Veterinary Service missions and good governance

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Summary
The rationale for the existence of official Veterinary Services (VS) has seldom been under such intensive public scrutiny as over the past two decades when the world has been confronted with outbreaks of major animal diseases that have posed a potential threat not only to human health but also to animal health and national food security. The mere existence of VS is not enough. The mission statement of the VS can no longer be cast in stone but needs to adapt and be amended continually to cope with new demands. The ability to ensure not only acceptance but also sustainability of the delivery of VS as a global public good, thereby demonstrating good governance, is becoming and will remain a challenge in terms of keeping it a non-rivalrous and non-excludable service to a demanding public clientele.

Mission statements to improve the health and welfare of animals will, however, remain no more than noble normative statements of intent if further refinement on how this should be done and governed is not encompassed in the strategic plans, vision and goals of the Veterinary Authority. They will also remain but noble statements if cognisance is not taken of the increased sensitivity, nationally and internationally, around animal welfare issues during transport, movement, housing, treatment and slaughter of animals and if this sensitivity is not reflected or addressed in national animal health and veterinary public health legislation.

The author describes some of the ways in which currently accepted critical functions of the VS need to change to demonstrate good governance and respond to the challenges of new or amended missions in order to meet the demands of an ever-changing VS environment.

Keywords

Introduction
The rationale for the existence of official Veterinary Services (VS) has seldom been under such intensive public scrutiny as over the past two decades when the world has been confronted with outbreaks of major animal diseases that have posed a potential threat not only to human health but also to animal health and national food security. The mere existence of VS is not enough. It is increasingly essential to show that their structure, coverage, resources and scientific capabilities are in line with the needs of their own countries and those of the countries or groups of countries with which they trade (12). Moreover, not only do their visible resources, structure and scientific capabilities need to be in line with perceived expectations, but it must also be convincingly demonstrated that the resources made available through public and donor funding to deliver an expected level of service also deliver good governance. The sharper focus on the need for good governance of VS probably started with the onset of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis in the UK in the late 1980s, which was soon followed by other animal disease and related threats with continental spread (e.g. severe acute respiratory syndrome [SARS], the devastating outbreak of foot and mouth disease [FMD] in the UK and Europe at the turn of the millennium, and the unprecedented spread of highly pathogenic influenza [HPAI] over five continents) posing the potential for a human pandemic of the disease. The public in both affected and unaffected countries questioned the ability of the veterinary profession, and more specifically that of the public VS, to guarantee an effective protective barrier.
between the animal source of the disease and the potential threat to human health. The VS in many countries were obliged to ‘go public’ and defend their very existence.

Mission statements, in effect, convey the reasons for the existence of an organisation (7, 11). During the animal health crises mentioned above, when the role and response of the VS made the news headlines in almost every country in the world, the most common response of VS was to defend their actions and their mandate to deal with such threats to animal and human health simply by stating the mission of the VS, i.e. the reason for their existence. Many public VS, especially in Europe and Africa, came into being as a result of a threatening animal disease that had potential or proven ability to spread internationally, such as the devastating outbreaks of rinderpest in the late 1800s (7, 15). Veterinary Services were established to control and, where possible, eradicate the threat, thereby carrying out their missions ‘to control and eradicate animal diseases’, which, in many countries until today, have remained mostly unchanged and often unchallenged. However, it is accepted that several contributing factors, for example, globalisation, the speed of international travel (and thus the speed of the international spread of pathogens), climatic changes and changes in farming and management practices, have brought about a drastic change in the epidemiology of, especially, trade-sensitive and zoonotic animal diseases (6, 10). It could thus be quite rightly asked if the original mission statements, and thus the reasons for the existence of VS, are either still valid or fully reflect the ability of VS to meet the wide spectrum of challenges and interventions of the 21st Century. Ensuring the well-being of animals or intervening in and controlling outbreaks of major animal diseases are no longer the primary purposes of public VS. The missions of modern-day VS should reflect a wider spectrum of responsibilities, such as:

– not only looking after the health of terrestrial and aquatic animals but also caring for their welfare

– not only recording population figures for the most important livestock species, but also analysing and using these data to better face new challenges

– not only attempting to separate the wild animal source of disease from domestic stock, but also facing the new challenges of interfacing livestock and wildlife while still protecting both animal and human health

– not only caring about the health of live animals, but also caring about the safety of products from these animals for both animal and human health

– not only caring for animal health to safeguard exports, but also acknowledging the role of animals in securing national and global food security

The concept of governance is defined in several ways in the literature, depending on whether it is defined from a political or an administrative point of view (9). The Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code) of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), for example, does not define governance per se but has guidelines for the quality of the activities performed by VS, which could be interpreted as both the criteria for and the outputs of good veterinary governance. The Terrestrial Code identifies the fundamental principles of quality, including elements such as independence, impartiality, integrity, appropriate veterinary legislation and effective organisation, and the need for capable VS to be able to implement animal health policies and measures and comply with international standards (20). In laying down the 14 key criteria for assessing the quality of the services delivered by VS (i.e. the good governance of VS), the OIE by implication also accepts that these will be non-debatable and inherent characteristics of well-governed VS (18).

The World Bank, on the other hand, defines governance as the exercise of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage society’s problems and affairs (9). However, when defining ‘good governance’ as opposed to merely ‘governance’, the emphasis should be on those criteria that illustrate good governance, such as those defined in the OIE Terrestrial Code. Good governance has, according to some analysts, eight major characteristics (9). It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, and equitable and inclusive, and it follows the rule of law. It ensures that corruption is minimised, the views of minorities are taken into account and the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (9). This and other similar definitions of good governance, however, appear to establish a compromise between a political and an administrative approach. However, irrespective of the number of defining criteria, good governance should provide a buffer between the unwanted and the desired outcomes of a society by facilitating the desired outcomes. How this may apply to good veterinary governance is depicted in Figure 1.

![Fig. 1 Good veterinary governance acting as a buffer](image-url)
Missions to improve the health and welfare of terrestrial, aquatic, domestic and wild animals

A mission statement should spell out the overall goal of an organisation, provide direction and guide decision-making and actions (8). It should ideally also identify the primary stakeholders or customers of the organisation and describe how the organisation fulfils the needs of its customers and provides value for taxpayers’ money. It is generally accepted that the delivery of VS is a ‘global public good’, i.e. that every member of the public should have access to its service and share equal benefits of a service that should be non-rivalrous and non-excludable (2, 17). To be a global public good, all countries need to contribute so that each one effectively addresses the risks that threaten its livestock and the farmers and households that rely on these assets for food or income. There is ample evidence that failure by one country to meet this obligation can endanger the whole planet. Consequently, an animal health system operated by a national VS, the mission of which includes animal health surveillance and the early detection of, and rapid response to, animal disease outbreaks that might be of importance to other countries in protecting their animal health status, qualifies as a global public good.

To say that the mission of VS is to improve the health and welfare of animals, whether it is for terrestrial, aquatic or wild animals, appears at face value to be an easy and obvious statement. Caring for the well-being of animals is, in the eyes of the public, the logical mission of the veterinary profession and almost goes without saying. This responsibility of caring for animals and if this sensitivity is not reflected or addressed in national animal health and veterinary public health legislation.

A mission statement on improving the health and welfare of animals may, however, not be such an obvious and uncomplicated matter as it appears to be at face value. The caring for animals or application of welfare standards is relative to standard regimes for treatment of specific animal diseases, which are often subject to cultural beliefs and practices. What might be acceptable in one country, e.g. for stray dog control, might be totally illegal and unacceptable in another. The same also applies to differences between countries and cultures in management practices and housing and slaughter of animals. The OIE standards do provide flexibility to accommodate these differences, thereby allowing countries room to incorporate within their mission statements acceptable and often country-unique cultural beliefs in their approach to improving animal health and the welfare of animals.

Missions to identify animal populations and farming and animal management practices posing an animal health risk

The most common approach applied in organisational analysis to assessing the human and physical resource needs of VS is to express the number of veterinarians and para-veterinary personnel needed to deliver a service as a ratio of the national livestock population or calculated livestock units. Such a calculation seldom unpacks the livestock population in sub-population units or livestock units relative to the animal health risk. The livestock population, or given number of livestock units, is also regarded as a static unit, i.e. it mostly reflects the given number or calculated number of livestock or livestock units at a specific point in time. Changes in the numbers or calculated figures, such as changes due to natural reproduction, marketing, transhumance and movement or replacement trends, are often not considered in such calculations. The end result of such an organisational analysis provides a given number of personnel...
Requirements of the OIE establishing disease-free areas in compliance with the Terrestrial Code (1). These areas aim to eradicate Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), which if present, would prove a threat to human health, as was the case during the outbreak of H5N1 HPAI, but it becomes more difficult to do the same when dealing with a disease such as FMD that does not pose a threat to human health. However, it is therefore important to ensure the safety of the food that is produced and then offered to the consumer. Ensuring the health and welfare of animals is an equal concern, and something that should also be reflected in their mission statement, is ensuring the safety of the food derived from healthy animals from the time of slaughter to arrival on the shelves of the supermarket.

The past few years have also seen a closer link between animal health interventions and veterinary public health and especially food safety concerns. People want the assurance that what is presented on their plate is safe to eat, and the eyes of consumers are therefore increasingly turned towards the responsible authority, the VS, to provide these assurances. Members of the public, and specifically consumers of products of animal origin, expect government, and thus the VS, to accept responsibility for the food that is produced and then offered to the consumer as safe to eat. Ensuring the health and welfare of animals is accepted by default as a generic mission of VS. However, of equal concern, and something that should also be reflected in their mission statement, is ensuring the safety of the food derived from healthy animals from the time of slaughter to arrival on the shelves of the supermarket. Sensitivity around the link between animal health and public health, food security and food safety

Missions to reduce poverty by securing public health, food security and food safety

Of the eight Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations, it seems logical that the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger should come first (70% of the 178 Member Countries of the OIE are developing countries or countries in transition, the people in many of them living below the poverty threshold). More than 70% of the 178 Member Countries of the OIE are developing countries or countries in transition, the people in many of them living below the poverty threshold. It would thus be expected that the reduction of poverty would be reflected within the mission of the VS of not only these countries but also countries in the developed world, which have an equal responsibility to help alleviate global food insecurity.

In southern and eastern Africa, the establishment of trans-frontier conservation areas (TFCAs: huge areas, spanning country borders, converted to wildlife conservation areas) appears to be a noble idea to protect the indigenous wildlife population of Africa within its natural environment. However, TFCAs, which are populated by local people, pose a new challenge in terms of controlling disease (especially FMD) and of reconciling the concept of TFCAs with the aims of either eradicating FMD or establishing disease-free areas in compliance with the requirements of the OIE Terrestrial Code (1).

Mission statements that express the wish of VS to mitigate and thus govern the animal health risk in a country should therefore go beyond mere animal population figures; they should carefully unpack not only the potential risks within identified sub-populations, but also those within different subsets of those sub-populations, i.e. those arising from differences such as varying movement patterns, different market preferences, different activities necessitating the gathering of animals, varied cultural practices, and differing political preferences and priorities.
human health was well illustrated during the outbreaks of H1N1 influenza in pigs, the H5N1 HPAI pandemic, and the BSE outbreak in the UK. People were concerned about the possible threats posed by foods of animal origin and expected that the VS should not only take action but also give assurances through good governance of food safety, considered by consumers to be integral to their mission of delivering a public service.

Missions to facilitate access to national, regional and global markets in animals and animal products

It is to be expected that, in most developing countries, the primary objective of the VS would be to ensure national food security before seeking entry into the lucrative markets in developed countries. That is often the position taken by some countries where FMD, for example, is endemic. Such countries’ primary preference is to aim to ensure national food supply rather than going to the expense of establishing disease-free areas as a trade incentive. There is, however, a difference between accepting subsistence farming practices as a source of protein supply (without attempting to improve the status quo) and having a productive animal sector producing sufficient good-quality food for national consumption. To achieve the latter, veterinary interventions are necessary to ensure increased production and reproduction and the availability of healthy animals and good-quality breeding stock. The need for such interventions should be reflected not only within the mission statements of the VS but also in set objectives and a pathway within the vision and strategic planning of the governance of the VS.

Countries that are able to produce enough food for national consumption and that are aiming to enter regional or international markets often try to achieve, at huge cost, disease-free status for trade-sensitive diseases such as FMD in order to provide sanitary guarantees for trade. It is, however, unfortunate that these good intentions often fail to materialise. Achieving freedom from disease is not that difficult; the major challenge is maintaining disease-free status; however, this is often not understood at the outset and disease-free status cannot be sustained within a limited budget. Obtaining freedom from disease remains the ultimate ideal and is often reflected within the mission statements of countries aiming for entry into the export market. However, it would be more cost-effective to more gradually move towards this ultimate ideal by applying in the interim other trade-facilitating measures provided for in the Terrestrial Code.

Concepts such as compartmentalisation and safe commodity trade have created opportunities for a more cost-effective and often quicker way of countries entering the export market while still working towards compliance with standards to achieve country or zonal freedom from disease (3, 4, 20).

Countries wishing to enter the export market in animals and animal products should accept that ensuring the safety of international trade in animals and animal products is an important obligation of countries that are members of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Under the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement), countries are expected to apply the OIE standards to ensure safe trade with respect to animal health, Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) standards with respect to food safety, and the standards of the International Plant Protection Convention with respect to the health of plants (3, 22). The link between the national responsibility of VS and their international responsibility, through membership of organisations such as the OIE and the WTO, by default also binds VS to good governance on a global level and as stakeholders in providing a global public good. Accountability thus reaches across national borders, which adds another dimension to the responsibility of the national VS. Accountability is a key requirement of good governance (Fig. 2). Not only governmental institutions, but also the private sector and civil society organisations, must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organisation or institution. In general, an organisation or institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions (9).

However, the apparent ease with which important pathogens have spread internationally has eroded the ability of national governments alone to deal with these threats (4, 6, 10). It is no longer unusual for both developed and developing countries to request assistance from international organisations to deal with these problems. The international community seems to accept that action programmes must take a global or at least a regional approach, as opposed to the more traditional national approach. Preventive and control strategies must thus be well integrated between public health and animal health authorities. The challenge facing countries in ensuring safe trade in animals and animal commodities is not restricted to animal health considerations alone. The occurrence and spread of animal diseases with zoonotic potential has further challenged both national veterinary authorities and the international standard-setting organisations, which must develop standards for certification that will satisfy both animal and human health concerns.
OIE criteria for good governance
1. Professional judgement
2. Independence
3. Impartiality
4. Integrity
5. Objectivity
6. Veterinary legislation
7. General organisation
8. Quality policy
9. Procedure and standards
10. Information, complaints, appeals
11. Documentation
12. Self-evaluation
13. Communication
14. Human and financial resources

Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS Tool)
1. Human and physical resources
2. Technical authority and capability
3. Interaction with stakeholders
4. Access to markets

Good veterinary governance
Delivery of a public good
Compliance

Obligations as Member of OIE and WTO

Good international veterinary governance
Delivery of a global public good

Fig. 2
The pathway towards the delivery of a global public good and good global veterinary governance

Developing countries are increasingly coming under pressure to improve their delivery of veterinary services to support their mission to enter the competitive arena of international trade in animals and animal products. The demands placed on developing countries, predominantly by developed countries, to comply with international disease prevention standards have also resulted in increasing demands on the financial, human and technological resources of these developing countries (4).

The OIE, in pursuing the mandate in the SPS Agreement of the WTO and that given to the OIE by its World Assembly of Delegates, is committed to facilitating and promoting, as far as possible within its resources, international trade in animals and animal products for all its Members. There can be no shortcuts to achieving this goal, and it will take time and demand a rational and scientific approach to future decision-making. As compliance with OIE standards is not immediately achievable by all, there is a need for research into alternative ways of facilitating trade without sacrificing good veterinary governance or the need for eventual compliance with standards. This is a major challenge not only to the OIE but also to all international organisations seeking a more liberalised trading environment and market access for all (3).

Missions to protect endangered wildlife species within the livestock–wildlife interface

The VS of a country, responsible for containing disease outbreaks in which wildlife are either the source of disease in livestock or are under threat from a disease in livestock, have to consider not only the health of the livestock population at risk and possible trade restrictions, but also wildlife conservation interests. Difficult decisions often need to be taken to meet the needs, priorities and often conflicting demands of livestock producers, the wildlife industry and other interest groups. Classic control measures such as isolation, vaccination and culling of infected stock are seldom questioned when applied in disease outbreaks in livestock. However, when similar methods are proposed for wildlife in the event of threatening disease outbreaks, the VS are faced with several challenges: for example, questions on the rationale for applying classic control measures in wildlife; the need for wildlife conservation and the protection of valuable genetic material; and the guarantees required to certify freedom
from disease in the domestic population when the disease is also present in the wildlife population.

It has been shown that approximately 61% of human pathogens, 77% of livestock pathogens, 90% of carnivore pathogens and 75% of emerging pathogens are zoonotic or have multiple hosts. The majority (71.8%) of emerging zoonotic diseases originate in wildlife, and the role that wildlife plays in disease emergence has increased significantly over time (14). The VS of a country have a responsibility to find an acceptable balance between ensuring the health of the domestic livestock population and remaining sensitive to wildlife interests, and this challenge has become increasingly difficult over the past few years. The questions of how to successfully manage the livestock–wildlife interface within changing ecosystems, how to maintain the biodiversity equilibrium and how to satisfy the interests of often contradictory needs will be increasingly important issues on the agenda of VS worldwide and will need to be reflected and accommodated within their mission statements.

Classic movement controls and methods of separation of livestock and wildlife have proved successful, e.g. in countries in southern Africa where buffalo are separated from livestock to prevent a spillover of FMD virus. However, such disease management control strategies are not applicable under all circumstances and raise questions on disease control measures applicable to separable or controllable wildlife species on the one hand and non-separable and non-controllable wildlife species on the other. The pathogenesis of diseases that are well known in livestock is often not as clear in wildlife, which calls for further research to enable VS to accommodate these differences within their decision-making processes and to review their missions to accommodate the often unique challenges posed by the livestock–wildlife interface as it relates to animal disease control.

Conclusion

The ability of the VS of countries to align their mission statements with continuous new challenges and also to defend the reasons for their existence and the way in which they are governed is being challenged much more intensely than would have been the case 20 to 30 years ago. The classic mission statements, reflecting the primary (and often only) responsibility of caring for the health and welfare of animals and controlling threatening animal diseases, are clearly insufficient to accommodate the increasing pressure on the VS of the new millennium to meet the demands and concerns of their clientele. The increasingly multidisciplinary environment in which the VS of today need to operate has brought new demands and challenges. Not only has the gap between animal health and human health narrowed considerably, due to an increase in emerging zoonotic diseases, but also the public are increasingly directing their concerns over issues such as food safety, food security, animal welfare and the wildlife–livestock interface to the VS and looking to them to provide answers and assurances.

The mission statement of a VS can no longer be cast in stone but needs to adapt and be amended continually to cope with new demands. The ability to ensure not only acceptability but also sustainability of the delivery and governance of VS as a global public good is becoming, and will remain, a challenge in terms of maintaining them as a non-rivalrous and non-excludable service to a demanding public clientele.

Veterinary Services must play the role of ‘guarantor’, i.e. the VS must ensure that all problems related to the field of veterinary medicine are managed effectively, in such a way as to uphold healthcare standards and the rights of the public. Moreover, the ‘guarantor’ role of VS must be considered an institutional objective and have a mandate, issued by the national authorities and reflected within their mission and governance, to help achieve the animal health objectives of a particular country (11).
Les missions des Services vétérinaires et la bonne gouvernance

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Résumé
Si l’on considère les deux décennies écoulées, la raison d’être des Services vétérinaires officiels a rarement été soumise à un examen aussi minutieux qu’aujourd’hui, alors que le monde entier est confronté à des foyers épizootiques majeurs menaçant potentiellement non seulement la santé humaine mais aussi la santé animale et la sécurité alimentaire des pays. Il ne suffit pas aux Services vétérinaires d’exister. Le mandat qui leur est assigné n’est plus gravé sur du marbre mais doit évoluer et s’adapter en permanence afin de satisfaire à de nouvelles exigences. La capacité de susciter l’adhésion et d’assurer durablement la prestation de services vétérinaires dans une perspective de bien public mondial, et donc de bonne gouvernance est devenue un véritable enjeu, et le demeurera à l’avenir pour que ces services conservent leur caractère non rival et non exclusif auprès d’une clientèle publique de plus en plus exigeante. Néanmoins, les énoncés de mission concernant l’amélioration de la santé et du bien-être des animaux ne sont rien de plus que de nobles et normatives déclarations d’intention tant que les plans stratégiques, les prévisions et les objectifs des Autorités vétérinaires n’apportent aucune précision sur les moyens de parvenir à cette fin et sur la gouvernance mise en œuvre pour le faire. Il en va de même si l’on ne prend pas acte de la sensibilisation accrue, tant au niveau national qu’international, concernant les problèmes de bien-être animal qui se posent durant le transport des animaux, lors de leur transfert, dans les locaux d’élevage, lors des traitements et durant l’abattage, et si les législations nationales de santé animale et de santé publique vétérinaire ne tiennent pas compte de ces préoccupations.

L’auteur explique de quelle manière certaines fonctions actuellement déterminantes des Services vétérinaires doivent être transformées dans le sens d’une bonne gouvernance afin de répondre aux défis associés aux missions nouvelles et changeantes de ces Services et de s’adapter aux exigences d’un contexte en permanente mutation.

Mots-clés

Misión de los Servicios Veterinarios y buen gobierno

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Resumen
Casi nunca las razones que justifican la existencia de Servicios Veterinarios oficiales han sido objeto de un debate público tan intenso como en los dos últimos decenios, cuando el mundo ha debido afrontar brotes de importantes enfermedades animales que entrañaban una posible amenaza no solo para la salud humana, sino también para la sanidad animal y la seguridad alimentaria de los países. La mera existencia de Servicios Veterinarios no basta. Ahora ya no cabe entender la misión de los Servicios Veterinarios como una verdad inmutable, sino como algo que conviene adaptar y modificar continuamente para
dar respuesta a nuevas exigencias. La capacidad de lograr no solo la aceptación, sino también la sostenibilidad de la prestación de servicios veterinarios como bien público mundial, exhibiendo por ello mismo métodos de buen gobierno, es cada vez más, y seguirá siendo, una obligación ineludible, que pasa por la prestación de un servicio no excluyente y exento de rivalidades a una clientela pública exigente.

Sin embargo, los enunciados de misión para mejorar el estado de salud y bienestar de los animales no pasarán de ser loables declaraciones normativas de intenciones a menos que los planes estratégicos, metas y objetivos a largo plazo de los organismos veterinarios integren una mayor sofisticación con respecto a los modos y medios de conseguirlo y a la forma de gobernar estos procesos. También serán papel mojado a menos que se tome conciencia de la creciente sensibilidad que existe a nivel nacional e internacional respecto de las cuestiones de bienestar animal ligadas al transporte, desplazamiento, alojamiento, manejo y sacrificio de los animales, y a menos que en los textos legislativos nacionales de sanidad animal y salud pública veterinaria se tenga en cuenta y se responda a esa sensibilidad.

El autor describe algunos de los cambios que es preciso introducir en las funciones de los Servicios Veterinarios hoy consideradas primordiales para exhibir buen gobierno y vencer las dificultades de una serie de misiones nuevas o modificadas con el fin de responder a las exigencias del mudable contexto en el que operan los Servicios Veterinarios.

Palabras clave


References


