

## Bird flu action plan

Governments and United Nations agencies have developed a six-point global action plan to preempt a deadly human pandemic of bird flu, which a World Bank analysis estimates could cost the global economy \$800 billion if it occurred. The global plan seeks to control avian influenza in animals and simultaneously limit the threat of a human pandemic. Funding to help countries take preventive measures will be funneled through the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Key components are:

- **control at source in birds**—improving veterinary services, emergency preparedness and control (including culling, vaccination, and compensation), and helping countries curb avian influenza in animals.
- **surveillance**—strengthening early detection and rapid response systems for animal and human flu, and enhancing laboratory capacity.
- **rapid containment**—training for investigation of animal and human cases and clusters, and planning and testing of rapid containment activities.
- **pandemic preparedness**—building and testing national pandemic preparedness plans, conducting a global response exercise, enhancing health systems, and training clinicians and health managers.
- **integrated country plans**—developing national plans across all sectors to provide the basis for coordinated technical and financial support.
- **communications**—factual and transparent communications, in particular risk communication, which is vital to support the other elements.

“Many countries where the disease is endemic have already taken action, but they are overwhelmed by the situation and require urgent assistance,” UN Food and Agriculture Organization Assistant Director-General Louise Fresco said recently. “Fighting the disease in animals is key to our success in limiting the threat of a human pandemic.”



Vaccinating chickens in China.

## Work longer

Employment ministers in industrial countries have agreed that more must be done to encourage older people to remain in the workforce. If nothing changes, the number of retirees will increase significantly over the coming decades while the number of employed persons will stagnate. In European countries, it is expected that, by 2050, for every retired person there will be only one person in employment. This will put pensions at risk and increase tax pressures on the working population. Ministers meeting in Brussels in October said early retirement should now be discouraged, and employers should be encouraged to retain or hire older workers.

## Digital divide harms growth

Developing countries in Africa and other regions face a competitive disadvantage because their businesses have difficulty accessing the Internet, according to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The *Information Economy Report 2005* shows that while in some poor regions the number of Internet users has grown substantially, overall the gap between developed and developing countries remains wide. For example, while 89 percent of enterprises in European Union nations are connected to the Internet, the same is true of only 5 percent of firms in Mauritius and 9 percent in Thailand.

Tourism is one example where developing countries could benefit from the Internet economically, the report notes, because many trips are now planned, booked, and paid for online. Banking and e-business are also growth areas.

## Africa fighting desertification

African governments and donors have launched an ambitious plan to fight desertification, which causes chronic food shortages and threatens to drive millions from their homes in coming decades. The *Terrafrica* partnership aims to attract at least \$4 billion over 12 years to improve the sharing of ideas about how to combat land degradation, according to officials meeting in Kenya in October. The United Nations estimates that 65 percent of Africa's 800 million population is affected by land degradation, mainly in areas where forests have been cleared to make way for agriculture and overgrazing.

## EVENTS IN 2006

### January 25–26, Davos, Switzerland

World Economic Forum, “Mastering Our Future”

### February 10–11, Moscow, Russia

G8 Finance Ministers meeting

### February 16–18, Vilamoura, Portugal

Global Conference on Social Responsibility

### March 27–29, Bonn, Germany

Third International Early Warning Conference on natural disasters

### April 3–5, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Inter-American Development Bank annual meeting

### April 5–6, São Paulo, Brazil

World Economic Forum on Latin America

### April 22–23, Washington D.C., United States

2006 Spring Meetings of the IMF and World Bank