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FAO GLOBAL INITIATIVES ON REGIONAL VETERINARY LABORATORY NETWORKS

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It is recognised that regional veterinary networks are an efficient and effective means of managing infectious animal diseases. In some regions of the developing world, FAO has been supporting existing networks, while in others, through its Technical Cooperation Programmes (TCPs), FAO has been the initiator of laboratory and epidemiology networks, becoming a catalyst in the medium term and a technical backstopper in the long term, while creating/developing a sense of ownership at local, national and regional levels. FAO regional offices specialised in animal health and production play an essential role in providing necessary guidance, establishing standard operating procedures for the networks and, where no existing regional network structures exist, coordinating implementation and a phased overall development and maintenance.

Through HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) projects implemented over recent years, diagnostic capacities and laboratory capabilities have been greatly improved in many developing and in-transition countries. Continuous support is, however, required for national veterinary laboratories; medium- to long-term issues need to be addressed to build on the funds and efforts invested during the HPAI crisis. Regional laboratory networks help to: share and update information on laboratory diagnostic techniques; involve member laboratories in harmonised quality assurance programmes; develop regional technical collaborations and catalyse experience sharing; ensure periodic maintenance and calibration of equipment and instruments; ensure a minimum supply of reagents; offer opportunities to participate in diagnostic proficiency tests; assess improvement of regional technical skills and continuous training of technical staff. Regional networks also represent an ideal mechanism to foster leadership, develop regional expertise centres, enhance performance, and create tangible results that can inspire healthy emulation within and outside a given region.

Finally, it is evident that successful establishment, consolidation, and sustainability of regional networks are intrinsically linked to the recognition received and support given by national governments and their regional economic organisations.



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