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“Solidarity in a competing world —
fair use of resources”

Live-Bird-Selling in Greater Hanoi - The Case for Socially Equitable Solutions in Animal Disease Control

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Abstract

Every day up to 150.000 birds are delivered into the expanding megacity of Hanoi for meat consumption. Most of this poultry is sourced from small farms in rural provinces, where livelihoods critically depend on livestock-income. This poses a giant intermediation challenge. Value-chains are complicated and often extend far into the hinterland. Starting at improvised hatcheries they involve multiple intermediaries and a complex, uncontrollable urban retail-infrastructure: Birds are distributed through a small number of giant wholesale-markets, before being retailed by small vendors on over 1.000 street-markets. Under these conditions live-bird-selling is a crucial tool to ensure market-efficiency. It responds to the consumer's desire for freshness without a cold-chain. It protects retailers from miscalculations of demand. Most importantly, it allows for a differentiated projection of quality, with price-variations >100% amongst different chicken-varieties. However, live-selling also plays a major part in spreading Avian Influenza. Street markets bear the risk of bird-to-human-infection. The aggregation process increases the risk of bird-to-bird-infection. Especially the large wholesale-markets act as reservoirs, where virus-strains are sustained and circulate freely among the poultry. Vehicles and wastewater transmit the virus back to small farms, critically endangering the livelihood of the rural poor. Despite their economic and epidemiological significance, wholesale markets lack adequate governance and often operate in legal grey-areas. For over a decade the international community has tried to assist Vietnam in containing Avian Influenza by emphasising restrictions on live-bird-selling and promoting a „western“ pattern of large-scale-production, industrial slaughter and supermarket vending. These efforts have largely failed, mainly due to severe negligence of the underlying socio-economics. Whilst the economic significance of Avian Influenza for the rural poor is recognised, almost no attention has been paid to the impact of the proposed interventions on the tens of thousands intermediaries, slaughterers and vendors along the value chain. Interventions have also ignored urban consumers, 50% of which could for example not enter supermarkets because of prohibitively high motorbike-parking-fees. Our presentation highlights the importance of rural-urban-linkages and socio-economics in the combat of emerging zoonotic diseases. It critically assesses the effectiveness of current international-response-mechanisms and emphasises the need for socially equitable solutions in animal disease control.

Keywords: Emerging pandemic threats, food security, nutrition transition, urban-rural linkages