

Towards global eradication of peste des petits ruminants

Fifteen years. That is the target international animal health specialists have set themselves to eradicate peste des petits ruminants (PPR). This is only half the time it took to eradicate rinderpest. This is an ambitious yet realistic target and will be achieved through coordinated joint action by the various national, regional and global parties involved.

During the past 15 years, PPR has spread at an alarming rate, reaching regions not previously infected. Identified in Côte d'Ivoire in 1942, this devastating disease now affects nearly 70 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, which are home to more than 80 percent of the world's sheep and goat populations.

The disease is highly contagious. Once introduced, the virus can infect up to 90% of a flock, and the disease can then kill 30% to 70% of infected animals. The economic losses induced by PPR strike at the heart of vulnerable rural populations, ruining animal production at national and regional level. Affected countries have suffered cumulative annual losses ranging from tens to hundreds of millions of dollars.

In the absence of any control plan, PPR could spread still further, causing more devastating socio-economic losses and hardship for the millions of poor farmers, mostly women, who rely on sheep and goats for their livelihoods.

This explains why the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in a bid to stop the spread of the disease and ultimately eradicate it, have developed a Global Strategy for the Control and Eradication of PPR, within the framework of the FAO/OIE GF-TADs (Global Framework for the Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases) Working Group.

At the beginning of April, over 300 high level representatives from all corners of the globe met in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, at an international conference organised by the OIE and FAO with the aim of adopting this global strategy, the ministerial recommendations issued by the meeting defining PPR as a top priority disease that should be eradicated in the next two decades.

The objective of global control and eradication of the disease within 15 years will only be achieved if sufficient funding can be obtained and if there is good coordination at all levels, coupled with a strong political commitment.

Fortunately, valuable lessons have been learned from the past and show the path to success. To date, only two diseases have been successfully wiped off the face of the planet: human smallpox, eradicated under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO), and the much feared animal disease rinderpest, eradicated under the auspices of the OIE and FAO.

Based on the rinderpest model, a gradual, step-wise method has been developed for the global control and eradication of PPR.

At national level, the strategy is implemented in four stages, the ultimate aim being to obtain the status of country officially recognised as free from PPR by the World Assembly of national Delegates of OIE Member Countries. It is also possible for each infected country to apply for OIE endorsement of its national PPR control programme, based on the standards in the OIE's *Terrestrial Code*.

At global level, a joint governance and coordination mechanism is being implemented within the framework of the GF-TADs agreement established between the OIE and FAO in 2004. In addition to this, there is a specific mechanism for managing the resources allocated to PPR eradication by the programme's financial partners.

It should be emphasised that the Global Strategy for the Control and Eradication of PPR is not presented as a 'stand-alone' activity, but rather as a combination of three inter-related components: namely the control and eradication of PPR, the strengthening of Veterinary Services and the parallel prevention and control of other major diseases of small ruminants. These three pillars form the Global Strategy adopted in Abidjan.

Through these three pillars, the aim of global eradication of PPR is also the starting point to achieve sustainable progress in the performance of national animal health systems and, in turn, to improve animal health status for other diseases of small ruminants and the health status of small village flocks.

The countries meeting in Abidjan thus undertook to strengthen the capacities and expertise of their Veterinary Services to ensure proper implementation of the eradication strategy, notably through the development of surveillance plans for the disease, capacity-building programmes for staff, technology transfer, public-private partnerships, and the use of vaccines that comply with OIE intergovernmental standards.

The global investments needed during the next 15 years will be substantial and at the present time they are difficult to evaluate precisely. Nevertheless, the target is achievable and will have a significant impact on food production, nutrition, incomes and livelihood resilience of more than 330 million poor farmers in many parts of the world by improving the productivity and profitability of their flocks.

Supporting the Veterinary Services by helping them to achieve compliance with OIE standards of quality will also have an impact on the effectiveness of prevention and control of all other animal diseases, demonstrating even more the cost-effectiveness of the investments made.

In the current context of globalised trade, paving the way for large-scale dissemination of pathogens, the activities of the Veterinary Services and the control of transboundary animal diseases such as PPR at source are in the interests of all countries, infected or otherwise. These activities should more than ever be considered as global public goods.

The OIE and FAO are continuing to implement the Global Foot and Mouth Disease Control Strategy adopted at the Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2012. The OIE, WHO and FAO are also continuing with the global control programme for canine rabies. A global conference

on the subject, organised by WHO, the OIE and FAO, is due to be held at WHO Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2015.

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