination meeting with high level authorities and multisector partners to share the national crisis communications plan entitled *National Influenza Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan, Volume 3: Communications Strategy*, 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.
- 3.3 Finalize Ecuador's national crisis communication plan and protocol to include lessons learned from the A(H1N1) pandemic, and complete development of a M&E plan with members of the pandemic influenza National Inter-institutional Committee of Communication. In addition, plan knowledge dissemination activities targeted to local governments.
- 3.4 Complete Paraguay's MOH 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 MOH for the submission of the plan and protocol to the National Commission for Preparedness and Response of Avian and Pandemic Influenza. Also, plan knowledge dissemination activities targeted to local governments.
- 3.5 Plan and coordinate a working meeting in Guyana for early 2010 to review the national PI plan and the communication strategy, and assist the MOH in strengthening the newly-established social mobilization committee to provide effective communication services to programs and departments in the MOH in support of the national health agenda. Materials for this meeting will be developed by Links Media team.
- 3.6 Assist communication technical working groups of the countries of Bolivia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, and Nicaragua in updating, completing, and disseminating the crisis communication protocol to the national commissions for preparedness and response of API and local governments.

Task 3: Translation of Existing Materials

- 4.1 Translate selected A(H1N1) messages and materials to support health communication activities planned by the ministries of health focusing on symptoms, covering cough, and care of the sick.
- 4.2 Translate into Spanish the sixth edition of the *Resources for Preparation and Response to Pandemic A(H1N1) and Avian Influenza, A Virtual Library*.

Task 4: Task 4. Design and Development

- 5.1 Complete development of the sixth edition of *Resources for Preparation and Response to Pandemic A(H1N1) and Avian Influenza, A Virtual Library* in English and Spanish.
- 5.2 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.

Task 5: Dissemination of Materials

- 5.1 Disseminate the sixth edition of the *Resources for Preparation and Response to Pandemic A(H1N1) and Avian Influenza, A Virtual Library* in English and Spanish via the Web and email to 22 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 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 Implement proposed 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 A(H1N1) pandemic has demonstrated the need to address 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 and where to get medical care, how to prevent the spread of the virus by adhering to prescribed hygienic practices.

One of the biggest challenges has been to effectively communicate crucial information about the virus in a timely manner. The current influenza pandemic has caused much concern across the LAC region among the general population and news media. Although an in-production vaccine will be made available to the public this fall, the key to preventing more illness and loss of life is to incorporate proactive measures alongside vaccination, which makes rapid and pervasive communication critical. Various governments in our region are sending health alerts about contagious diseases to their constituents and to the public to educate them about preventative measures and guidance when symptoms appear. They also are making the public aware of the availability of the vaccine in the coming months and the importance for vulnerable populations, such as young children, pregnant women, and those with chronic illnesses to be vaccinated.

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 continuous 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, M&E, 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.

