

USAID, AusAID to fight pandemic threats in SE Asia

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Singapore: The US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) signed a memorandum of cooperation on June 6, 2012, to help reduce the risk of emerging pandemic disease threats in the Mekong region of Southeast Asia. Under the MoC, AusAID is providing A\$6 million to USAID's PREVENT project, which uses evidence-based social and behavior change communication approaches and tools, such as training, advocacy, and media, to reduce the risk of diseases of animal origin that could pose a threat to humans.

Support to PREVENT will help to boost the ability of people and organizations at the grassroots level to reduce the risk of transmission of dangerous pathogens from animals to humans by taking regulatory, managerial, social and behavioral actions. Work will focus on the countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion, including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and possibly Burma.

The MoC with AusAID reflects USAID's ambitious new reform effort, USAID FORWARD, which includes a greater emphasis on collaboration and partnership with bilateral donors, multilateral, and international organizations to increase synergies and avoid duplication.

The PREVENT project, implemented by FHI 360, is part of USAID's larger, overarching Pandemic Influenza and Other Emerging Threats (PIOET) program that includes three other interconnected projects: PREDICT (strengthening detection/surveillance), IDENTIFY (boosting diagnostic/lab capacities), and RESPOND (strengthening local response capabilities). PIOET was established in October 2009 to build on the successes and lessons learned from USAID's previous work on avian and pandemic influenzas.

To date, PREVENT has worked in and near identified hotspots, including sites in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, to conduct market studies and other qualitative research to help identify population segments that are at greatest risk for exposure to and transmission of

emerging infectious disease events, and the specific activities and practices that put them at risk. PREVENT then works with local groups to identify feasible, less-risky alternatives to current practices, and to develop ways to persuade people to adopt these alternatives, either permanently or during periods when risk is particularly high.

In addition to PREVENT, FHI 360 is implementing the Mekong Infectious Disease, Behavior Change Communication (MID-BCC) project, also funded by USAID, to help prevent and control avian influenza, malaria, dengue and other infectious diseases in the Greater Mekong Subregion using behavior change and communication tactics.