

**Thai APAIR Network Coordination and Collaboration:  
Country's Learning lessons and Thinking ahead**

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper is written-up following APAIR Steering Committee (SC)'s advice at its 2<sup>nd</sup> Face-to-Face Meeting in Bali in March 2008. The SC suggested Thailand to document the country coordination experience in order to share with APAIR members. It is hoped that the case of Thai APAIR network would, more or less, provide learning lessons and challenges for APAIR countries. The main purpose is to strengthen coordinating capacity within APAIR countries.

The paper briefly comprises 4 sections: Introduction; The origin of APAIR initiative; Thai Avian Influenza (AI) research partnership, the good starter; Achievements, Learning lessons and thinking ahead.

## **2. The Origin**

It was during mid-2005, Dr. Stephen J. McGurk (Regional Director, Southeast and East Asia Regional Office, IDRC) consulted with a number of Thai expertises and leaders of research institutes in Thailand including the Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI) about the movement on ***Pandemic Avian Influenza: Science, Tools and Incentives, Avian Influenza Research Competition Concept***. He introduced the IDRC planned to launch CAD 750K (ca 24 million Baht) per annum for the following three years, with more budget if needed, to support the regional pandemic research initiative with Thailand, China, and Vietnam.

Subsequent to Stephen's proposal, the HSRI convened a consultative meeting on 14 July 2005. Thai key leaders on AI triggering (MoPH(DDC, DMSc, PMSO) NRCT, NSTDA, TRF, NHF, MoNRE and MoA(DLD) were invited. Dr. Suwit Wibulpolprasert (Executive Advisor on disease control, Thailand Ministry of Public Health, and HSRI Board member) kindly accepted taking chairmanship of the consultation.

The meeting considered due to AI multidimensional nature, it was therefore necessary to seriously establish both national and regional research collaboration. It was agreed to: (1) cooperate with IDRC and neighbouring countries to support the regional research initiative; (2) designate the HSRI to function the country coordinator for Thai-IDRC Research Partnership; and (3) To expedite the establishment of mutual network among East Asian countries. HSRI, on behalf of Thailand, and IDRC hosted the first international meeting between delegates from the four countries and international partners in December 2005.

## **3. Thai Avian Influenza research partnership, the good starter**

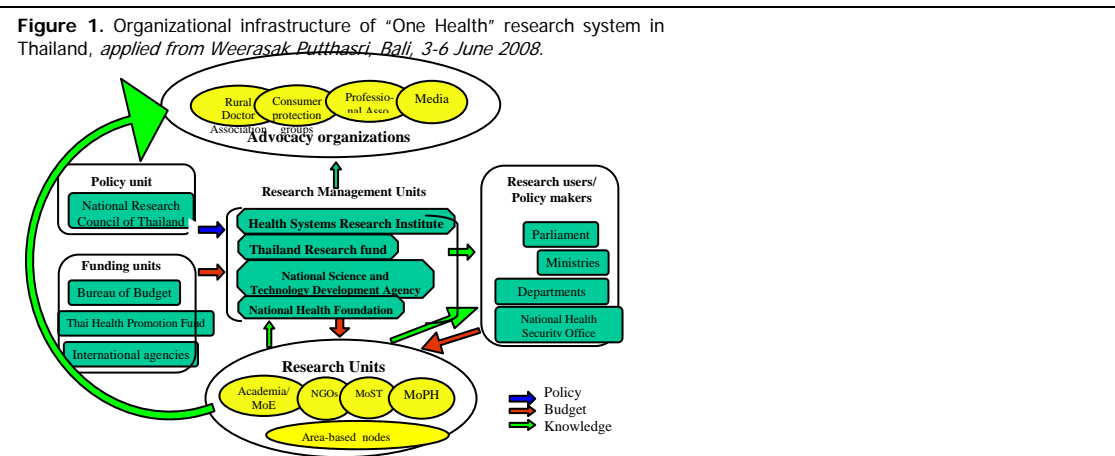
During this decade and beyond, the major concern of research institutes is not only conducting the gold standard researches to generate evidenced knowledge, but the utmost importance is the effective and efficient research management system. There is an immediate need to consider strengthening national research system capacities in the complementary areas: setting priorities, managing research, monitoring performance, adopting standards and regulations for high-quality research and its ethical oversight, human and financial resources, research institutes and use of research findings in policy decisions, and to foster national and international networks for research collaboration.

At the same time, the "one health" concept which is the needs for collectively vertical and horizontal integration of human, animal and eco-health for timely detecting, reporting and responding to emerging threats, is of great value and benefits to the partnerships at all levels.

To respond to these major challenges, it is considered the organizational structure of “One Health” research system in Thailand does exist (Figure.1). They include,

- 1) *National Research Policy unit:* National Research Council of Thailand( NRCT)
- 2) *Research management units:* Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI), Thailand Research Fund (TRF), National Sciences and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), National Health Foundation (NHF).
- 3) *Research Units:* Ministries of Education (MoE), Science and Technology (MoST), Public Health (MoPH), academia.
- 4) *Research users/ Policy makers:* Ministries of Agriculture and Cooperative (MoA), Natural Resources and Environment ( MoNRE), MoPH, the Government.
- 5) *Funding units:* Bureau of Budget, Thai Health Promotion Fund (ThaiHealth), International partners/funders.
- 6) *Advocacy organizations:* the media, Professional Associations, Consumer Protection Groups.

However, capacity strengthening of the national research system is needed.



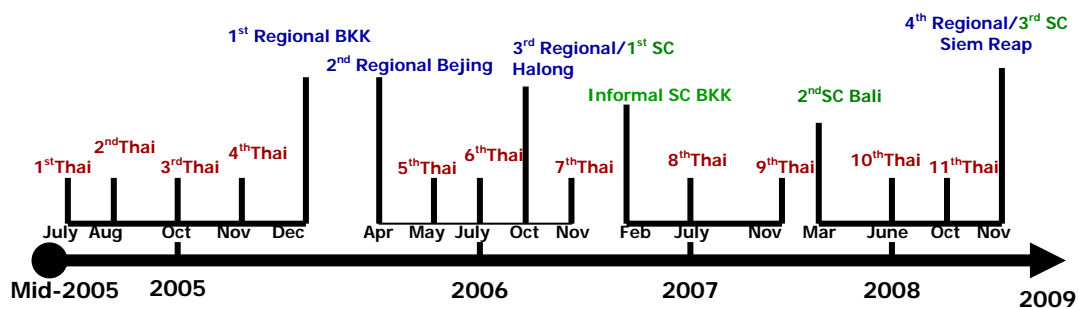
Synergistically, APAIR initiative provides an opportunity for Thai AI research partnership. The Thai network consists of all above 6 multi-sector, multi-dimensional stakeholders of the research system. It includes relevant institutions/organizations, inclusive (livestocks, human health, S&T, natural resources, eco-health, academia, research, policy and practices). Especially, international partners/partnerships including IDRC, FAO, WHO, RF, MBDS and ILRI are welcome. More importantly, with the HSRI substantial support, there are regular meetings, as appropriate, since the beginning in mid-2005 (Figure 1).

The main objectives of the Thai APAIR meeting are: 1) Updating of the progress of APAIR projects; 2) Sharing and exchanging lesson learnt and findings among APAIR projects; 3) Updating AI research mapping of the country; 4) Updating and working complementary to the movement of regional APAIR and other regional HPAI/EID collaboration e.g. FAO, FAO/OIE, ASEAN+3 EID, ACMECS, APEC, ADB, USAID, WB, AusAID/IDRC, ILRI/IDRC, WHO, MBDS, etc.

The success of the Thai APAIR network is based upon the active and committed participations, collaborations and contributions: (1) mutual cooperation among the individuals and institutions; (2) strong leadership of the chair who chaired the Committee for the Development of the National Strategic Plan for Avian Influenza Control and Influenza Pandemic Preparedness in Thailand, 2005-2007; (3) HSRI substantial support; and (4) cooperating closely with IDRC.

Since 2005 upto the time of writing, there are 11 regular Thai APAIR network meetings, 4,3,2,2 in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, respectively. Meetings were convened before, interim and follow the regional APAIR and SC meetings.

**Figure 2.** Timeline of Thai's and Regional APAIR and SC meetings since it's origin in 2005.



**Year 1- 2005: The Good Starter: From country priority research questions To collaborative intercountry researches--- *identification of research priorities*"**

During July to December 2005, there were 4 intensive Thai research partnership on pandemic influenza meetings. The intent was to prepare the country inputs and contributions for the 1<sup>st</sup> Intercountry Workshop in December in Bangkok. The preparations undertaken included,

- HSRI conducted the 1<sup>st</sup> round priority survey (by questionnaire) of AI researches that conducted, underway and in the pipeline by all research institutions since AI outbreak in 2004.
- IHPP and HSRI analysed the questionnaire response and synthesized AI research mapping with reference to AI mapping conceptual framework (by Dr Supamit Chunsuttiwat, MoPH). As a result, research questions of high national priority and a high knowledge gap were identified.
- HSRI and NSTDA were assigned to be the co-host organizations for the country brief review write-up for the first intercountry partnership meeting in December 2005. This review consists of 3 sections including (1) An introduction on avian influenza situation and trends of influenza both on avian and human; (2) The second section is the National Strategic Plan for Avian Influenza control in Thailand (in brief); and (3) The last section is the 6 proposed priority researches for collaboration with IDRC: (i) Surveillance and disease control in birds; (ii) Husbandry model and alternative model/compartimentalization; (iii) Surveillance and disease control in humans ; (iv) Protocol development for outbreak control at source of origin/ study control of host factors/ treatment of infected patients; (v) Development of antiviral and vaccine; (vi) Socio-economic: operational research on public health system of country members.

All these inputs were brought to the first Intercountry partnership workshop co-hosted by HSRI and IDRC during 30 November- 2 December 2005 in Bangkok.

The participants at Bangkok meeting discussed on scope, potential areas of regional research collaboration, and possible mechanisms for regional research collaboration. Although the participants did not reach consensus on either regional priority research collaborative agenda or possible mechanisms of regional collaboration, the "next steps" to be taken by country focal points prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting in Beijing were agreed upon.

The "next steps" included: (1) To hold multi-partner in-country consultations to identify research priorities and mechanisms for collaboration at national and regional levels; and (2) To produce an in-country inventory of who is doing what research. The country focal persons were named by participants from all five countries. These people will serve as the focal points throughout the national consultation and research inventory process.

In addition, there were two research topics identified as priority areas for regional research collaboration: (1) A comparative multi-country research study of the impact of poultry

vaccination; and (2) A research study aimed at investigating the social, economic, and environmental linkages with avian influenza and associated impacts on human health.

**Year 2- 2006: Collaborative upstream process: Development of regional project proposals, challenges and lesson learnt**

*"The year of the formation of regional collaborative priority research agenda and multicountry project groups and start up the proposal development."*

Following Bangkok meeting and prior to Beijing meeting in April 2006, HSRI and IHPP in collaboration with Thai APAIR network carried out research mapping on AI studies in Thailand. The research mapping process comprised two parts, namely research priority setting and a research inventory study. After two rounds of a priority survey, Thailand applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to finalize the research priorities. As a result of this process, 13 issues were selected as priorities for Thailand while 12 issues were selected as regional priorities. Of the 13 priority issues for Thailand, five had no current research activity. Thus, there is an urgent need to invest in research in these areas. The research mapping approach was useful for Thailand and can be applied to other countries and other research areas both in health and non-health sectors.

At Beijing meeting, there were three major agreements. They included,

1. Six research themes were identified as priorities for the regional research partnership. These included those two from the Bangkok meeting. The six priorities were: (i) Migratory bird surveillance; (ii) Socio-economic impacts; (iii) Backyard poultry; (iv) Policy analysis; (v) Control measures; and (vi) Risk behavior. Subsequently, six multi-country groups of researchers (the so-called: regional research team) were formed to prepare the collaborative project proposals.
2. The participants agreed to the organizational/governing structure of the partnership with the following specific functions: (1) Management of research collaboration; (2) Support research capacity building; (3) Information sharing; (4) Networking among researcher/institution; and (5) Advocacy for changes in practice, tools, and policy.
3. There was an interim plan for the Coordinating Office and the issue would need to be redressed at a future PSC meeting. In the meantime, IDRC will continue to provide coordination services for the partnership.

During the period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beijing regional meeting (April 2006) to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Halong regional meeting (October 2006), there were two Thai APAIR meetings in May and July 2006, respectively. The meetings considered and discussed on the progress of works of 6 themes both at country and regional levels. It was agreed that the six Thai research team leaders and country focal point would work actively within and with other countries to develop their detailed project proposals. They would interact and coordinate with all relevant Thai partners in the particular fields, and would bring consensus, comments or suggestions to work with the partner countries. In addition, the proprietariness of the research result will be consulted with member countries and IDRC. The preliminary research proposals were then presented at the Halong workshop for comments and worked further.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional workshop and the 1<sup>st</sup> SC meeting in Halong, the important issues discussed were,

1. The role of the partnership in bringing groups within each country together to learn from one-another and become a network, especially the role of SC members in strengthening networking and collaboration within each member country is the key of successful partnership.
2. Partnership coordinator and Coordinating Office (CO): HSRI has provided a significant in-kind contribution in terms of office space for the CO, communication support and

efforts to organize and convene Thai network meetings. It was agreed that Mr. Tung would take the partnership coordinator.

3. Two groups (Migratory Birds Surveillance and Socio-Economic Impact) were about to finalize their proposals. After the Halong workshop, these two proposals were approved for funding by IDRC in January 2007.

In Thailand in particular, the six research themes were used to attract national scientists and funding agencies. The Thai APAIR network meetings were held regularly to keep updating the progress and working actively with the APAIR activities.

### **Year 3-2007: Set up Coordinating Office: Proposal approved by IDRC and Government clearances**

*“ The year of proposal selection and funding approval and project implementation”*

When Mr. Tung took his post in mid-January 2007, the coordinating office(CO) was then set up based in HSRI office.

In February 2007, the CO/HSRI organized informal SC meeting as a side event of the Prince Mahidol Award Conference(PMAC) in Bangkok. Subsequent to the SC meeting, the CO/HSRI organized the other three regional research group- meetings( Backyard Poultry, Policy Analysis and Control Measure) with IDRC support by assigning the project advisors to assist the researchers to finalize the project proposals. To this end, the three proposals were approved for funding by IDRC in mid- 2007 and 2008,respectively.

All IDRC approved proposals were requested to acquire and submit the Government clearances. In Thailand, HSRI helped the Thai APAIR projects' submission to TICA for the clearances.

In 2007, there were two Thai APAIR meetings with the special occasion that Dr.Jean Lebel (Director,Program Area for Environment and Natural Resources Management, IDRC Ottawa)and Dr.Hein Mallee (Program Specialist, IDRC Southeast and East Asia Regional Office) visited HSRI and participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting on Saturday 17 November 2007.

At this meeting, Dr. Jean expressed his appreciation on behalf of IDRC. Firstly, the APAIR work is useful for the future. It is an Eco-Health program covering environment, health, social and economic components. IDRC mandate is to support such research capacity where the problem takes place. Secondly, regional cooperation is key issue. And thirdly, sharing and learning is the most critical point. He suggested we should think about what is the best mechanism of sharing research result.

Dr. Pongpisut (Director, HSRI) emphasized that HSRI strongly support APAIR activities. HSRI also recognizes the value of national and regional partnerships extending to both the control of avian influenza and other emerging infectious diseases.

Dr. Suwit highlighted the achievements of APAIR and stressed the importance of a regional collaboration to address the threat of Pandemic influenza. He extended thanks to all participants, Dr. Stephen McGurk and IDRC for the broad minded on AI research capacity building. He asked all participants to continue to build trust, commitment and friendships.

### **Year 4- 2008: Conduct collaborative researches—Preliminary findings and Learning lessons**

Following the 2<sup>nd</sup> SC Bali meeting in March 2008 and prior to the Siem Reap meeting, the Thai APAIR meetings were convened twice. At the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting in June 2008, the Thai APAIR were informed about the important issued discussed at SC Bali and started up the preparation for the Siem Reap meeting. At this meeting, Dr.Jacobo Finkelman(APAIR initiative Assessor for IDRC,Ottawa) and colleagues from Google.org including Dr.Mark S.Smolinski

(Director, Predict and Prevent), Dr. Corrie Conrad, Dr. Amy Luers and Dr. Nikkita Patel also participated.

Followed by the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting in October 2008, the Thai APAIR research teams shared the progress made and the contributions to the coming events both Siem Reap and Eco-Health Forum in Mexico. Dr. Hein Malle phoned in this meeting to describe the workshop process in Siem Reap.

#### 4. Achievements, Learning lessons and Thinking ahead

**Achievements:** APAIR provides advantages and opportunity to the country;

1. It contributes to the real collaboration among the research funding agencies, research institutes, research users and policy makers. Especially, it bridges both animal and human health.
2. It leads to the continuous update of the research mapping on AI in the country. BioTec Thailand periodically updates the mapping as an in country inventory of who is doing what AI researches as well as the researches' status i.e., researched that conducted, underway and in the pipeline (Figure 3).
3. It helps build up capacity (individual, institutions and networking) among all collaborative institutes.
4. It generates knowledges that can be applied in the control of Avian Influenza.
5. It mobilizes more resources to the countries as well as building the country leadership on AI research.

#### **Learning lessons:**

The activities so far are those afore-mentioned. Among the others, the followings are some particular cooperating efforts undertaken:

1. Assist coordinating with Thai colleagues for IDRC assessment (Jacobo's visit) in June 2008. This is an external evaluator process by meeting and visiting some project sites to learn how the projects being implemented, its progress and problems.
2. Cooperate and participate in inception and mid-term workshops and training workshops taken by APAIR Thai research team. These include:
  - Policy analysis process training workshop in May 2007 (conducted by HSRI as the co-PI of Policy Analysis Thai group)
  - Q-method training workshop in April 2008 (conducted by Backyard Poultry Thai group)
  - Socio-eco impact regional mid-term workshop, Chiangmai, July 2008
  - Control measure regional inception workshop (the workshop where cross-country research methodologies are harmonized), Chiangmai, August 2008
  - Backyard Poultry Thai focus group meeting with DLD in September 2008
3. Cooperate and participate in relevant regional and/or international workshop e.g. cohosting "the International Conference on Avian Influenza" with BioTec and cooperating to support APAIR researchers to attending in January 2008.

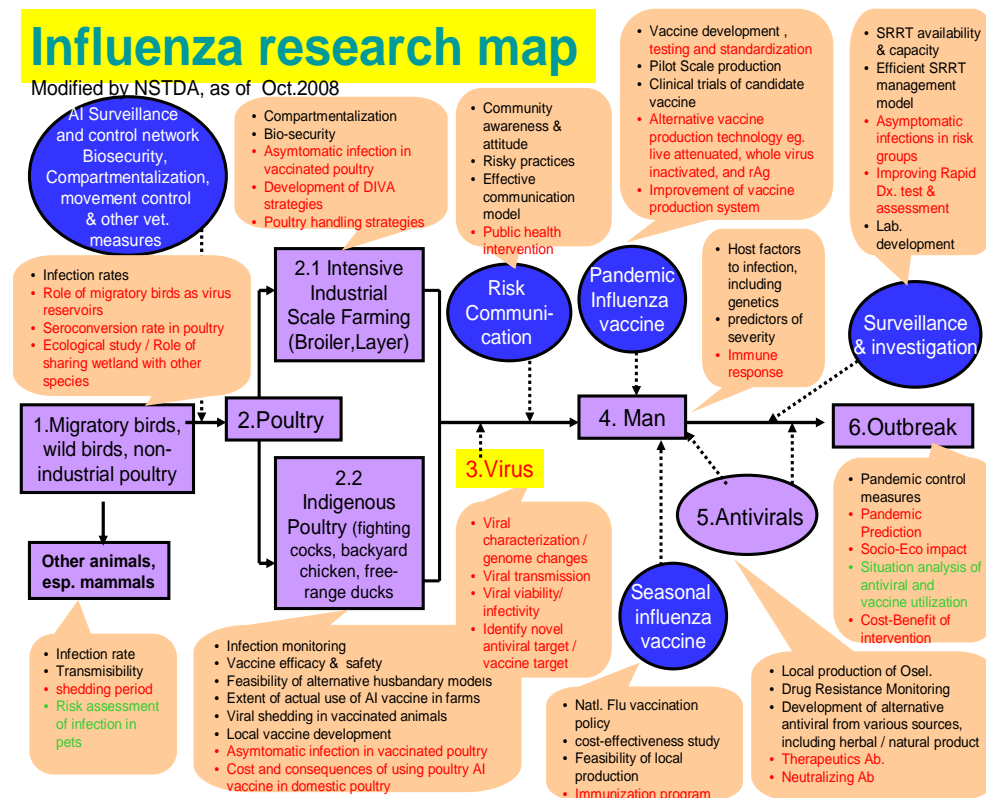
Value are that all six Thai research teams were invited to participated in the above training workshops. These functions provided additional platforms for sharing and learning among us.

#### **Thinking ahead:**

The HSRI has been actively involving and participating in as well as contributing to the partnership by its four important roles in APAIR. The four roles are SC member (HSRI Director), country focal person, co-principal investigator of the policy analysis project and

regional co-coordinator (the author). The challenges are how to balance these particular roles by working complementary and constructively and how best can be done.

As far as country and regional cooperation are the key of success. Strengthening cooperation capacity is key issue. Subsequently, sharing and learning is the most critical point and could be achieved only the best mechanism of cooperation is happened.



**Figure 3.** Influenza Research Map, as of October 2008.

Researches in,

- Black means those, already done.
- Red means those, ongoing and/or not yet start.
- Green means those, in the roadmap.

Sources:

- AI mapping, Dr Supamit Chunsuttiwat (Department of Disease Control, MoPH)
- NSTDA, BioTEC, Thailand.

## Acknowledgements

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