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OIE LABORATORY TWINNING PROGRAMME BETWEEN EGYPT AND GERMANY ON AVIAN INFLUENZA AND NEWCASTLE DISEASE – PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES FROM THE NORTHERN TWIN LABORATORY

T.C. Harder[1], **C. Grund**[1], **H.M. Hafez**[2] **& M.M. Aly**[3]

1 OIE and National Reference Laboratories for Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease Viruses, Friedrich-Loeffler Institute (FLI), Suedufer 10, 17493 Greifswald-Insel Riems, Germany
2 Institute for Poultry Diseases, Free University, Berlin, Germany
3 Animal Health Research Institute (AHRI), Dokki, Giza, Egypt

Since 2005, Egypt has had endemic Highly pathogenic avian influenza virus (HPAIV) H5N1 infections in its poultry populations. This causes occasional spill-over infections in humans with often fatal outcomes. Egypt has taken immense and nationwide measures to control the situation and to eradicate the HPAI virus. To further strengthen the Egyptian efforts to control HPAIV, several international actions have been launched through FAO, WHO, and OIE. As part of the OIE activities, a 2-year twinning project between the national reference laboratories for Avian Influenza (AI) and Newcastle Disease (ND) of Egypt (AHRI, Giza) and Germany (FLI, Greifswald) started in October 2008.

The project set out to promote rapid molecular diagnosis and characterisation of AI and ND viruses by establishing firm links between the twin laboratories (e.g. mutual transfer of technology and knowledge with special emphasis on transfer of validated methods and reference materials). Another important goal of the co-operation is to share experience in laboratory work and animal husbandry under biosafety level 3 conditions. As an initial step a kick-off meeting at the Egyptian laboratory helped to establish personal contacts, to become familiar with the local situations, and to jointly convert ideas into a clearly defined agenda. Mutual visits of staff were used as a central tool in realising these action items. So far the FLI has offered training to seven trainees, one of whom is carrying out parts of his PhD in the framework of this project.

We interpreted “twinning” of laboratories as a chance to exchange ideas and experiences between two “siblings from one family”. Challenges faced due to differing cultural backgrounds of the people involved are coped with more easily by integration of project consultants who are at home in both societies. So far, laboratory twinning has proven a very fruitful gain in experience for both laboratories and seems a valuable opportunity to improve the quality of the diagnostic performance of the twinned laboratories.

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