POULTRY IN THE DAILY LIFE OF LAO PEOPLE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BIRD FLU PREVENTION: A COMMUNITY STUDY IN VIENTIANE, LAOS

SENGALOUNE INTHAVONG

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCE) FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY 2009

COPYRIGHT OF MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
POULTRY IN THE DAILY LIFE OF LAO PEOPLE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BIRD FLU PREVENTION: A COMMUNITY STUDY IN VIENTIANE, LAOS

SENGALOUNE INTHAVONG 5038097/ SHHS/M

M.A. (HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCE)

THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE: LUECHAI SRINGERNYUANG, Ph.D
ILJAS BAKER, M.Phil, PENCHAN SHERER, Ph.D

ABSTRACT

Avian influenza, bird flu, has become a health threat to the world population. Its epidemics, involving the human and poultry relationship, make prevention and control efforts hard and sometimes less possible. This study investigates how poultry are part of the daily life of rural people in Laos and the implications of such relationships on bird flu prevention and control. This focus is on how poultry relate to humans in terms of income, food, and cultural and social activities. An ethnographic approach was used and data were collected through participant and non-participant observation, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews.

The findings reveal that poultry mean many things to the farm household not only as a source of food and income, and savings, but as an inseparable part of culture. Socio-cultural and socio-economic factors influence the farmers’ beliefs and practices about poultry in terms of good long term relationships, especially as chickens are symbols of good luck to all levels of people in Laos.

The study suggests that the villagers view bird flu as a new disease. The outbreak of the disease did not cause them to change their eating habits and they were reluctant to accept culling of the birds. Control efforts by authorities have found a negative effect on various aspects of the villager’s lives. Many lost some of their income and food available from their backyard. Some villagers adapted their ritual practices because they could not find chickens.

A major recommendation of this study is that strategies to control for bird flu should be developed based on a solid understanding of cultural beliefs and practices of the people, especially how poultry are a socio-cultural and socio-economic part of villagers’ daily lives.

KEY WORDS: POULTRY, FARMER, NORMS/VALUES/CULTURE/ECONOMICS LAO

101 pages