

Zim, SA lose one million chickens to bird flu

By [Elita Chikwati](#)

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Zimbabwe and South Africa have lost over one million chickens to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), it has been learnt. The disease hit the two countries recently, threatening the livelihood and food security status of millions of families.



Alison Burrell via [Pexels](#)

Worsening vulnerability

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) confirmed the development in a statement after an SADC meeting on avian influenza in South Africa. FAO said if not tackled quickly, the HPAI outbreak would impede trade opportunities and reverse the gains made in enhancing food and nutrition security.

SADC representative, Bentry Chaura, said South Africa had so far culled over 800,000 birds. Zimbabwe culled around 215,000 birds.

"This is likely to have a knock on effect on the availability of table eggs and poultry meat for consumers in the region. South Africa alone is destroying one million eggs a day from the affected farms. Small-scale producers are also expected to face shortages of day old chicks in the market," he said.

Chaura said the bird flu had come at a time when the region was struggling to recover from the El Niño-induced food

shortages (2015-2016 season) further worsened by the emergence of other pests such as the fall armyworm which devastated crops this year. "We are all witnesses of what animal diseases and pests, particularly transboundary animal diseases, can do to worsen the vulnerability of rural-based communities.

"Those do not only affect lives in the community but also normally have a lasting impact on local, regional and international trade," he said.

The spectre of bird flu

In Southern Africa, the flu has so far been reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa and Zimbabwe. In South Africa and Zimbabwe, the disease has mainly been identified on large commercial farms, where systems to monitor outbreaks are readily in place compared to smallholder and backyard producers.

The spectre of bird flu outbreaks has been looming across the region since the beginning of the year when Uganda reported an outbreak (January 2017), prompting SADC member states to develop the capacity for surveillance, detection, prevention, and rapid response to HPAI.

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