

National Reference Lab for Poultry Diseases, Animal Sciences Institute, NARC

Introduction of Coordinated Avian Disease Surveillance System

Challenge

Poultry sector in Pakistan is one of the fastest growing sectors of livestock segment of agriculture based economy of the country. A steady annual growth of 10-12% has been observed since 1990 in this sector. However, one of the limiting factors in further growth in this sector has been the intermittent introduction of infectious diseases. Since 2003, Avian Influenza viruses of different types have been severely affecting the growth of commercial and backyard poultry. During the Avian Influenza virus H7N3 outbreak of 2003-4 it was realized that some nationally coordinated efforts were required to establish avian disease surveillance system in this country for the preparedness of encountering a rapid response against the introduction of any new disease.

PARC Intervention

The PARC decided to establish a National Reference Lab for Poultry Diseases (NRLPD) at the Animal Sciences Institute, NARC for which a project was got approved through PSDP for three year duration in 2005 and this lab was regularized in 2008. Since its inception, a number of sub-projects were developed to set up first Avian Influenza Surveillance and Monitoring Network throughout the country, involving 10 provincial labs, 40 regional surveillance units and 66 rapid response units. The NRLPD has been up-graded with the technical assistance of FAO and USAID to serve as Regional Leading Diagnostic Lab (RLDL) for SAARC countries in the area of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. The lab has been extending technical assistance to member states within SAARC

Outcome

The lab has so far run 8 internationally funded research projects in the area of avian health, resulting in training lab staff from national and regional labs as well as extending research assistance to 12 M. Phil. and 4 PhD students. Furthermore, due to international accreditation (ISO-17025) acquired by NRLPD, the clinical samples for avian disease diagnosis are not being dispatched abroad any more. The surveillance activities coordinated by NRLPD have led to achieve freedom for Pakistan from "bird flu" in July-2008, avoiding annual losses of USD 80-100 m

