

AVIAN FLU REPORT

The outbreak of avian flu cases in Romania at the end of 2005 and during the spring of 2006, especially in the rural areas, showed the fact that Romanian authorities, both from central and local levels, are not very well prepared to deal with a pandemic disease at animals or humans. The need of training for the local authorities from the small and medium size entities was obvious; it also important to strengthen the capacity of these local authorities to prevent future outbreaks.

Romanian Association of Communes, as representative of the local authorities from the commune level, was aware about the fact that these specific entities will be the most affected by a pandemic outbreak; there is also obvious the fact that the communes have a low degree of financial resources for dealing with such outbreaks, do not have always well prepared health officials, public servants. In a lot of cases, Romanian communes' civil servants and officials have poor understanding of medical conditions, requirements and procedure and a limited access to quality sanitation.

The contract of A.Co.R with PADCO regarded the training of local elected officials from commune level regarding the avian flu. The activities, according to the contract, involved the following steps:

1. Training of trainers: A.Co.R. identified 8 persons from the level of the Regional Centers for Local Authorities Training, who were trained for the regional and county councils training sessions;
2. Regional trainings: at this stage the responsibilities involved, according with the contract was to mobilize six participants from each of the 41 counties in order to participate at the training sessions. The target for this step was of 246 participants from all the Romanian counties;
3. High-Risk County Training: The counties with the highest incidence of avian flu outbreaks will be involved in training activities; a number of 30 mayors from each county will participate at these trainings. The total number of persons involved during this step of the contract should have been around 270 participants.
4. Information campaign: In this final stage of the contract A.Co.R. should copy the avian flu manual and mail it to a number of 3000 local authorities within Romania.

The total number of persons that the contract intended to train was of 516 local elected persons from the commune level, a very important percentage from the total number of 2.841 Romanian communes. It is important to underline that this quarter that was trained during this sessions will have for sure an important impact over the other colleagues that were not present at the training sessions. The other third quarter will anyway receive the material through mail, so we can conclude the fact that the effectiveness of the avian flu information campaign and trainings will affect the entire number of communes from Romania.

The success of this project is more important if we consider the fact that instead of seven month, the activities were implemented in less than three month. The delay was determined by the fact that the training material was not ready in time. The fact is normal if we take into consideration the fact that instead of 20 pages the training material was about 100 pages.

One of the most difficult steps during the contract was that of identifying the 8 trainers from the training centers, because during the beginning of the project the leadership of the National Institute of Administration was changed, process that created a delay in the relation with the centers. It is important to underline the fact that not in all the cases the persons that were proposed by the regional centers for the TOT were the most suitable for the activities that were supposed to be carried out during the contract. One of the requirements for them was to have, if it is possible a medical background, and to have training experience before. At the end of the project we can say that the training experience prevailed over the background: the best trainer was a person without medical experience, but with a lot of training sessions behind. The second important conclusion at this point is the fact that the trainers that worked before with mayors were more effective than those who have training experience with other kind of persons and professions. From the total number of eight persons trained during the TOT session, only two of them were at the standards.

The TOT session took place in Predeal and at the session was also present one mayor that dealt with a case of avian flu; sharing her experience to the future trainers allowed them to find out what the problems of a commune mayor are and what really happens when an outbreak appears.

The next two tables show the periods and locations of the regional and high-risk counties trainings, number of persons invited and the total number of participants for each session and for the entire period:

Regional Centers	Location of the training	Date	Number of people invited	Number of people who attended the training
Constanța	Venus	06 – 08 August	30	26
Timișoara	Timișoara	10 – 12 August	24	18
Sibiu	Bușteni	11 – 13 August	30	22
Craiova	Băile Govora	16 – 18 August	30	32
București	Sinaia	18 – 20 August	25	30
Iași	Vatra Dornei	20 – 22 August	36	35
Cluj	Stâna de Vale	20 – 22 September	46	42
Călărași	Bușteni	03 – 05 November	28	24
TOTAL			249	229

High risk county	Location of the training	Date	Number of people invited	Number of people who attended the training
Galați	Slănic Moldova	02 – 03 October	50	34
Constanța	Constanța	05 – 06 October	50	44
Tulcea	Tulcea	13 – 14 October	35	29
Iași	Gura Humorului	19 – 20 October	35	35
Botoșani	Gura Humorului	19 – 20 October	50	50
Brăila+Ialomița	Brăila	23 – 24 October	50	45
Vaslui	Vaslui	27 – 28 October	30	25
Călărași	Călărași	30 – 31 October	30	25
TOTAL			330	277

The previous two tables clearly show that the effort made by A.Co.R. for organizing the training sessions was consistent and required all the resources and the local structure of the association. The total number of mayors invited at the training sessions was of 579 and the total number of those present was 516 (the percentage is 89%). The percentage is quite impressive if we take into account the fact that 6 of the 8 regional trainings took place in August, a month that regularly is a month of holidays.

The organizing effort was important regarding the arrangements made for the training sessions: if we look at the periods we can observe that the sessions took place one after the other during August and October. In all this period the staff involved in the project selected the most suitable locations for the training, contacted and contracted the hotels for accommodations, conference rooms, food and other administrative problems. There were also made copies of the materials for the mayors that were supposed to attend the sessions. Most of these administrative arrangements were made during a session for the following session.

The invitation was sent to the mayors by email, but in a lot of cases it was necessary to resend them by fax. The time for mobilization and confirmation of attending the conference was practically inexistent. A great effort regarded the presence of trainers at the sessions in such a short time. The effort to participate at this sessions made by the executive staff of the association was significant; the training sessions were one after the other and in different part of the country.

The reaction of the participants at the training was favorable: most of them were satisfied or very satisfied about the training sessions, they found out the material interesting and useful for their activities (especially the part regarding the communication with the media and the population). Almost all of them appreciated the usefulness of such trainings for their day by day activities (for extensive results see the annex). During the training sessions a lot of the participants appreciated the fact that A.Co.R. and PADCO trained them and observed the fact that such training should have been made by central

government and more often if someone want to build a capacity of reaction from the local authorities.

The sessions seemed to be more interesting and useful for those mayors from the counties that were affected by avian flu, because they already had practical experience in dealing with cases of disease. A lot of that mayor said that if these trainings would take place before the outbreak they should have been more prepared in dealing with the outbreak. They were also more aware about the fact that it is more effective to prevent than to combat the cases when they appeared.

In the case of the sessions that took place in Constanța and Tulcea (two of the most affected counties) the media came at the beginning of the sessions and was very interested about the project and the effectiveness of the trainings. They also appreciated the fact that someone makes something not only talk about avian flu.

The final step consisted in sending a shorter version of the material to 2800 communes together with a letter from the president of the association and a description of the project and the way the A.Co.R. was involved in it. The materials were copied using the new copy machine that the association acquired during the contract. The material took the form of a brochure; the staff of the association, using the database with the communes, made the labels and sends by mail the material to all communes of Romania.

The activities and the materials made under the contract were a real success; the main arguments for such a statement are:

1. The training material was appreciated by the Ministry of Agriculture: the secretary general of the ministry offered a recommendation letter for the mayors regarding this material. They also agreed to post the material on their website;
2. One mayor on the behalf of A.Co.R. was invited to a study visit in Delaware, USA on the avian flu prevention;
3. A.Co.R. will put the training material on its website; the Federation of Local Authorities will also include the material in the LOGIN library;
4. The impact of the contract on the institutional development of A.Co.R. was very high: the training sessions offered the possibility to meet with the mayors from one quarter of the Romanian communes in a three month period. The level of involvement of that mayor in the associations' activities increased since than. The level of fee collection of the association rose, because a great number of the mayors realized that A.Co.R. have done something for them.