



**Prevention, detection and monitoring of animal diseases,
including those harmful to humans: veterinary services are
the keystone of the global system**

15/03/2006 Today more than ever, outbreaks of some animal diseases, particularly those harmful to humans (zoonoses) can cause considerable economic and social upheaval and send a wave of panic across the globe. The recent health crises due to bovine spongiform encephalopathy and foot-and-mouth disease are a good illustration of this new trend. The current avian influenza epizootic also shows how a serious health event for the animal kingdom can have a global impact on the rural economy and consumers and constitute a threat to public health.

Globalisation is a factor that facilitates the appearance of emerging and re-emerging diseases and considerably magnifies their impact. National Veterinary Services are crucial to prevention, detection and monitoring of animal diseases, including diseases transmissible to humans. They play a key role in all countries as guarantors of animal health and, by association, of public health. Their mission is the responsibility of the public authorities, with the involvement of private-sector partners.

In many countries, development and growth depend on agricultural performance, in terms of production, quality and safety of products of animal origin. That performance is directly linked to the quality of national Veterinary Services. To be efficient, Veterinary Services must operate according to scientific principles and in complete transparency, be technically independent and free of political and private-sector pressure. The OIE reiterates its affirmation that Veterinary Services are a global public good and that bringing them into line with international standards (structure, organisation, resources, capacity, role of the private sector and para-professionals) is a priority public investment.

The current avian influenza crisis is further proof that, without effective Veterinary Services, countries are unable to prevent the introduction or emergence and re-emergence of animal diseases or to bring outbreaks under control when they do occur. Countries with inefficient Veterinary Services cannot provide credible guarantees to their trade partners of the safety of the products of animal origin they wish to export.

The OIE undertook to produce international standards on the quality of governance of Veterinary Services and to help its member countries apply them.

The OIE's standards on the quality and assessment of Veterinary Services were democratically and unanimously adopted by its 167 members. In order to facilitate the implementation of the standards, the OIE, with the initial support from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), developed an interactive application for evaluating the quality of Veterinary Services on the basis of the adopted standards. The application, called "Performance, Vision and Strategy" (PVS), is designed to serve as a guide to help countries

comply voluntarily with OIE standards through a process of self-evaluation, evaluation at the request of a trade partner or evaluation by a third party under the auspices of the OIE.

Use of PVS to monitor closely the various constituents of the OIE standards will be the topic of a training course for a team of OIE experts from the different regions so they can act as facilitators for the evaluation process and support OIE member countries. Whether for an individual country that wishes to conduct a self-evaluation, a group of countries that wants to conduct reciprocal evaluations to facilitate trade between them, or a country that wants to be evaluated by a third party under the supervision of the OIE, these experts will ensure the consistency of the evaluation process.

Organisations that fund economic development, the World Bank in particular, have supported the OIE initiative to promote the use of PVS worldwide and have requested the OIE's assistance in conducting voluntary evaluations in more than 100 developing and transition countries that meet the requisite conditions. The World Bank and the international community recognise the need for quality Veterinary Services, not only to control the current avian influenza crisis but also to prevent and bring other emerging or re-emerging diseases under control rapidly.

The evaluation of Veterinary Services using PVS, coordinated by the Central Bureau of the OIE, supported by its Regional Representations and offices on the five continents, will play a vital role in the preparation and definition of country investments needed to prevent and control disease on a global scale.

The evaluation data generated by PVS will enable the entire donor community to target investments, with the overarching goal of assisting countries that so wish to bring their services into line with international standards adopted democratically by all. The economic justification for these investments can be easily demonstrated: the cost of disease prevention is tiny in comparison with the cost of health crises; and appropriate animal health policies have an impact on poverty reduction and food safety. They also enable countries that wish to export animals and products of animal origin to access regional and international markets from which they would otherwise be excluded because of the presence of animal diseases on their territory or because their Veterinary Services do not meet OIE standards.

For the above reasons, the work of the Veterinary Services is now recognised as a global public good. Rich countries also acknowledge that support for the Veterinary Services in developing and transition countries is a priority, not only to promote development around the world, but also to protect the world against the spread of animal diseases and zoonoses that had already been eradicated.

OIE's expertise is now at the core of national programmes intended for over one hundred Member Countries so as to help them strengthen their Veterinary Services and secure the planet against natural or intentional biological disasters.

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