

Rationale

Laos is a country with fascinating cultures, religion, and people. It is a land of festivals. Every village, every temple, and every ethnic minority not only holds its own special festivals but also joins the wider Lao community in celebrating the national ones.

Under the USAID-funded MID-BCC project, FHI 360 provided technical assistance to provincial health departments during the boat racing and That Luang festivals to enhance prevention and control of disease outbreaks through communication campaigns and community mobilization.

Objectives

- ❑ To help strengthen the provincial effort to reach a greater segment of the population during communication campaigns for health.
- ❑ To promote the key messages of hygiene and protection against bird flu infection during festival celebrations.



Boat Race Festival in Paksey, Champassack Province, October 1-14, 2011
Theme: "Protect yourself from bird flu"

In Champasack, every year the boat race festival is celebrated to mark the last day of Buddhist lent and the last day of the rainy season. People celebrate it after three months of lent, usually 10 days leading up to the October full moon. Thousands of people from neighboring provinces like Saravan, Xekong, Savannakhet, and Attapue come to witness the festivities. The celebration falls within the season when people get typically sick from influenza-like illnesses.

Materials and Methods



Giving away information materials like the low-literacy avian influenza booklet



Demonstration and strengthening the message of proper hand washing

During the That Luang Festival from 5-9 November 2011, FHI 360 assisted the Vientiane Capital Health Department to conduct communication campaigns to disseminate information to reduce the risk of bird flu, drink safe and clean water, and prevent food-borne diseases. The health education teams provided communication materials to an estimated 10,000 audience members and engaged them in video viewings, contests, street games and singing.



Results

Multi-sectoral stakeholders and local leaders were mobilized for support.

Messages to protect oneself and one's family members against avian influenza were strengthened.

Conclusions

Cultural and religious events are part of the Laotian way of life. MID-BCC employed strategies that are acceptable to the culture and traditions to reach out to a significant segment of the population to keep reminding people how to protect themselves from H5N1.



Acknowledgments

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