Introduction and background

Improving animal health brings great benefits for human health, economic development, poverty alleviation and food production. This is particularly the case in Africa, where livestock is the largest contributor to agriculture and often accounts for more than 30% of the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP). In short, animals play a fundamental role in the livelihoods of African farmers and households.

As guarantors of animal and public health, Veterinary Services also have an important role to play because they are at the very core of animal disease detection, prevention and control; it is for this reason that Veterinary Services are considered a global public good. Good governance of animal health systems is the responsibility of all governments and depends upon the efficient use of good governance mechanisms; namely, providing adequate human and financial resources and employing the methods of governance described in the OIE Codes and democratically adopted by 178 Members.

In view of the economic and strategic importance of animal health systems, the goal of the European Union-funded programme, ‘Reinforcing Veterinary Governance in Africa’ (or ‘Vet-Gov’) is to achieve effective and efficient Animal Health Services in Africa by strengthening the institutional environment (national and regional). Reinforced Veterinary Services will be able to put into place the necessary measures to ensure that the livestock sector actively contributes to food security and safety, economic growth and wealth creation in Africa.

The Vet-Gov Programme

This programme builds on the success of the long-term partnership between the European Union, the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), OIE and FAO, which led to the eradication of rinderpest in 2011, one of the major transboundary animal diseases affecting Africa.

In collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), these partners have once again joined forces for this five-year programme. The structure of the Vet-Gov Programme is founded on the concept of partnership and on respecting the different mandates of the various institutions. The inception workshop for Vet-Gov was held at the OIE Headquarters in Paris (France) from 17 to 19 May 2012, with the participation of representatives from the three major implementing partners (AU-IBAR, FAO and OIE).

AU-IBAR has responsibility for the overall coordination of the programme and has already begun a series of stakeholder workshops in all sub-regions to promote and improve understanding of the programme, and to encourage participation (‘buy-in’) and ownership by all those who will benefit from Vet-Gov.

The FAO and OIE are responsible for carrying out the activities aimed at achieving specific results in the RECs and at both country and regional level. The OIE recognises the importance of regional stakeholders and has signed collaboration agreements with organisations such as AU-
IBAR, RECs (the Arab Maghreb Union, Economic Community of West African States and Southern African Development Community) and other Economic Communities (the West African Economic and Monetary Union or WAEMU, and the Commission Economique du Bétail, de la Viande et des Ressources Halieutiques – CEBEVIRHA), to support them in implementing their respective mandates.

The OIE approach

The OIE has long advocated the need to strengthen, support and promote good governance of Veterinary Services and the Vet-Gov Programme coincides with this objective. The OIE PVS Pathway encapsulates the OIE’s strategy of using OIE standards to evaluate and improve the quality of Veterinary Services and guidelines on veterinary legislation to bring a country’s laws and regulations up to date. Progressing in the PVS Pathway allows national Veterinary Services to establish their current levels of performance, identify gaps in their ability to comply with OIE international standards, and define a shared vision with their stakeholders (including the private sector), by establishing priorities and securing the investment needed to carry out strategic initiatives.

Through the Veterinary Legislation Support missions under the PVS Pathway, the OIE will provide assistance to countries wanting to improve their legislation in the animal health field and ensure that their animal health systems provide for: appropriate disease surveillance, early detection and transparency, and a rapid response to animal disease outbreaks, including biosafety measures, compensation and vaccination, when appropriate. To further support this initiative and encourage Members to take it up, the OIE will conduct a seminar on veterinary legislation for OIE Subject Matter Focal Points in Cotonou (Benin) from 15 to 17 January 2013.

Bearing in mind the benefits of the OIE PVS Pathway, and in line with the already-established results of Vet-Gov, the OIE will continue to deploy these tools in Africa to enhance the institutional capacities of African Veterinary Services in livestock policy formulation, animal health strategies and legislation, and to help them to enforce and implement their policies and regulations in line with the OIE international standards on quality.

Additionally, and in collaboration with AU-IBAR, the OIE will implement or ‘roll out’ the updated OIE-compatible Animal Resources Information System (ARIS II) in an increasing number of African countries. This exercise will be accompanied by a campaign to promote awareness among Member States of the enormous value of collecting and sharing such information, to ensure that the necessary financial support is made available to guarantee the sustainability of the system and to improve the capacity to respond rapidly to outbreaks and prevent and control animal diseases. In particular, it is important to control the existing endemic diseases, to prevent their spread to other countries or regions and to reduce their expansion, with the long-term goal of eradication.

Challenges and perspectives

The Vet-Gov Programme provides the institutional framework to avoid duplications or gaps, so that the already-proven partnership between the OIE, FAO, AU-IBAR and RECs can continue towards strengthening good governance among Veterinary Services. Together, these organisations can make a valuable contribution towards the improvement of public health and food security in Africa.

Although the programme provides an incredible opportunity to coordinate actions in Africa among intergovernmental and regional organisations/institution, there are still certain challenges that it must overcome before it can fully achieve its objectives.