Building capacities in Caribbean animal health in the: The VEP (Veterinary Epidemiologist / Para-Epidemiologist) Project

A. Delgado¹, C. Faverjon², T. Lefrancois², J. Shaw³, V. Gongora⁴, H. Hackshaw⁵, J. Pradel²

1. IICA, San Jose, Costa Rica; 2. CIRED UMR CMAEE, Petit Bourg, Guadeloupe; 3. USDA APHIS-IS, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; 4. Belize Poultry Association, Cayo District, Belize; 5. Vet Services, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Chair of CaribVET

Skills in Epidemiology Lacking in the Caribbean

- Region made up of over 31 countries, territories, and protectorates, with concomitant differences in language, culture, and historical experiences.
- Disease surveillance and control has historically been difficult with frequent introductions of exotic diseases and pests.
- Discontinuation of previous disease control programs left a need for personnel trained in epidemiology and emergency response.
- Need for longer-term, tailored training in epidemiology, surveillance, and emergency response.

VEP Project Design, Coordination and Evaluation

- 4-year, 2 million USD, funded by USDA APHIS-IS and implemented by IICA
- Technical coordination: USDA, IICA, CIRED
- General coordination: The Caribbean Animal Health Network (CaribVET)
- Steering Committee & Epidemiology WG: ensure that VEP project meets the needs of the participating countries, as well as the region overall
- Joint activities: participation in CaribVET meetings and trainings, sharing internal and external communication means (fora, Website, Information Bulletin, etc.)

External Evaluation

- VEPs/Working Group
- CaribVET
- Technical Coordination
- Support

Countries, Participants, and VEP Responsibilities

Jean Rodney Jacques Simon
Wendy Gonzalez
Zakia Goodwin-Diaz
Tracey Challenger
Patricia Bartlette
Malaika Glasgow
Dennis Derek Thomas
Vicki Almy
Lennox St Alme

Responsibilities transferred to the VEPs to meet Project objectives

- Assist in the building /coordination of the epidemiological surveillance network
- Participation in external evaluation of their surveillance activities by SNAT*
- Coordinate sample collection, preparation, and submission
- Design & manage surveillance databases & GIS, farmer registries & livestock census info
- Conduct disease prevalence surveys based on the country’s needs and priorities
- Emergency situations: review of plans, participate in simulation exercises
- Establish and/or maintain communication with stakeholders
- Prepare and submit regular activity reports to the CVO* and to VEP coordinators

Impacts and Conclusions

Results of the project:
- Strengthened collaboration between countries/territories through the VEPs activities
- Very positive feedback from the participants after self-evaluation of improvements in capacities
- Individual-level results based on indicators built upon action reports, show variation among the VEPs.

Conclusions:
- Project design allowed for continuation of action by CaribVET, even after project funding ends; e.g., regional emergency preparedness & capacity building - Recommendations of the VEP project integrated in the Work Plan of the Epigraf of CaribVET
- For future capacity building projects, recommend: improved participant oversight and development of concise indicators for monitoring training and activities; planning for formal recognition of the training program to motivate participants to complete all training

For more information on the project, visit http://www.caribvet.net/en/vep-project

Abbreviations used:
- CAP: Caribbean Animal Protection Program
- SNAT: Surveillance Network Assessment Tool/Tool from the Epidemiology Working Group of CaribVET
- CVO: Chief Veterinary Officer
- CSU: Colorado State University

VEP Project Objectives

Specific

- Create, strengthen, & maintain coordinated & harmonized databases
- Develop & reinforce national surveillance systems

General

- To strengthen the animal health surveillance and rapid response systems of National Veterinary Services in the Caribbean Region through the formation of a group of veterinary epidemiologists or para-epidemiologists: the “VEPs”

Program and practical implementation in the countries

- Capacity Building Program: developed by epidemiologists from IICA, USDA, Colorado State, Univ. of Florida, & CIRED - Theory, practice, & hands-on experience
- One participant (a "VEP") nominated by the government in each participating country, formerly involved in CAP program - VEP Working as full-time government employees throughout the project, allowing for immediate application of knowledge and skills gained from training
- Funds provided to pay incentives (participation) & to purchase surveillance supplies
- Monthly Action Report used for follow-up of VEP activities

Training program focused on 5 key areas

- Workshops, online & short course trainings
- In-country epidemiologic projects completed in collaboration with a mentor
- 2 outbreak simulation exercises
- 1 final regional Simulation exercise involving all VEP countries

Data Collection and Management & GIS Analysis

- Sample Handling & Shipment
- IATA certification
- Inventory management
- Sample shipment
- Simulation exercise

Basic Epidemiology

- CaribVET program
- Mentored epidemiologic projects

Emergency Response

- Table-top and field simulations
- Use of the Incident Command System

Disease Knowledge

- Endemic and exotic diseases

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the project participants in each country, their CVO’s, and animal health staff; epidemiologists and veterinarians from CIRED, IICA, USDA, CaribVET, CSU and University of Florida; and USDA APHIS-IS for funding the VEP project. Also, thanks to Linda Logan and Dave Hird for serving as external evaluators.

% Improvement in Core Capacity Domains Measured by Self Assessment

Sample Indicators Based on Monthly Action Reports From VEPs

Period from June 2011 to April 2012: Average per VEP Group Level (Min-Max)

- Number of databases developed: 6, 0-12
- Number of surveys conducted by VEPs: 74, 0-12
- Number of surveillance plans developed: 6, 0-6
- No. Emergency preparedness activities: 3, 0-7

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Training

Basic Epidemiology

Endemic and exotic diseases

Data Collection and Management & GIS Analysis

Sample Handling & Shipment

IATA certification

Inventory management

Sample shipment

Simulation exercise

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Table-top and field simulations

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