



OIE builds its capacity to improve global animal health information

31/07/2012 The need for knowledge of the animal disease status of every country in the world led to the establishment of the OIE in 1924, preceding that of the United Nations. The historic mission of the OIE since that date has been based on the legal obligation of each of its Member Countries to provide the OIE with timely information on any animal disease event of interest that may occur within its territory, with the OIE being responsible for passing on this information to other Member Countries.

Member Countries' obligation of transparency regarding their animal health status differs depending on the nature of disease events and the way in which they are controlled. While some events must be notified immediately, with follow-up reports on how they are being managed, other diseases included in a list adopted by all Member States need only be reported every six months.

In our globalised world, the prevention and immediate control of potential biological disasters relies on their early detection, under the responsibility of effective national Veterinary Services, as well as on triggering a national and international warning, if relevant, by means of appropriate reporting systems to ensure the fastest possible national and international response. In the face of a serious animal health event, whether natural or intentional, just one defaulting country is enough to endanger the entire global community.

In 2006, after decades of global disease reporting, mainly involving paper-based information flows, the OIE launched its World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS). Following the gradual introduction of WAHIS, all Member Countries (178 in May 2012) now have a direct online link with the main server in OIE Headquarters, which processes the information sent by each Member Country in the form of immediate notification and follow-up reports, six-monthly reports and annual reports, before publishing them on a free web interface, open to the general public, called the World Animal Health Information Database (WAHID).

As the effectiveness of this system is entirely dependent on the quality of data submitted by Member Countries, the OIE has set up a global training programme to teach national focal points techniques for notifying diseases of terrestrial and aquatic animals, and of wildlife. Every focal point in every country has undergone at least two WAHIS training courses. Each national focal point is appointed by the competent government authority (the national Delegate to the OIE) and are responsible for their entire country. Since the quality of disease surveillance in the field relies largely on the effectiveness of Veterinary Services and their compliance with OIE standards, the OIE launched its PVS (Performance of Veterinary Services) Pathway in 2006, which has benefited more than 130 Member Countries, improving their capacity for the early detection and notification of animal diseases.

In just a few years, all this has overturned our previous assumptions regarding the global animal disease situation. However, continuing advances in computer technology and demand for an ever more sophisticated reporting system have led the OIE and its experts in the Animal Health Information Department to modernise WAHIS and to prepare for the imminent launch of a new set of functionalities. The main innovation has been to incorporate detailed information on wildlife events, no longer using the annual Excel questionnaire introduced in 1993, but a fully-fledged application allowing voluntary notification of specific wildlife diseases (OIE-listed diseases of wildlife will continue to be notified through the different reports existing in WAHIS namely immediate notification, follow-up report, six-monthly report and annual report). A point of note is that 131 Member Countries completed the voluntary Excel questionnaire in 2011.

A large number of wildlife species can now be identified by their taxonomic name and species name in Latin.

In addition, WAHIS now incorporates a generic regional component allowing data to be customised for each region. The new component called OIE/NACA is dedicated to information on aquatic animals of interest to OIE Members belonging to the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia–Pacific (NACA). Furthermore, all maps of Member Countries, including internal geographical divisions (first administrative divisions) have been updated globally.

Training for national officials in using the WAHIS system, under the responsibility of the national Delegate appointed by his or her government, includes detailed information on the use of these new applications. Officials (national focal points) will receive practical training at further seminars organised by the OIE with the support of its regional offices.

WAHIS/WAHID will be enhanced continuously to improve global transparency in the ongoing war being waged by humans and animals against pathogens of every kind.