

Meetings

Africa

Harmonising veterinary legislation one region at a time

An update on OIE experiences in Africa

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While the concept of legislation is probably as old as civilisation itself, and veterinary legislation as old as the science of veterinary medicine, it became an important capacity-building target for the OIE when the Organisation began to analyse its evaluations of Veterinary Services carried out since 2006, under the OIE Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) Pathway. The capacity to develop and implement effective veterinary legislation is included among the 47 critical competencies of the PVS Tool to assess the performance of Veterinary Services in OIE Member Countries. Recurring reports of shortcomings or inadequacies in many countries' veterinary legislation led to the development of the Veterinary Legislation Support Programme (VLSP), under the umbrella of the broader PVS Pathway (which includes the initial PVS Evaluation, the PVS Evaluation Follow-up, Gap Analysis, specific laboratory support missions and, indeed, the VLSP).

Some important milestones in this respect were: the implementation of veterinary legislative support missions on a pilot basis in 2007 and 2008; the publication of the OIE guidelines on veterinary legislation in July 2009; the first Global Conference of the OIE on Veterinary Legislation, held in Djerba (Tunisia) in December 2010; the

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Opening ceremony of the Veterinary Legislation Seminar for Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Lomé, Togo, June 2016. Left to right: the OIE Delegate from the host country and the representatives of ECOWAS, AU-IBAR, OIE and FAO

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Working group session during the Veterinary Legislation Seminar for Member States of the East African Community (EAC), Arusha, Tanzania, August 2016

establishment of an *Ad hoc* Group on Veterinary Legislation to transform the guidelines into a proposed chapter for the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*; and the subsequent adoption, in May 2012, of that *Code* chapter, Chapter 3.4., on Veterinary Legislation. These provided a solid foundation for the formal launch of the VLSP and, in particular, the undertaking of OIE VLSP veterinary legislation identification missions in countries that submitted a request. In Africa, the programme has been a resounding success with (by the end of April 2017) 35 countries having benefited from an identification mission, and 10 countries having requested longer-term collaboration with the OIE under a formal agreement, with the aim of modernising their national veterinary legislation.

In November 2011, a pilot training course on veterinary legislation was organised by the OIE Sub-Regional Representation for Southern Africa in Gaborone (Botswana), targeting National OIE Focal Points and Delegates from

the Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). For the first time, the pool of trainers represented a mix of veterinarians and lawyers. The seminar focused on the general principles of sound legislation (drafting, internal and external quality, the legislative hierarchy) and two major areas of veterinary legislation: animal disease control and food safety.

In January 2013, a second seminar took place for the countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held in Cotonou, Benin. This training was funded primarily by a Contribution Agreement, signed with the OIE, under a European Union-funded programme called ‘Strengthening of Veterinary Governance in Africa’, or VETGOV. Two other implementing partners are involved in VETGOV: the African Union’s Inter-african Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) and the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), each addressing veterinary governance

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Representing the Director of AU-IBAR, Dr Mohamed Abdel-Razig Aziz, Technical Advisor to the VETGOV Programme, at the seminar held in Lusaka, July 2017



Group photograph at the Veterinary Legislation Seminar for the Member States of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Lusaka, Zambia, July 2017





Group photograph at the launch of the Veterinary Legislation Seminar for Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Lomé, Togo, June 2016

issues within their own international and continental mandates and expertise.

In October and November 2013, two more continental seminars on veterinary legislation took place within the framework of VETGOV, this time funded by AU-IBAR and facilitated and coordinated by the FAO. The OIE took part in both seminars, one for French-speaking participants (Naivasha, Kenya, November 2013) and the other for English speakers (Arusha, Tanzania, November 2013). These were three-day training programmes on the importance and drafting of veterinary legislation. This overall effort, which targeted all African countries, was well received by the delegations of those nations who took part. At the close of each seminar, AU-IBAR presented a draft of its proposed plan for working with individual countries and regional bodies on developing legislation in the coming years. The active participation of the OIE was a key element in that plan and resulted in a series of seven sub-regional seminars, starting in October 2014 and targeting specific clusters of Member States of African Regional Economic Communities or RECs:

- Yaoundé, Cameroon, November 2014, for the countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS, 10 Member Countries)
- Khartoum, Sudan, November 2014, for the countries of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD, Horn of Africa, 8 Member Countries)
- Tunis, Tunisia, June 2015, for the countries of the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UMA, North Africa, 5 Member Countries)

- Maseru, Lesotho, July 2015, for the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC, 15 Member Countries);
- Lomé, Togo, June 2016, for the countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, 15 Member Countries);
- Arusha, Tanzania, August 2016, for the countries of the East African Community (EAC, 5 Member Countries at that time).
- Lusaka, Zambia, July 2017, for the countries of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA, 19 Member Countries).

These sub-regional seminars were co-funded under VETGOV, initially by AU-IBAR and later increasingly by the OIE.

The methodology applied here was and still is innovative. At all of these seminars, each participating country sent three participants, including one veterinarian, one lawyer and one subject-matter specialist, involved in the development and implementation of veterinary legislation. Formal presentations were kept to a minimum during the five-day seminars to allow space for a progressive series of working-group activities, which focused on a specific area of veterinary legislation, e.g. animal disease control or regulation of the veterinary drug supply. In the working groups, countries first analysed their own existing legislation on the selected topic, then identified gaps and weaknesses in that legislation, next looking for areas where a regional approach might help to fill those gaps. The groups created an outline for harmonised regional legislation, based on the gap analysis, and, finally, identified the problems,

costs, challenges and opportunities involved in adopting the regional approach. The RECs then pledged to work with their Member States after the seminars to move forward and develop regionally harmonised legislation.

As can be seen from the list of seminars above, the total number of countries invited to attend these seminars (77) far exceeds the number of countries in Africa (54), pointing to much overlapping membership of RECs. This means that one country may have to align its national (veterinary) legislation with various regional directives from up to three different RECs. Consequently, some countries were invited up to three times to attend such seminars, as members of the different RECs targeted. The potentially repetitive nature of this approach, however justified, was in part mitigated by asking countries to select a technical topic amongst the topics considered, based on Chapter 3.4. of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*. This topic, and the relevant national legislation, would then be used to work on as case studies. This was also a way to address the specific needs of different RECs and avoid unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved in a five-day training seminar. From the range of proposed topics, three were addressed by the following RECs:

- animal disease control (ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, UMA)
- veterinary products (EAC)
- import/export inspection and certification (COMESA).

In the specific case of SADC, the theme of animal disease control was used to highlight the control of peste des petits ruminants (PPR), a disease regarded as a high priority for the region at the time, particularly in the context of the OIE/FAO PPR Global Control and Eradication Strategy, which was launched in April 2015 at a global conference in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

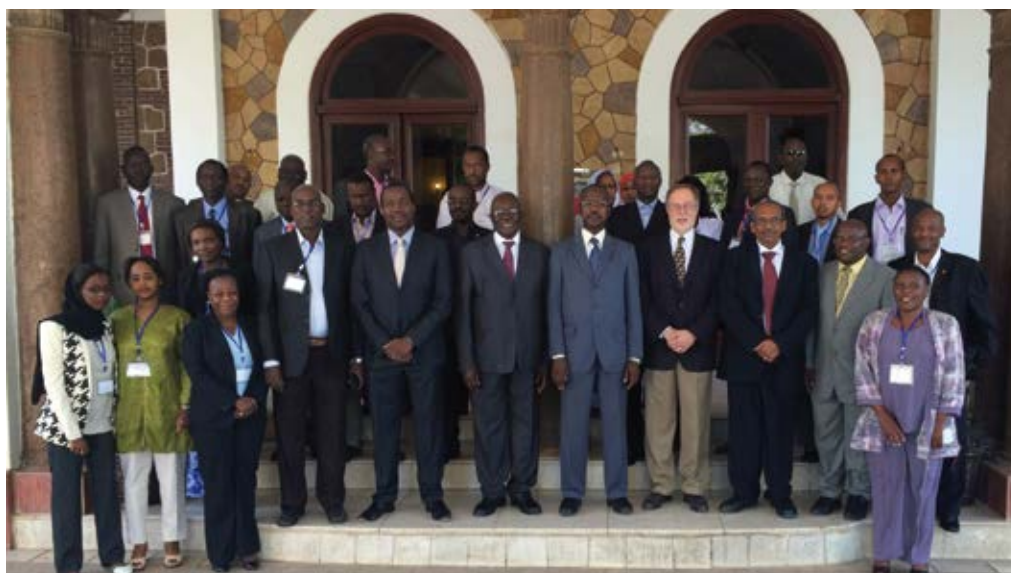
All seven seminars have resulted in varying degrees of commitment and recommendations by REC Member Countries and secretariats to implement agreed-upon procedures to move towards regional harmonisation.

Furthermore, efforts are currently under way, once more in partnership with AU-IBAR and FAO, to develop a new supporting mechanism to assist Member States and REC secretariats on this specific challenge of regional harmonisation in years to come. As experience to date has shown, legislative review and harmonisation is a complex, and therefore slow, process which has taken the European Union, for example, the better part of half a century to implement.

A crucial consideration in this respect is that not all RECs in Africa have been granted the authority, by their founding Member States, to approve binding regional directives for their countries to transcribe in national legislation. In combination with the overlapping membership of some of these RECs, this means that some countries face major difficulties in adopting veterinary legislation in a timely, coherent and harmonised manner.

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Group photograph after the opening ceremony of the Veterinary Legislation Seminar for Member States of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), Khartoum, Sudan, November 2014

The OIE Veterinary Legislation Support Programme: www.oie.int/en/support-to-oie-members/veterinary-legislation/
The OIE Component of the VETGOV Programme: www.rr-africa.oie.int/vetgov.html

