Roles of community animal health workers in surveillance and early warning – a regional overview in South East Asia

S. Subharat[1] (supatsak.subharat@fao.org), **G. Lamielle**[2], P. Motta[2], F. Claes[2], N. Cogger[3], E. Vallée[3]

[1] *Country Office, FAO, Vientiane, Laos*

[2] *Regional office for Asia and the Pacific, FAO, Bangkok, Thailand*

[3] *EpiCentre, School of Veterinary Sciences, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand*

Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) play an important role in animal disease surveillance and early warning systems across Southeast Asia, particularly in rural areas where access to formal veterinary services is limited. This regional overview synthesizes findings from Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Viet Nam, drawing on a structured literature review complemented by bilateral consultations with country stakeholders.

The study employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. A comprehensive literature search using broad keywords was conducted to capture relevant publications on CAHWs in the four countries. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, with eligible articles managed and grouped by country in EndNote. Full texts were reviewed, and reference lists were manually searched to identify additional sources. The selection process was documented using a PRISMA flowchart. Bilateral meetings with FAO ECTAD country teams were conducted to incorporate practical, country-specific perspectives on CAHW deployment.

Across countries, CAHWs contribute to surveillance through routine observation, reporting of suspected cases, participation in vaccination campaigns, and promotion of biosecurity practices. However, their roles and level of integration into national surveillance systems vary considerably. Viet Nam and the Philippines demonstrate stronger institutional integration, with CAHWs formally linked to government systems. In contrast, in Cambodia and Lao PDR, CAHWs primarily operate as private, fee-based providers, with more ad hoc engagement in government-led surveillance activities.

Several cross-cutting challenges affect the effectiveness of CAHWs in early warning systems, including inconsistent training, limited coordination with veterinary authorities, weak systems to track active workers, high turnover, and reliance on external funding. At the same time, CAHWs remain a critical interface between communities and formal surveillance systems, highlighting their potential to strengthen early warning if appropriately supported.

Further national-level analyses are recommended to refine these findings and inform context-specific strategies for strengthening CAHW systems.

Keywords: Community Animal Health Workers, surveillance, early warning, PRISMA, Southeast Asia.