

The OIE organised a workshop with a table-top exercise (TTX) in Tunis, Tunisia, from 11 to 13 July 2017. The exercise, which was held in collaboration with INTERPOL, UNICRI, FAO and WHO, brought together experts in epidemiology, laboratory work and communication, as well as decision-makers from both the veterinary community and law enforcement/security sectors from eight countries of the Middle East (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon) and North Africa (Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia).

The main objective was to establish functional links between the veterinary and security/law enforcement sectors. Identifying gaps, strengths and weaknesses within the two sectors was also part of the exercise, so that sustainable recommendations could be made to improve preparedness and response during the suspected and/or deliberate misuse of an animal pathogen. The 'Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise' (IZSAM, Teramo, Italy) and 'Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement' (CIRAD, Montpellier, France) took part as OIE Collaborating Centres, providing presentations and relevant materials from the perspectives of biosecurity and risk management. The TTX simulated the deliberate release of rinderpest virus in different countries, as working groups discussed and analysed a range of aspects of preparedness and rapid response.

Methods

As this TTX centred around an animal health issue, the exercise used a simulated scenario of the deliberate release of an animal pathogen in various countries. In this context, a fictitious situation was described, which explored the malicious release of rinderpest virus (which was eradicated from animal populations in 2011) from a laboratory.

The TTX was divided into three components:

- Component 1: Early-warning indicators (Part I)

The session first discussed the clinical presentation of a gastroenteric syndrome with a high mortality rate and other clinical signs in cattle on a farm located in Country A. It was hoped that a discussion would take place and that the participants would decide on the first and most appropriate approach to tackle a biological event that appeared to be due to natural causes, and to determine the possible source of infection.

- Component 2: Early-warning indicators (Part II)

This session addressed management processes for animal disease control when clinical presentations of a similar syndrome occurred on a farm in Country B. The same animal pathogen was confirmed. Information from the law enforcement sector was able to determine that the pathogen had possibly been released intentionally. The expected discussion was designed to examine aspects of the decision-making process, effective communication, notification, biosecurity, etc.

- Component 3: Investigations: animal health and law enforcement working together

With rinderpest confirmed, the session triggered discussions on how best to approach the investigation in the context of the deliberate release of an animal pathogen. Recommendations were sought on cooperation in a crisis situation, communication management and appropriate frameworks and agreements to facilitate collaboration between animal health and law enforcement organisations as they conducted a joint investigation.

Conclusions

Discussions and recommendations addressed the following subjects:

- joint investigations between animal health and law enforcement organisations
- biosecurity and bio-risk management
- inter-agency operability
- border security
- working together
- risk communication
- preparedness and response.

This TTX stemmed from the [OIE Biological Threat Reduction Strategy](#) (2015), which recommends holding international disease-simulation exercises to involve key players in the security and health sectors, to identify gaps and improve cooperation. Follow-up activities are essential to create opportunities for agencies to continue to interact at the national and international level. Using scenario-based discussions, participants gained new insights into potential emerging bio-threats, as well as learning how to strengthen cooperation and identify new opportunities to prevent, detect and respond to bioterrorism.

AROUND THE WORLD

NETWORK INITIATIVES

Regional table-top exercise for countries of the Middle East and North Africa

AUTHORS

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