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Technical Report

Workshop
"Workforce Development for Zoonotic Disease Management"
11 to 12 September 2023,
Tirana International Hotel,
Titana - Albania

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Introduction

Zoonotic disease management within the framework of One Health is crucial for protecting public health, preventing disease outbreaks, mitigating the impact of diseases, and fostering collaboration across disciplines and borders. It recognizes that the health of humans, animals, and the environment are interconnected and must be managed as such to address the complex challenges posed by zoonotic diseases.

Albania is a disaster-prone country and emergent events such as floods, forest fires, heatwaves, earthquakes, and a series of epidemic outbreaks. From zoonoses of greatest public health concern, Albania has identified anthrax, brucellosis, Crimean–Congo hemorrhagic fever (CCHF), leishmaniasis and leptospirosis. Rabies and tuberculosis (TB) are additional issues for the animal populations

The Institute of Public Health at the central level and the Health Care Service Operator at the central, regional, and local level are responsible for the surveillance of zoonotic diseases in the health sector.

In the veterinary service, it is the Ministry of Agriculture at the central level and the National Authority of Veterinary and Plant Protection, at the central, regional, and local level, which follows the surveillance and prevention programs of zoonotic diseases. Other institutions of the Ministry of Agriculture that are part of the zoonoses risk management system are also the National Food Authority and the Institute of Food Safety and Veterinary.

In general, there is good coordination of actions between the veterinary and public health institutions in relation to zoonotic diseases. However, referring to a series of documents and studies focusing on the assessment of public health/veterinary service capacities in the management of zoonoses, some weaknesses have been identified and some of them are related to human resources to enable prevention, preparedness and responding to zoonoses through a One Health approach.

In Albania, Tirana has taken place the “Workforce Development for Zoonotic Disease Management” Workshop, on 11 – 12 September 2023. The workshop brought together representatives from the national, sub-national, and local level, technical staff from the human/public health, animal health, and environmental sectors involved in zoonotic disease management; Authorities, and decision-makers involved in One Health-related workforce activities. Tripartite organizations (FAO, WHO, WOAH) were the technical organizers of the event where Albania was chosen to be the pilot country for the implementation of the Workforce Development Operational Tool (WFD OT). The event was supported by the WHO.

Objectives of workshop:

- Strategically review the functions (responsibilities) required by the official workforce to ensure effective zoonotic disease management.
- Detail occupations and possible needs to appropriately cover the multisectoral, One Health functions required for zoonotic disease management: and
- Make recommendations for further human resource/staffing needs and competency-based education and training strategies as appropriate.

Outputs

The output from the workshop will serve as a basis for strengthening the capacity of the One Health workforce to address zoonotic diseases in Albania.
The event started with an open session from the institution’s representatives: Dr. Entela Ramasaçaj; Vice Minister Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Mrs. Peter Sousa Hojeskov, Technical Officer, World Health Organization EURO, Dr. Gazmend Bejtja – National Public Health Officer, World Health

Organization Albania and Ms. Keti Margariti, Directorate of Veterinary & Animal Health Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Chief Visionary Officer.

Dr. Gazmend Bejtja, opened the activity and welcomed the participants. He highlighted that the concept of OH is a very important one as it puts all of us together for one purpose, the health of people, the health of animals, and the health of the environment. He emphasized that we can do things much better together and the OH initiative is present at the international level, regional levels, and as well in Albania has the ambition to follow this international trend.

Dr. Entela Ramosaçaj, Vice Minister, Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) expressed her pleasure to attend the event. She highlighted the complex link between human, animal, and environmental health and the need for coordinated actions through the OH approach. The coordination at local, national, and global levels needs interdisciplinary and inter-sectorial expertise. Ms. Ramosaçaj pointed out the importance of early detection. She also mentioned the targets of OH, including (i) building networks; (ii) finding common grounds for coordination and opportunities to start coordination; (iii) integration at different levels; (iv) equal distribution of resources; (v) leading change. **Dr. Ramosacaj** mentioned that to apply OH, it is needed collaboration between different sectors such as agriculture, animal health, and human health. As well, she mentioned the bottlenecks to implementing OH, including coordination among different governmental organizations and agencies, and data-sharing mechanism in place.

Keti Margariti, Directorate of Veterinary & Animal Health Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and CVO, expressed her gratitude to be present at the event. She was thankful to international organizations that made possible the OH approach. Ms. Margariti mentioned the value of animals in terms of environment, culture, food safety, and on the other side their role as potential sources of infections and diseases. The management of animal health is a primary duty of OH following: (i) supervision and monitoring; (ii) preventing measures: (iii) cooperation among veterinarians; (iv) increase of awareness on interconnection of animal health and human health; (v) development of policies to protect animal health; (vi) increase of human capacities along the chain of OH.

Peter Sousa HOJESKOV, Technical officer of, the World Health Organization (WHO) EURO, highlighted that they conducted last year the workshop on preparedness for this workshop and mentioned that as previous speakers said, OH is an approach to help all humans, animals, and the environment and mentioned that Albania there is an enthusiasm to implement OH approach. One of the constraining factors while implementing that approach He said is the capacity of the Workforce (WF) linked to the needs, and the competencies for supporting member states in the region and globally. He emphasized that we are in the process of developing new guidance in coordination with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and other organizations, which help to review the WF needs and provide recommendations for the WF to deal with OH.

Photo no. 1 *During the open session, Deputy Minister, Dr. Ramosacaj*

Dr. Gazmend Bejtja invited everyone to introduce themselves and to continue according to the agenda, after we had a group photo.

Photo no. 2 *Participants in the event*

Technical part (day 1) of WFD OP

Ms. Ong-orn (Aim) PRASARNPHANICH, Technical Officer, Human-Animal Interface Team, WHO HQ, opened the technical part of the workshop. She shared with participants the background information on the workshop, and She mentioned that the objective was to come out with some outputs from that two-day workshop and integrate these outputs into the existing WF plans, aiming to finance, coordinate, and implement. During the workshop, we have to define WF **functions** and from there identify **occupations**, **educate** and **train** the WF, and ensure that human resources are available.

Ms. Ong-orn (Aim) PRASARNPHANICH emphasized that tools help the country to operationalize the multi-sectorial coordination mechanism the second one is the surveillance and information sharing and the third one is the risk assessment. Ms. Ong-orn (Aim) PRASARNPHANICH said based on the objective of this operational tool is to ensure that the WF in Albania, is trained, maintained, and mobilized across different sectors to address zoonotic diseases.

She started with functions (roles and activities that you could use to address zoonotic diseases) that we need within the country to address zoonotic diseases, and She mentioned identifying the occupations that could deliver the functions that you have identified. Once you have the functions and you have the occupations you refer to the website to identify how you educate, how you train the WF, and how you train the occupations that you already identified so that they can deliver the functions.

Ms. Ong-orn (Aim) PRASARNPHANICH highlighted that having that workshop in Albania in September, and after this workshop in two weeks we are having the advisory group meeting in-person consultation in Geneva, so we can finalize everything and we hope to publish it early next year. During the first quarter of 2024, it is expected to finalize the tool and online tool prototype. So, Albania is the first pioneer.

Photo no 3 Ms. Ong-orn (Aim) PRASARNPHANICH and Dr. Carla Stoffel during the workshop

According to the agenda and pre-workshop preparations, we started with **Module 2 – Situation Analysis and setting the scope.**

Dr. Carla Stoffel, Consultant, Human-Animal Interface (HAI), Department of Health Security Preparedness (HSP/CCI), WHO HQ, presented the steps that we went through during the workshop. She mentioned that Step 1 was to secure agreement to use WFD OT including advocacy for the use of WFD OT, obtaining agreement to use WFD OT and strengthen WF, providing directions and guiding the objectives on the use of WFD OT, and setting up the technical team. To establish a Technical team we envision technical staff including human, animal, and wildlife. This is key. she said we are trying to improve the involvement of the environmental sector, we are trying to improve, and it is a work in progress.

Dr. Carla Stoffel emphasized that Step 2 was to conduct a situation analysis and set the scope. Situation analysis includes as well identification of national plans that are existing and operational. It includes also the identification of the priority zoonotic diseases in the country and presents the results before conducting WF analysis (Module 2). The second component she mentioned was the technical scope we have the option to focus on which phase you want to focus on. We have decided to include zoonotic diseases (prevention, preparedness, response, recovery) and you have the option to choose. Today we are focusing on response. The last technical area is the topical area we can include reemerging zoonotic diseases; neglected zoonotic diseases; and all zoonotic diseases. For our workshop here we have decided we are going to work with all zoonotic diseases.

The scope of the situation analyses was to identify existing tools or programs with workforce capacity assessment, to identify national-level plans that are present and operational in the country, and to identify Priority Zoonotic Diseases in the Country

The Current Situation analysis for the MoHSP was presented by **Dr. Lindita Molla**, regarding the WF capacity to address zoonosis. Dr. Molla has given an overview of the human resources in Albania concerning zoonotic diseases based on the recent situation of functions, occupations, and all the needs that we considered during the workshop. They include not only the human resources but all the aspects related to the institutions, and the status of WF capacity to work across sectors and disciplines in PH at the national level. It included local and regional level laboratories for water and environment; same-level laboratories of Microbiology; diagnostic labs of Water and Environment; diagnostic labs in Public Health Institute (PHI), epidemiology at regional level and service of epidemiology and surveillance for zoonosis and outbreaks at PHI. She mentioned the legal formwork of Health institutions responsible for zoonosis management such as MoHSP; Healthcare Service Operators (HSO), PHI (the most important institution for surveillance), and LHCU.

Ms. Valbona Paluka has presented the organization of Animal Health and Food Safety under the umbrella of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD), in charge for zoonosis managements. Started from July 2022 the new created structure in the Ministry is in line with the structure in regional and district level. Despite the increase in the number of staff, there is still a great need for increasing technical capacities in all levels. An important institution is the Institute of Food Safety and Veterinary (IFSV) as the National Center of Reference that deals with food safety, animal health, plant health and plant protection, through the implementation of control and monitoring program that is approved by MoARD. The Animal Health Department, is the main department covering zoonosis, and has three main pillars: (i) Diagnostic – 6 Laboratories; (ii) Pathology – 4 Laboratories; and (iii) Serology – 3 Laboratories. Although there are collaborations between the authorities' part of One Health, partly regulated by agreement, again the coordination and cooperation is for certain diseases and controls such as the brucellosis control program in cattle and small ruminants; anthrax disease control program; the national AI surveillance program, the long-term program for the control of tuberculosis in cattle, the national program for the prevention and surveillance of African swine fever. There is a need to strengthen cooperation with the third element of One Health, with the structures of the environment. The 3 stakeholders involved in OH need to collaborate and address the complex challenges posed by zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, environmental degradation and other related health issues. Effective coordination and communication between these groups is essential to the success of the OH approach to protect human, animal and environmental health.

Photo no 4. During the analyses situation

After the situation analysis, we went to Module 2 WF analysis through steps 3, 4, and 5, Outlining functions and occupations; where we looked at the needs and challenges by mapping occupations to functions and also looked at the competencies required for specific functions.

According to the program we had a separation of the participants into four groups (see annex nr. X and photos during the work and members for each group). The groups had participants from different sectors and different levels of institutions (local to national).

The working group consisted of the identification of functions from different sectors. After we had the functions we went on the group work to identify occupations and institutions and then looked at the challenges and needs. The four groups have given their feedback through their work presentations.

On Day 1, the WFD OT tool was introduced, the results of the situation analysis (i.e., Module 1) were presented including capacities that need strengthening, the scope of the WFD OT was established, the participants completed the following exercises of Module 2

Photo 5 – Working groups

Exercise 1 - Identify functions of the workforce, focused on capacity to work across sectors and disciplines to effectively address zoonoses and other One Health threats. **Zoonotic disease outbreak simulation** to contextualize coordinated functions at the human-animal interface across sectors.

For this purpose, the REPREP results have been used (a 3-day workshop on response preparedness, was held on May 2022). Each group worked on the maps and functions put on the boards. The groups reviewed the functions in the table, identified which functions are important or at what stage of the flow they are important. Each group consisted of 6 -7 people from AH, PH, Environment. From the reports of the 4 groups, here are the identified functions:

Coordination within the MoARD, MoHSP, MoTE and between them.

- Conducting Surveillance
- Legislation improvement
- Research
- Prevention & Control function
- Risk Assessment
- Risk Management
- Risk Communication
- Response
- Financing
- International collaboration
- Investigation procedures start from the inspectors in both cases

Some critical points are related to:

- Revision of legislation
- To plan and implement recovery from outbreak
- Provide information on OH policy guidance response in similar cases

- Missing of strategy on OH and a OH training plan.
- Chain of commands are not in line with current situation. Functions in the FSVI and PHI are different.

Photo no. 6 *Animal Health Group*


Exercise 2: Prioritized functions

- Prepare legislation for both fields (animal and human health)
- It is important to have inter – sectorial coordination, in particular in times of outbreaks
- Ensure early detection and coordinated assessment of zoonotic disease outbreaks by improving surveillance system. PH has already an electronic system, but integration with the AH is not functioning so well
- Ensure capacity for early diagnostic/confirmation of zoonotic pathogen
- Share surveillance data and conduct joint analysis of surveillance data
- Prioritize joint investigation on zoonotic diseases by including public health, animal health, microbiologist
- To establish coordinated surveillance systems
- To increase laboratory capacities
- Ensure field security and safety
- Coordinated risk assessment between institutions
- Developing joint risk communication in the case of outbreaks, by using harmonized risk communication messages and materials according to the target audience including at-risk communities and the public

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- Coordinated risk assessment between institutions
- Developing joint risk communication in the case of outbreaks, by using harmonized risk communication messages and materials according to the target audience including at-risk communities and the public
- Have more joint training programs and project applications
- Coordination of the activities conducted at the interface between sectors for the management of zoonotic diseases during peacetime
- Provide and advocate for OH policy, guidance and recommendations
- Conduct joint risk assessment including management recommendation
- Develop joint training program, involving all relevant stakeholders
- Coordinate response activities during zoonotic disease outbreaks including biosafety and biosecurity measures
- Resource mobilization and allocation
- Strengthen response and control measures
- Communication campaign/awareness by using joint/coordinated messages for the population
- Prioritize joint investigation on zoonotic diseases by including public health, animal health, microbiologist
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- Strengthen response and control measures

Technical part (day 2) of WFD OP

Four working groups have been established, two with representatives of PH and two with AH. In each of them there were representatives of the environment sector as well.

On the first day, the groups went over 38 functions, which during the second day were reviewed in the Albanian context.

During the second day, the identification of needs and challenges continued. The functions within the sectors were reviewed, the professions needed to complete the functions as well.

The second day was focused on occupations, institutions, and challenges faced.

Karla Stoffel has given the definition on occupation, (Occupations is your job title) and clarified that occupations are used to perform functions in the institutions or agencies to ensure effective zoonotic disease management. Typically, occupations have sector specific training.

The focus of exercise was on capacity to work across sectors and disciplines to effectively address zoonosis and OH threats. Number of collected occupations extracted from Albania REPREP, ECDC, WHO health workforce, ISCO etc. has been 58. These were categorized in sectors (animal, human health, environmental and One Health) and divided these occupations by level (National, Local, Both).

Exercise 3: Occupations & Challenges

Results based on sectors - MoARD/ Animal Health sector:

- Lack of coordination between MoARD - NAVPP and between other ministries or other structures including policies, guidelines and recommendations for OH.
- Need on "One Health Strategy", that would include the involvement of respective structures under ONE Health umbrella and ways of coordination. Only cooperation agreements don't fulfill the proper implementation of the approach. Different institutions have engaged different people and participate in different activities, but no synergy at all between them.
- NAVPP is a relatively new structure, thus it needs staff trainings on several issues like early detection of diseases or differential diagnosis. A dedicated budget for training is needed as well for the new staff training in a ToT approach.
- FSVI has all the capacities to deal with the early detection of diseases and diagnostician but there is a need for training of the staff especially considering the most priority diseases. The need to train the new staff is immense.
- Need on common stimulation exercises. This type of exercise is missing while is very important. This is not done due to the lack of the budget and human capacities to stimulate an exercise and coordinate with other institutions. Regional exercises will be useful, also being triggered by cross-border diseases (ASF, AI etc.)
- There is no assessment on impact of diseases on the environment. MoARD conducts the environmental impact assessment only in the case of Anthrax disease. But MoTE and MoARD needs to increase the capacities on wildlife and water reservoirs environmental impact.
- Need to increase capacity related to communication, as a very important tool. Lack of communication procedures and communication techniques for the staff.

It's important to mention that the current structure under the MoARD is not in line with the structure included in the presented flowcharts. The structure of MARD responsible for animal health is:

MARD includes the Veterinary Service as well the CVO, the unit of epidemiology and identification and registration. Communication in case of emergencies is undertaken by MARD.
NAVPP is the central veterinary authority that collects data from 4 regional directorates, under which are twelve directorates at the County level.
MoARD in cases of emergency or animal prophylaxis contracts service veterinarians.
Regarding coordination of activities, it is good coordination in peacetime between veterinary services in all stages, and the MoARD tries to improve the surveillance measures and to calculate cost for all events.
Photo no. 7 working groups

Review and access competencies

Priorities selected from groups:

- ***Legislation*** **-** Completing the legislation and the legal framework at the right time to prevent outbreaks of diseases
- ***Use of technology and digitalization*** is very important.
- ***Surveillance system***. Although systems and reports exist, there is a need to strengthen coordination between stakeholders and sectors. This coordination should be not only in times of crisis, but also the normality of the activity of veterinary and human services.This system should be strengthened with the exchange of data both in case of explosions and in cases without explosions.
- ***Early detection*** -Ensure capacities on zoonotic pathogens 2 categories (i) disease identification; (ii) laboratory.
- ***Laboratories*** - Increasing capacities of laboratories, both equipment and human resources; development of protocol on rapid responses
- ***Coordination at local level*** **-** Performance of local staff to increase the capacities for case detection. Is important to have a team leader to coordinate actions and ensure exchanges in the future.
- ***Data sharing and data analysis*** – Useful tools to be strengthened and to be used as references for the future from all institutions involved.
- ***Training's programs*** – All actors should be involved as multi sectorial groups attending One Health trainings sessions, to successfully deal with emergencies in human health, animal health, and environmental protection. A permanent trained multi sectorial task force needs to be set up.
- ***One Health*** – drafting of policy paper; Advocacy for OH policies and recommendations. It is an approach that is still not fully understood, even an approach that should be practiced after it is clear to all actors.
- ***Risk assessment –*** strengthening the capacities
- ***Life education*** - Develop capacities for continuous education of all staff in all levels Implementation plan and regaining the status after each emergency
- ***Risk communication*** - Training on communication techniques, on preparation of awareness materials to be understandable by consumers.
- ***Environment monitoring*** - Monitoring post vaccine for other diseases like it's done by rabies and red fox by strengthening the cooperation between MoARD and MTE.

They reviewed occupations, matched the priority functions and occupations, and identified the challenges and critical gaps. Every group reported back in plenary.

In the afternoon, the working group continued to review and assess competencies for each priority function and reported back to the plenary session.

An overview of resources for education and training database and identification of in-country training continued during the afternoon and each group reported back to the plenary session and they discussed and gave recommendations, for the next steps.

Recommendations:

The recommendations are based on the results of the exercises that groups have done during the two days of the workshop.

As we mentioned above for the organization of the working groups and their scope on the exercises according to the main objectives we have listed the integration recommendations

1. Review and revise workforce functions and occupations and prioritized functions

a. Enforce and Revise the legislation for both sectors in Public Health and animal health
b. Strengthening the coordination between both sectors and institutions in and during the outbreaks and during peacetime
c. Improving the system of surveillance for the management of zoonotic diseases, especially in the field of animal health, Sharing surveillance data and conduct a joint analysis of surveillance data
d. Strengthening the laboratories' capacity, especially in the field of Public Health and Improving laboratory findings connection
e. Having a Plan and implementing recovery from the outbreak or in the emergency situatio

f. Provide information from one health policy guidance response
g. Improving coordination for risk assessment for both main institutions for the addressing of zoonotic diseases
h. Increase the capacities for the research field on zoonotic disease, especially for animal health
i. Develop a joint training program, involving all relevant stakeholders and application projects related to outbreaks and management of zoonotic disease.
j. Provide and advocate for One Health policy, guidance, and recommendations

2. Identify relevant in-country training

a. Develop interprofessional, interdisciplinary, and multi-sectoral collaboration mechanism
b. Describe the relevant organizational structure of the groups involved in management of zoonotic diseases
c. Illustrate the laboratory's relevant organizational structure and processes
d. Describes public health laboratory emergency response protocols
e. Describes, implements, and leads interactive learning processes
f. Evaluate the effectiveness of communication initiatives
g. Uses active listening skills
h. Collaborates across sectors and stakeholder groups in a climate of transparency, mutual respect, and shared value
i. Manage coordinated reporting lines of unusual events at the local level
j. Develop a joining training program involving all stakeholders
k. Participates in the development of continuous professional education availability and accreditation

Conclusions:

1. Strengthening the required legal changes all fields such as Public Health and environmental.
2. Establishing coordination mechanisms/Creating a strategy for One Health
3. Digitalization of the system for exchange of data for management the zoonotic diseases
4. Exchange of experiences and knowledges
5. Develop a joining training program involving all stakeholders, Public Health, Animal Health and Environmental.