

Veterinary Statutory Bodies in Africa

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Summary

Within the 52 Member Countries of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in Africa, no more than 37 have established formal Veterinary Statutory Bodies (VSBs) which conform to some or all of the OIE criteria, as listed in the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Article 3.2.12.). The remaining countries, for a variety of reasons, are in the process of establishing, did not manage to establish, or do not envisage being able to establish such bodies. Most African countries do have professional interest associations (general veterinary associations, small animal practitioners and veterinary nurses). These associations do not have the same role and function as a VSB, according to the OIE definition. However, in countries that lack a VSB these associations may perform some relevant functions, such as keeping a register of their members and setting standards for the profession by establishing a code of conduct against which the behaviour of members may be measured and dealt with.

The findings in this paper are based on the outcomes of the Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) evaluation missions conducted in Africa since 2006 and the analysis of an online survey of representatives of VSBs, veterinary associations and veterinary authorities' administrations.

Most VSBs in Africa do not regulate the quality or establish minimum standards of veterinary education and do not have a role with respect to veterinary para-professionals. Their scope is usually limited to regulating the professional activities of private and public sector veterinarians.

At the basis of these shortcomings lie three fundamental features of Veterinary Service delivery in Africa: (a) the relative scarcity of resources, making it difficult for VSBs to generate the required financial resources, (b) the fact that the veterinary profession largely evolved from and/or is still widely dominated by the public services and (c) the inadequate awareness of stakeholders. Functional VSBs require the rule of law, democracy and the strict separation of the three powers of the State, which is not attained everywhere in Africa today.

The authors conclude that while progress has been made in the past decades, more needs to be done to (a) continue raising general awareness of requirements for good governance of the Veterinary Services, (b) establish VSBs in countries that have not yet done so, (c) improve compliance with OIE standards in others and (d) improve the linkages between VSBs and VEEs in order to strengthen the grip of VSBs on the supply and demand for professionals of the highest possible quality in years to come.

Keywords

Africa – Compliance – PVS evaluation – Survey – Twinning – Veterinary association – Veterinary education – Veterinary para-professionals – Veterinary Statutory Body.

Introduction

The various ways in which legislators have (or have not) established Veterinary Statutory Bodies (VSBs) or veterinary councils in Africa since independence from the former colonial powers, has, to the best of our knowledge, never been thoroughly researched. As international standards on the quality of Veterinary Services become more and more enshrined in national legislation, VSBs too are under increased scrutiny from the public and the stakeholders. Any VSB today should be able to demonstrate that it has the capacity and authority, supported by appropriate legislation, to exercise and enforce control over all veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals. These controls should include, where appropriate, compulsory licensing or registration, participation in the definition of minimum standards of education (initial and continuing) for the recognition of degrees, diplomas and certificates by the competent authority, the setting standards of professional conduct and competence, the investigation of complaints and the application of disciplinary procedures. In addition, the VSB should be able to demonstrate autonomy from undue political and commercial interests and, where applicable, the implementation of regional agreements for the recognition of degrees, diplomas and certificates for veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals (Article 3.2.12. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* [Terrestrial Code] on the evaluation of the Veterinary Statutory Body). The last statement is becoming increasingly important as supra-national and regional alliances, associations and interest-groups dealing with some or all of the mandates of the VSB are increasingly pursuing region-wide harmonisation and compliance with international standards. The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has, since 2006, included the VSB in its standardised Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) evaluation matrix (Critical Competency III-5) and now possesses valuable information on the 'level of advancement' (levels 1 to 5, according to increasing compliance with international standards) of VSBs in Africa and around the world.

Materials and methods

The results presented in this paper are based on two sources: a continental survey conducted in the course of July and August 2013 amongst representatives of veterinary councils, veterinary associations and chief veterinary officers (CVO) in Africa; and an analysis of the outcomes of the reports of PVS and PVS Gap Analysis missions with respect to the Critical Competency (CC) III-5, dealing with VSBs.

The continental survey was conducted using an online survey form, developed by the authors on a platform called eSurveyPro (www.esurveypro.com). The questionnaire contained 35 mostly multiple choice questions and was available in French and English. Invitations to complete the questionnaire were sent out to the chairpersons and registrars of veterinary councils, as listed on the OIE Africa website (www.rr-africa.oie.int/en/RC/en_vsbs.html), to the representatives of veterinary associations, as listed on the World Veterinary Association website (www.worldvet.org/about.php?sp=members) and to the OIE Delegates (chief veterinary officers), as listed on the OIE Africa website (www.rr-africa.oie.int/en/RC/en_delegates.html). The data were collected over a period of seven weeks and reminders were sent out to non-respondents every fortnight. The collected data were analysed in part by the embedded data-analysis tools of eSurveyPro and in part through the use of an exported Microsoft Excel 2010 spreadsheet.

The analysis of PVS mission reports was conducted using a simple Microsoft Excel 2010 spreadsheet.

Most data presented in the present paper are anonymous, as several PVS reports have not been released into the public domain; furthermore, the purpose of this paper is to provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of African VSBs in general, not in respect of particular countries or sub-regions of the continent.

Results

Forty-seven individuals submitted a completed questionnaire, representing a total of 45 out of the 54 countries (83%) recognised by the United Nations (UN) in Africa (Fig. 1). Of these 54 countries, 52 were members of the OIE in 2013. Nine countries, i.e. Burundi, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Liberia, Malawi, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Somalia, did not reply to the questionnaire. Amongst these, only Senegal is known to have a VSB (based on PVS reports). Hence, the participation of countries was 83% and the participation of VSBs was 97%; VSBs were present in 67% of OIE Member Countries in Africa.

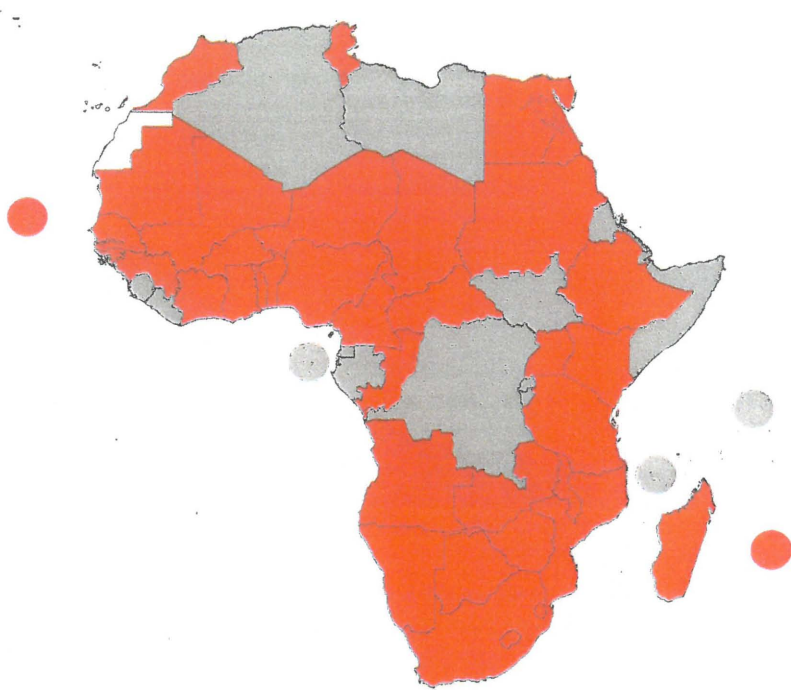


Fig. 1 African countries with a Veterinary Statutory Body (in red), established by law
The red dots correspond to the island states of Cape Verde (west) and Mauritius (east)

Most questionnaires were completed by the chair or the registrar of the VSB (35% each), with the remainder being completed by the chair or chief executive officer (CEO) of the veterinary association (24%) or the CVO or OIE Delegate (6%), usually in countries that do not have a VSB (Fig. 2).

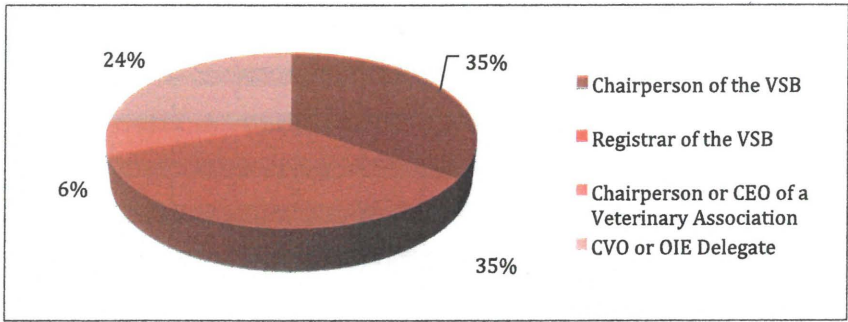


Fig. 2 Source of information for the online survey
CEO: Chief Executive Officer; CVO: Chief Veterinary Officer; VSB: Veterinary Statutory Body

From the respondent countries, 84% had legislation defining the establishment of a VSB and 78% had established a VSB, irrespective of whether this body is compliant with the quality of veterinary services standards of the OIE (Article 3.2.12. of the *Terrestrial Code*). In 73% of countries there is also at least one veterinary association active and in 42% of countries at least one association of veterinary para-professionals. In the vast majority of countries, VSBs are called the Veterinary Council or Veterinary Board, but there are also countries where the VSB, although duly established by law and in accordance with OIE standards, is nevertheless called an Association. In Egypt, the Veterinary Council and the Department/Directorate of Veterinary Services are merged as the General Organisation of Veterinary Services (GOVS) which registers public sector veterinarians only.

The oldest VSB in Africa is the Veterinary Council of Nigeria (VCN), established in 1952. The cumulative establishment of VSBs since 1952 is presented in Figure 3.

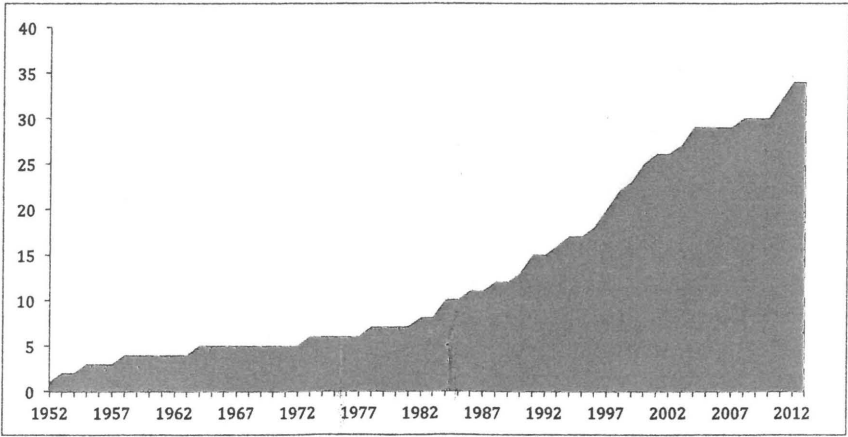


Fig. 3 Cumulative number of Veterinary Statutory Bodies established in Africa since 1952, when the Veterinary Council of Nigeria was established

Only 31% of VSBs communicate via an official website.

In countries that have a VSB, the VSB licenses the categories of veterinary graduate seen in Figure 4 (some respondents did not answer this question, hence the maximum is not 100%). One VSB licenses private veterinarians only.

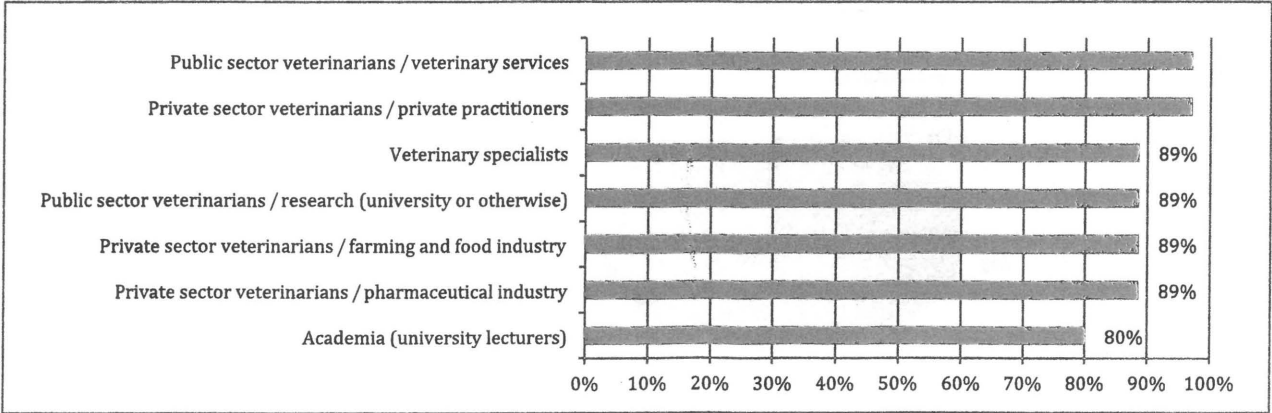


Fig. 4 Categories of veterinarians licensed by the Veterinary Statutory Bodies in Africa, in decreasing order of frequency

With respect to veterinary para-professionals, 57% of VSB do not register this category of professionals. For those that do register veterinary para-professionals, the categories of veterinary para-professionals registered are displayed in Figure 5.

It is highlighted that 29% of VSBs that register veterinary para-professionals include community-based animal health workers (CAHW) in their definition of para-professional. This corresponds to five countries.

The size of VSBs, in terms of members, varies from 13 to 15 in some very small countries to 6,000 to 11,000 in the most populated countries in Africa (i.e. Nigeria and Egypt) (Fig. 6).

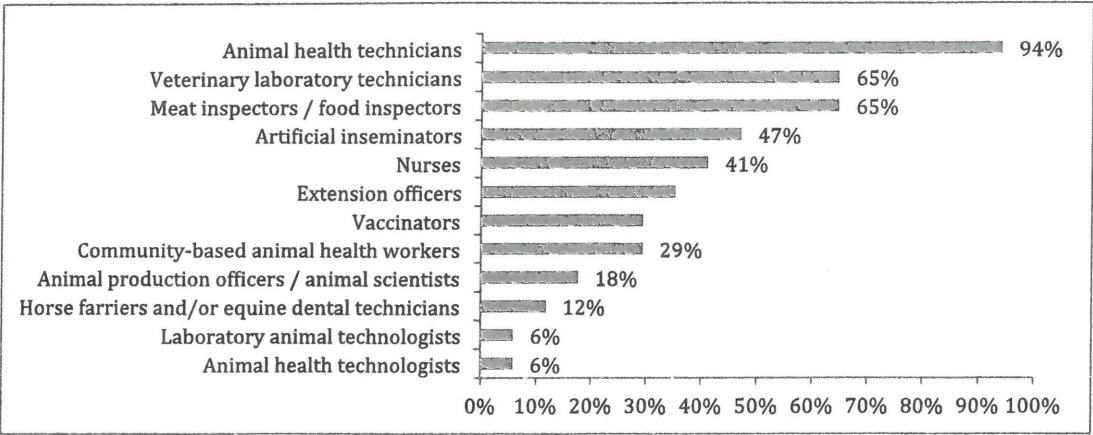


Fig. 5 Where legislation permits, categories of veterinary para-professionals registered by the Veterinary Statutory Bodies in Africa, in decreasing order of frequency

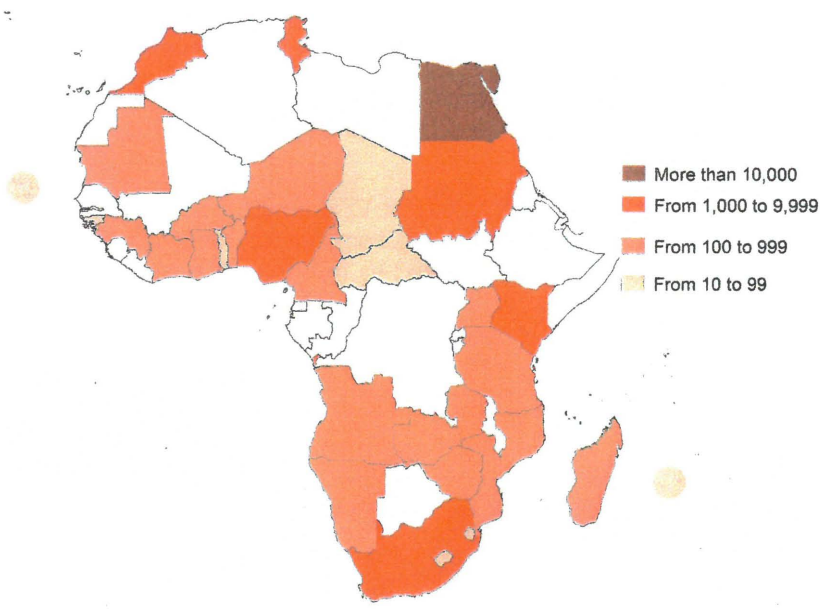


Fig. 6 The number of Veterinary Statutory Body members in African countries (in red) with a Body, established by law. The number of members is indicated by the intensity of the red colour (increasing from pale red to dark red)

On average, the membership of VSBs comprises 46% private sector veterinarians, 19% public sector veterinarians, 11% veterinary academic staff, 7% veterinary research staff and 1% 'others', e.g. retired veterinarians, members of parliament, etc. This explains why the percentage of registered veterinarians is sometimes greater than the percentage of veterinarians working in the country (89% on average).

When examining the compliance of VSBs with the main elements of the international standards, as defined by the OIE in Chapter 3.2. of the *Terrestrial Code*, it appears that few VSBs in Africa undertake the three main tasks of a VSB:

- (a) the licensing or registration of veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals to perform the activities of veterinary medicine/science;
- (b) the maintenance of minimum standards of education (initial and continuing) required for degrees, diplomas and certificates entitling the holders thereof to be registered or licensed as veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals;

(c) the setting of standards of professional conduct and competence of veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals and ensuring that these standards are met (Fig. 7).

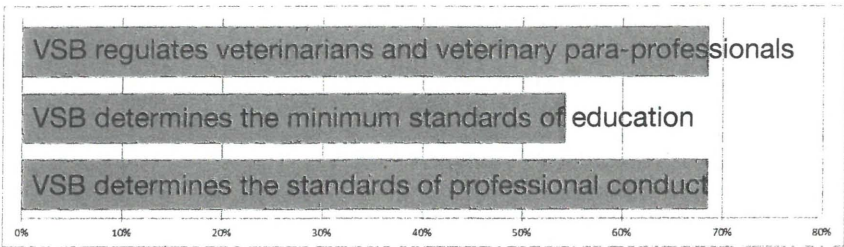


Fig. 7 Compliance of Veterinary Statutory Bodies in Africa with three important mandates of any Veterinary Statutory Body, as defined in the Terrestrial Code

Overall, only 15 VSBs in Africa comply with all three requirements (43% of respondents from countries with a VSB). The only reason for non-compliance with statement (a) is the fact that the VSB does not register veterinary para-professionals. The main reason for non-compliance with statement (b) is the fact that the country does not train its own veterinarians (no national faculty or school of veterinary medicine or sciences).

On average, each country in Africa has 1.3 faculties or schools of veterinary medicine or sciences offering university degrees in veterinary medicine and 4.2 institutes or schools providing sub-university/diploma training in animal health, such as veterinary nursing schools.

The OIE standards also state that the statutes establishing the VSB should clearly define (a) the election procedures and duration of appointment; and (b) the qualification requirements for members. Compliance is 87% for both requirements. Cases of non-compliance are often linked to the lack of ‘autonomy from undue political and commercial interests’. This arises, for example, when chairpersons are designated by the Line Ministry (17%) or are synonymous with the position of Director of Veterinary Services (6%; Fig. 8).

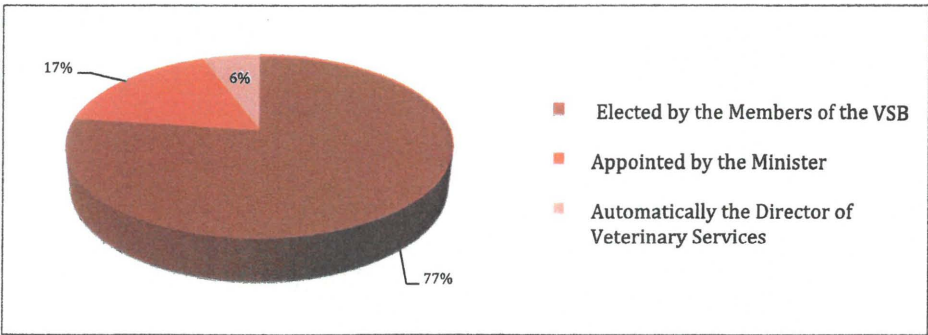


Fig. 8 Three ways in which Chairpersons of Veterinary Statutory Bodies are elected or appointed

The breakdown of the membership of the governing body of the VSB is shown in Figure 9. Other indicators of compliance with international standards and best practice, as defined by the OIE, concern the duration of appointments and the interval between elections. Based on the survey, most VSBs have defined these intervals in their statutes or in their legislation (91%) and have appointed a Council or Board for a duration of 3 years (on average 3.3 years with a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 5 years). Nevertheless, some VSBs organised their last elections as long ago as 1998 (15 years). On average, the most recent elections were held 2.9 years ago. The most recent presentation of the financial report to the members was, on average, 19 months ago.

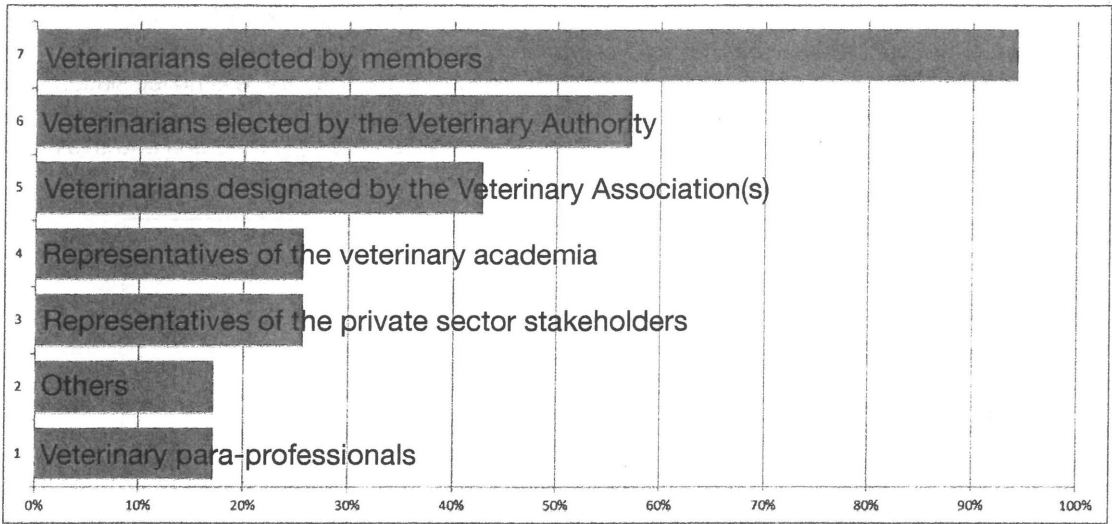


Fig. 9 Categories of veterinarians constituting the governing body (e.g. board) of the Veterinary Statutory Body in Africa, in decreasing order of frequency

The willingness of VSBs to exert their authority to the full extent of the law is illustrated by the number of cases in which VSBs engage in punitive or repressive measures, which is generally low. As shown in Figure 10, less than 50% of VSBs launched (one or several) investigation (s) of professional misconduct by members during the past 12 months and only four VSBs applied penalties to their members for such misconduct (11%).

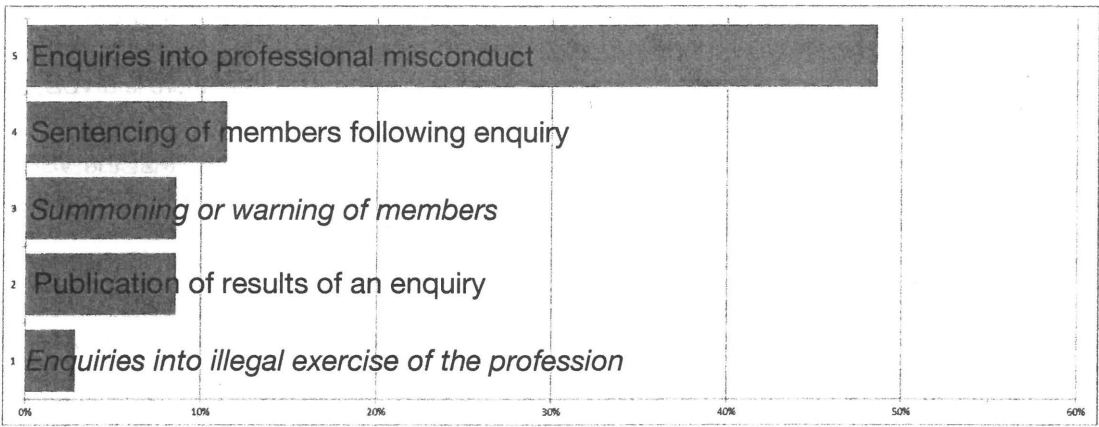


Fig. 10 Corrective or punitive measures taken by the Veterinary Statutory Bodies in Africa, in decreasing order of frequency
The measures printed in italic were additional measures, suggested by the contributors to the survey (under ‘other’)

The cost of registration of veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals was also investigated. The fee for a first time registration of a national veterinarian is on average US\$ 46 and for a foreign veterinarian US\$ 161. The average annual retention fee is US\$ 62, with special fees sometimes for retired veterinarians or private sector veterinarians. In some countries, no retention fees are payable at all, whilst in other countries retention fees may be as high as US\$ 280 per annum. For veterinary para-professionals, the average registration fee varies from US\$ 30 to 35, depending on the category of veterinary para-professionals and the average annual retention fee is US\$ 19 (varying from free of charge to US\$ 60).

When queried (as an open question) about the relationship between the VSB and the Line Ministry (the Ministry in charge of the Veterinary Authority) most respondents highlighted the independence of the VSB from government (whether operational or financial) and considered the Ministry as one of many partner institutions represented in the Council. Other respondents referred to financial support provided by the Ministry and described the Ministry as part of the decision-making process, e.g. validation or ratification by the Minister of decisions taken by the VSB.

Based on the analysis of PVS reports (PVS evaluations and PVS Gap Analyses, where applicable) from 49 countries (91% of countries), it would appear that 16 countries (33%), at the time at which the mission was conducted (2006–13), were allocated a level of advancement score 1, which means that ‘there is no legislation establishing a VSB’ (Fig. 11). According to the authors’ survey (2013), only 15 countries have no legislation establishing a VSB. The difference may be attributed to the passage of time between the PVS missions and this analysis.

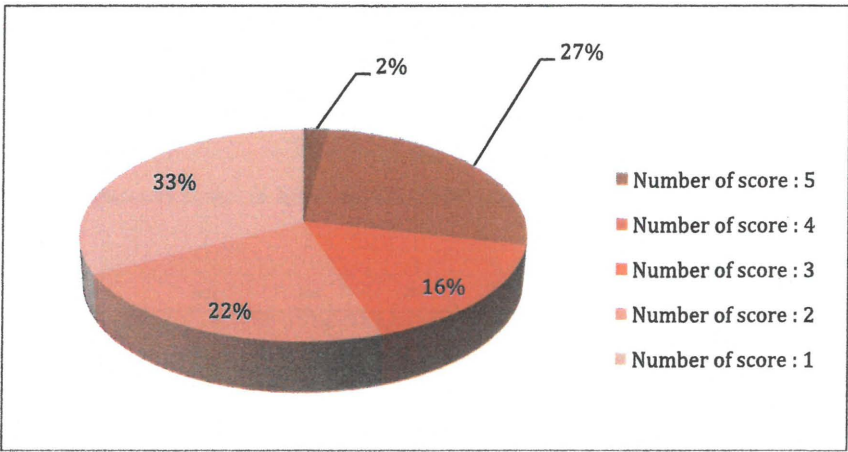


Fig. 11 Levels of advancement of Veterinary Statutory Bodies in Africa, as compared with the international standards, rendered based on 49 Performance of Veterinary Services evaluation reports (levels 1 to 5, according to increasing compliance with international standards)

Eleven countries (22%) were categorised at level of advancement 2, which means ‘that the VSB regulates veterinarians only within certain sectors of the veterinary profession and/or does not systematically apply disciplinary measures’. According to earlier versions of the PVS Tool, this could also mean that ‘there is a VSB, but it does not have legislated authority to make decisions nor to apply disciplinary measures’.

Eight countries (16%) were assessed being at advancement level 3, which means ‘that the VSB regulates veterinarians in all relevant sectors of the veterinary profession and applies disciplinary measures’. According to earlier versions of the PVS Tool, this could also mean ‘that the VSB regulates veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals only within certain sectors of the VS (e.g. public sector but not private sector veterinarians)’.

Finally, 14 countries (29%) were awarded a level of advancement of 4 (13) or even 5 (1), which means (at least) ‘that the VSB regulates functions and competencies of veterinarians in all relevant sectors and veterinary para-professionals according to needs’.

Discussion

Within the 52 Member Countries of the OIE in Africa, 36 (69%) have established formal VSBs which conform to some or all of the OIE criteria, as listed in the OIE *Terrestrial Code* (Article 3.2.12.). The remaining countries, for a variety of reasons, are in the process of establishing, did not manage to establish or do not envisage being able to establish such bodies. This finding is mirrored by the analysis of the PVS reports, with 16 countries not having a VSB that is operational.

Thirty-three African countries have (at least one) professional association (s). These associations do not have the same role and function as a VSB, according to the OIE definitions. However, these associations may perform some relevant functions in the countries where there are no VSBs, such as keeping a register of their members and setting standards for the profession by establishing a code of conduct against which the behaviour of the members may be measured and dealt with.

The compliance of the VSBs with OIE standards is generally low (43%) primarily because the VSB does not define the minimum standards for veterinary curricula and to a lesser extent because it does not register veterinary

para-professionals and/or does not apply corrective measures when confronted with malpractice. In countries where veterinary educational establishments (VEEs) exist, veterinarians are, in general, accredited by the VSB as an administrative measure, although there are some exceptions to this approach. The reliance on administrative procedures seldom leads to complaints and appeals (even if provision for these is made by statute).

Based on licensing numbers combined with the annual retention fee, the annual budget of a VSB varies from as little as US\$ 75 per annum to close to US\$ 800,000, which might explain why some VSBs stress their financial independence from outside influences and authorities, while others stress the fact that their operations very much depend on government support, e.g. in Angola and Morocco. In addition, many respondents acknowledge the fact that decisions taken by the VSB must be ratified, validated or endorsed by the Line Ministry to be implemented, e.g. for the accreditation of private veterinary practices in Cameroon. In a few countries, VSBs are basically government entities under the authority of the Veterinary Authority or the Line Ministry, where the Chair of the VSB is *ex officio* the CVO or Director of Veterinary Services.

In countries which have not yet established a VSB and those in which no veterinarians and/or veterinary para-professionals have been registered yet, most respondents identified delays in the approval of legislation as the main problem. It is relevant to note as well that initiatives dealing with regional integration in other sectors do not seem to extend to the VSBs. Only Burkina Faso referred to harmonisation of legislation pertaining to the Council across the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). Most responding countries (63%) indicated that there was no form of coordination with VSBs in neighbouring countries. This is surprising given the fact that most countries will have to open up their borders for veterinarians and para-professionals in the foreseeable future, as common markets take shape across the continent.

Conclusions

Three fundamental features of veterinary service delivery in Africa, (a) the relative scarcity of resources, making it difficult for VSBs to generate the required financial income, (b) the fact that the veterinary profession largely evolved from and/or is still widely dominated by the public services and (c) the inadequate awareness of stakeholders, explain the shortcomings described in this paper. Functional VSBs require the rule of law, democracy and the strict separation of the three powers of the State, which are not present everywhere in Africa today.

While progress has been made in the past decades, more needs to be done to (a) continue raising general awareness of requirements for good governance of the veterinary services, (b) establish VSBs in countries that have not yet done so, (c) improve VSBs' compliance with OIE standards in other countries and (d) improve the linkages between VSBs and VEEs in order to strengthen the influence of VSBs on the supply and demand for professionals of the highest possible quality in years to come.

In this respect, regional coordination and harmonisation is critical. Unfortunately, there is to date no continental organisation or union of VSBs, nor are there such bodies at regional level. With the support of – amongst others – the OIE, VEEs in some parts of Africa have started engaging in regional coordination in basic core curriculum, continuing education and innovations in the delivery of courses; and involve the VSBs of those countries as part of the (main) stakeholders. This is currently the case with the Southern and Eastern Africa Association of Veterinary Educational Establishments (SEAAVEE) and the Mediterranean Network of Veterinary Educational Establishments (REEV-Med). The OIE recommendations on Day 1 competencies of graduating veterinarians and the OIE guidelines on the veterinary core curriculum are used as reference documents and some VEEs are currently considering entering an OIE-facilitated twinning agreement with another establishment. The same will type of twinning agreements shortly be available to African VSBs wishing to enter into a twinning agreement with another VSB.

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