STRENGTHENING VETERINARY SERVICES THROUGH RESTRUCTURING
AND THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND SPECIFIC GROUPS

V.M. Astudillo
Director of the Pan American Foot and Mouth Disease Centre, P.O. Box 589
Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, CEP 20001-970

Original: Spanish

Summary: Strengthening Veterinary Services is a key element in the operation of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures which led to a re-examination of the health principles governing trade in animals and animal products. Where official Veterinary Services are the only protagonists involved in animal health activities, their effectiveness is often hampered by excessive administrative centralisation, and coordination with other sectors and institutions of society is generally poor. The world trend is towards a reduced role for the State as a service provider, hence the need to seek new models for animal health organisations. Solutions that involve giving access to new social players, especially from the private sector, appear to be very attractive because these players generally have a strong capacity to mobilise social, political and financial resources. These new models transfer animal health activities to a geographical micro-area consisting of local committees in which the community shares the problems and interests of the livestock sector.

A questionnaire sent to the OIE Member Countries shows that there is a wide range of approaches and a number of strategies for organising social participation in animal health issues. The great majority of countries have adopted an official policy that aims to involve the livestock farming community in health management. Such participation can range from simple consultation or ad-hoc collaboration with livestock farmers or private veterinarians, to the full participation of the community in all of the health processes. The State must be the main instigator of this process, which cannot be launched without considering the motives of the participating community, the importance of which is measured by the continuity of effort and degree of commitment of the social players.

Training in participation is fundamental to this process because it allows the members of the community to become key players in a teaching and learning process that has its origins in day-to-day practice, and it confers on individuals the necessary qualifications to initiate and promote changes in the health situation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the international scene has undergone a series of diverse transformations. One that has evolved at a breathtaking rate, especially during the past decade, is economic globalisation, characterised by the opening up of markets to international trade. This economic development during society’s transition between the second and third millennia has had considerable repercussions on the international animal health situation.

Apart from the other macro-trends, such as the technological revolution and widespread access to information through the world communication network, it is the conditions laid down in the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS1, GATT2/WTO3, 1994) that have guided the development of the health principles governing trade in animals and animal products. In this agreement, the Member Countries of the WTO undertake to

---

1 Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures of the World Trade Organization.
2 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.
3 World Trade Organization.
avoid trade barriers that are not scientifically justified, and to base their decisions on the assessment and management of health risks, in the search for suitable levels of protection. One of the keys to these new principles is to strengthen Veterinary Services so that they possess the necessary infrastructure for applying measures of this type and ensuring the reliability of information on which risk assessment is based (28).

Historically it has always been the State that, having recognised the major importance of health problems in livestock production to economic and social development, has provided a socially organised response in the form of official Veterinary Services (1). In other cases, this response emerged as a result of the pressure exerted by countries importing livestock products (36).

The major fluctuations in the world market have had heavy repercussions on national economies. In developing countries, the size of external debt has only served to accentuate such effects. The policies of adjustment to this crisis have sought to stabilise fiscal matters and the balance of payments, which has led to a reduction in investment and a significant drop in service provision capacity (17). These disruptions have affected virtually all the Veterinary Services throughout the various regions of the world, often prejudicing the effectiveness of health management (7, 16). Animal health disciplines, which have always been eminently technical in nature, are today expanding and discovering that they will not be able to continue to protect animal health unless they develop new information-producing and power-creating approaches. The time has come to extend the field of vision, to reconstruct methods and to seek new practices in order to foster the creation of a social entity that is responsible for animal health problems, and to call upon the State to help overcome the apparent contradiction between political and technical issues (15).

The current situation requires a search for new organisational models for Veterinary Services. An attractive alternative is to form alliances with new social players, especially in the private sector (34), hence the need to redefine the social links between the State and civil society in animal health matters, without going as far as abdicating public responsibility (18). The new models lend themselves to other sectors, institutions and services (‘intersectoriality’), strengthen community participation and consolidate local authority, whether this is at the municipal or another level (decentralisation) (6).

Where the only animal health protagonist is the official veterinary administration, this could be detrimental to the long-term future of the programmes. By contrast, the involvement of social forces is favourable to the continuity, hence the importance of the local community participative model, especially in developing countries. This is all the more so as there are leaders, social organisations or institutions that hold real political power.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to gain a better understanding of the degree of community participation in animal health matters, forms of participation, benefits, and the type of involvement undertaken by social players, as well as their role in planning, implementing and assessing animal health activities, a questionnaire was sent to the 145 Member Countries of the Office International des Epizooties (OIE). Seventy-one countries replied and 69 replies were selected for analysis.

The information obtained from the questionnaire may be summarised as follows:

a) 89% of the countries that answered the questionnaire declared that their Veterinary Services had established an official policy for participative management with social players in the community, particularly in the private sector. The aim was to introduce a programme jointly with the official services for the different phases in the prevention and control of animal diseases.

The main objectives of participation mentioned by the countries that replied to the questionnaire were, in descending order of importance: to improve the production capacity of the livestock sector (76%); to boost international trade in livestock products (75%); and lastly to resolve public health problems (66%). Support for small-scale producers was considered to be an important aspect, particularly by East European countries.

With respect to community intervention, the countries mentioned strengthening local actions to prevent and/or control disease (93%), identifying problems and needs in the field of animal health (86%), and formulating proposals for resolving such problems (81%). The developing countries reported less community participation in the assessment of actions to protect against and control disease at local level, whereas the developed countries reported more community participation in all activities linked to health processes.

The results of the questionnaire show that, except for the developed countries, community participation is limited to forms of consultation and collaboration. Those developing countries that had ranked social participation last in the assessment of health activities, mentioned that historically their official services had restricted social participation to
selected areas of secondary importance. As a mechanism for generating new options for improving the management of programmes, assessment is an innovative and creative process. These results confirm that the lack of a close relationship between official services and the community acts as a hindrance to improvement of the livestock health situation.

b) With respect to the way community participation in animal health matters is organised, the results indicate that 45% of the countries benefit from participation at three hierarchical levels (national, regional and local), and that 72% benefit from participation at national level, 71% at regional level and 61% at local level. In 11% of the countries there is no form of community participation at all. In more than half of the countries the community has begun to take part in such activities over the past ten years.

With respect to the social players concerned with animal health at national and local levels, most of the countries mentioned livestock raisers first and private-sector veterinarians second. The relationship with other social players, such as scientific and technical institutions and universities, is cited less often.

Locally, meetings between the various social groups and the official Veterinary Services take place at the offices of the Veterinary Services (90%) as well as on the premises of livestock farmers’ organisations (80%).

It is an acknowledged fact that the local level, which ought to be the level most suited to the participative process, remains the least developed. Overall, the results regarding this point are encouraging and demonstrate that real progress has been made.

c) With respect to the administrative functions associated with animal health, nine of which were cited in the questionnaire, virtually all of the responsibilities fall to the official services, with the exception of health operations in the field, which are shared with private-sector veterinarians or are based on certain forms of co-management between the public and private sectors. The health activities set up at the initiative of the social players in the community are broadly supported by the official Veterinary Services. However, less than 50% of the countries indicated that the social organisations took initiatives in animal health matters.

Making other social players in the animal health sector jointly responsible for actions that have always been the sole responsibility of the official services requires a gradual ‘apprenticeship’ on the part of these services and their technicians. Indeed, traditionally the State and its organs have been non-participative institutions, and veterinarians are rarely trained to work participatively with social groups. Nonetheless, the situation is changing fast in view of the current threat of the Veterinary Services gradually deteriorating.

d) The benefits of local community participation in the animal health sector most often cited (under the headings ‘considerable repercussions’ or ‘limited repercussions’) were boosting public awareness of animal health issues (80%), and an increase in productivity and the joint management of health problems (77% of the replies for each of these two points). The benefits least often cited were the rationalisation of the work of women (36%) and the integration of cultural values specific to animal health care (47%).

The disadvantages associated with the lack of community participation in the animal health sector (grouping together the replies received under the headings ‘considerable repercussions’ and ‘limited repercussions’) are the ineffectiveness of actions (74%) and the lack of cost-effectiveness or sustainability (73% for these two headings). The large number of replies mentioning rising public awareness of health problems and co-management is a favourable sign for future development.

In order to analyse some of the procedures followed by the various countries for restructuring animal health activities through the participation of social players, particularly the private sector, this report will present the principles and methodologies applied to animal health, social participation and participative forms of organisation. Taking the experience acquired in the countries of South America in eradicating foot and mouth disease as an example, it emerges that the objective was achieved in all regions and all countries where the health provision systems set up as part of these programmes included active and intensive community participation.

3. ANIMAL HEALTH ACTIVITIES

The term ‘animal health activities’ or ‘veterinary monitoring of animal health problems’ is intended to mean the health services provided to livestock raisers by specific institutions (Veterinary Services), by other establishments and
In view of these realities, many countries have plans for restructuring their animal health systems in line with the sectors capable of mobilising political, financial and material resources.

Animal health activities are centred on health events, and involve complex processes calling for continuous, simultaneous and mutual interaction with the components and variables of the physical and socio-cultural environment (11). In this context, the operational characteristics of open systems continually interact with the social system as a whole (energy, information, goods, resources) (10, 31). This global approach to the veterinary sector makes it possible to overcome the rigidity of interdisciplinary barriers, procures a global vision of the structure and processes involved in health services, and allows the constant changes affecting the system’s components, priorities and social players to be understood. It therefore appears that when seeking any transformation it is necessary to take into account the complexity of the system. Moreover, Veterinary Services are only a component (or sub-system) of animal health activities, which also encompass the interventions of specialised institutions (which usually have official status) that are responsible for providing services to livestock raisers (14).

In numerous countries, especially developing countries, the effectiveness of animal health activities is hampered by weaknesses in the overall organisation of the Veterinary Services’ health activities, namely: a) the excessive administrative centralisation that characterises the analysis of health problems, in which the search for solutions depends solely on the opinion of technicians; b) the asymmetric relationship between the official services and the groupings concerned by livestock production, which in certain cases leads to social isolation; c) poor coordination with the other sectors and institutions present in rural society; d) the lack of management adaptability; and e) the low importance accorded to the health role of small-scale producers (35).

We are living through a time of profound change in all areas of economic, social and political life. Science and technology are developing at an unprecedented rate, which, paradoxically, is creating a yawning gap between the knowledge acquired and the ability to resolve ever-increasing problems. Animal health activities centred around development and bearing the hallmark of a paternalist and beneficent State, have remained at a standstill in the face of pressures from the international market, the guiding principles of which are productivity, quality and competitiveness (22). The theoretical, methodological and technical courses formerly followed no longer provide guidelines, and it has become imperative to find new institutional and administrative procedures. However, this approach means calling into play all the available creative and innovative skills, as well as opening up the way to alliances with other groups and sectors capable of mobilising political, financial and material resources.

In view of these realities, many countries have plans for restructuring their animal health systems in line with the prevailing context. One of the new models that seeks far-reaching changes in procedures for providing animal health services, for using technology, for integrating knowledge and for ways of using resources is based on the organisation and participation of civil society (29). Other mechanisms are being set up in parallel to promote social mobilisation in aid of animal health activities. These mechanisms involve processes of administrative decentralisation and ‘intersectoriality’ (coordination between institutions and sectors), in seeking greater continuity of health interventions and better animal health management (6). As a result, local systems of animal health intervention have been designed by transferring health operations to the geographical micro-area (municipality, district, etc.) in which the community shares the same problems, interests and contextual conditions. It is in these local arenas that the social players who represent the various economic, social and political groups concerned with livestock production are able to participate in the health, productive and economic development of local livestock production and to assume responsibility for these issues (13).

**4. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION:**

**PROCESS OF DELIBERATION AND CONSULTATION**

Various definitions of the term community exist, but where this concept is used, it is always advisable to clarify its specific nature in relation to the objective conditions of communal life that result in an inter-relationship between the people and a social unit with shared interests, values and problems. These people normally live in a well-defined geographical area, but this does not mean that their interests, values and problems are exactly identical. It can only be said that this group shares a given general set of problems and issues. Indeed, the differences that exist give rise to differences of opinion and of position or to disputes that are sources of motivation and can foster skills that make it possible to construct collective solutions (5).

The social players in the livestock sector are members of groups fulfilling different social functions and whose interests and cultural values differ and are specific to them (3). Some of the social players of interest include livestock raisers,
herd owners, private-sector veterinarians, animal-industry and trade representatives, livestock transporters, producers and sellers of livestock products, representatives from other ministries and services working in the rural environment, consumers and all members of society whose activities are linked to livestock production and animal health (2).

Current experience of social participation in the resolution of animal health problems covers a multiplicity of guidelines and strategies that are embodied in very diverse forms of participation (20). Nevertheless it is appropriate to differentiate between passive participation, in which the social players have simply agreed to be included in the programmes of the official services, and active participation, in which the community collaborates by providing resources, work and financing. In the latter case we speak of the active participation of the community.

The different forms of social participation in animal health matters include:

a) the simple association of livestock raisers in programmes adopted by other participants, usually from the official professional sector;

b) the collaboration of voluntary workers in certain specific actions included in the programmes, the characteristics of which have been defined without consultation or participation;

c) collaboration in the form of sharing costs whereby the community makes specific financial investments in a given programme;

d) the regulated distribution of responsibilities, based on social participation in the programmes and founded on agreements that define the responsibilities of each party; and lastly

e) a more intensive form of community participation that embodies the desire of the community to exert an organised influence on the deliberations, the resolution of veterinary problems, the adoption of commitments and responsibilities, the mobilisation of resources and monitoring of the compliance of each group involved in the process with its obligations (21).

Community participation in the resolution of animal health problems implies joint participation in accordance with a “self-help” concept. This is a process whereby the components of each community group interact as social beings conscious of the participative apprenticeship process at work. Whilst reinforcing their role as key players in their own development, these players gradually learn to assume their full rights and duties as people in charge of the livestock health situation, especially as a certain intrinsic value is conferred upon such participation (25).

It is the very evolution of the participative process that should give rise to models for integration into health issues, whereas the community must involve itself in active and direct participation, by identifying needs, establishing priorities, seeking possible solutions, and helping to mobilise and distribute resources (40). Such an approach implies sharing responsibilities for the development and outcome of the programmes, as well as public non-State control of health management (26). Factors favourable to community participation include administrative decentralisation of health actions and improving the way civil society is organised, as well as inter-sectorial and inter-institutional coordination.

This involves a laborious, resolute, conflictual, on-going process that calls for a change in attitude in the relations between individuals, as it is essential to evince both great flexibility and an attitude of constructive criticism to cope with the changes brought about as the participative process comes to maturity. The process of social mobilisation can very easily be superimposed on the dynamic of each society, marked by the vital role of the economic, social, political and cultural determinants. Each case requires a situational analysis in order to identify the factors that determine the social relations prevailing in the community. The collective search for health solutions must involve a specific and active movement by the society concerned, and must be fostered by this society’s organisations and groupings. The participation of different social players in the conduct of animal health matters implies not only a progression in the resolution of health problems, but also a change in social relations so that it is no longer possible to exclude or to push into the background certain groups concerned with animal health problems (24).

Deliberation embodies the ability of the community concerned to help to analyse specific problems, by contributing its own vision and interpretation of the epidemiological, economic and commercial elements and by seeking to integrate the viewpoints of the different groups into a creative and transforming process. Consultation is a process whereby the different parties agree on what can be done to resolve the problems on which consensus has been reached. The consensus can culminate in the assignment of responsibilities and in implementing health actions. The mobilisation skills and representativeness of those acting for the different social groups play a fundamental role in such a consensus (12).
5. THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Community participation in animal health monitoring processes is linked to the distribution of powers because this modifies the social relations that exist by altering the relative importance of those responsible for thinking and those responsible for decision-making (27). Consequently it is essential to clarify the relationship between community participation, the State represented by the official Veterinary Services, and the other official institutions offering their services to livestock farmers.

Community participation calls for the role of the State to be reinforced, in order to allow it to be the promulgator and main guide in the process, and not to act as a hindrance (30). It is the State’s role to create a forum for meetings and consultations between the various social players in the community. It is desirable for official veterinarians to conduct and direct actions aimed at strengthening social participation and to resolve any conflicts of interest between the various groups (negotiation, consultation). Here the legitimacy of the role of government officials rests on their thorough technical training, which is reflected in the scope and soundness of their arguments and the effectiveness of the proposed solutions (37).

Any intervention in the livestock sector that calls upon local social groups to participate directly or indirectly in animal health activities necessarily involves the interests of such players and their perception of the local realities that they wish to transform. The point of view of the official Veterinary Services corresponds to an interpretation of reality that is based on scientific and technical knowledge and on experience acquired in the animal health field. However, it is also necessary to take into account the viewpoints of the interest groups whose knowledge stems from practical experience of livestock production and of the health problems encountered, which have a coherent interpretation within a specific context. The day-to-day activities aimed at transforming the realities of livestock production, whether simple or sophisticated, provide the members of this community with valuable knowledge which, though not systematically formalised in the manner of academic concepts, does possess a structure and a language specific to it. It is precisely this knowledge that leads the members of a rural community to define their own objectives when they participate in campaigns backed by the official Veterinary Services.

The first part of the process is the comparison of the different rationales and areas of knowledge relating to the technical and systematic approach on the one hand, and to the concrete and practical approach on the other, corresponding to different health situations, outlooks and values.

One of the most fragile but paradoxically one of the strongest aspects that determines the success of efforts to encourage community participation in animal health activities, is the way in which this clash between areas of knowledge and rationale is handled, because the consequences of any intervention have direct repercussions on the interests and production strategies of the community’s components.

State officials must take up this challenge and, through exchanges of view, knowledge and experience, they must work to develop more effective and more appropriate actions. It is therefore understood that a dialogue that takes account of the scientific and technical information and the practical experience of realities can create new knowledge, which will enable the community to renew and globalise its responses to these realities by developing its responsiveness and its innovation and management skills. The free participation of the community in animal health activities has an impact on the power relationships within society, developing new definitions for those responsible for thinking and those responsible for decision-making.

6. THE AIMS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation in animal health matters must be seen as a process of social mobilisation, organised specifically to reinforce the veterinary system. The main aim of this process is to eliminate the consequences of disease on production capacity, as well as factors hindering the sale of animals and livestock products, and problems affecting public health.

The processes of social participation cannot be analysed from an abstract viewpoint because it is imperative to take into account the community’s aim, by making reference to the type of interest or benefit it demands. The importance of motivation is measured by the continuity of the efforts and degree of involvement of the social players, these factors being directly related to the expected gains or benefits of participation. The aim of community participation is specific to each situation and assumes characteristics that are specific to each community. It also depends on the animal production system in operation (enterprises, family structures or subsistence farming), on the type of economic and commercial relationship with the global economy, and on the real possibility of each of these groups to participate in decisions regarding veterinary care.
In countries where the potential of the livestock sector is strong, particularly where there is a surplus of exportable products, the participation of livestock farmers organised into enterprises is largely directed towards programmes for the eradication of diseases such as foot and mouth disease, which significantly restrict exports and hence the profitability of such enterprises. By contrast, this type of integration may appear to be much less attractive to small-scale producers who do not participate in the export trade and whose production is aimed more at self-sufficiency and the domestic market. In order to resolve this difficulty and to secure the participation of the entire community, some countries have used a strategy based on a complementarity of interests. In order to allow the community to participate throughout the territory in fighting the diseases that threaten the entire national economy, veterinary activities must take into account the specific requirements of the population of each municipality in order to combat and eradicate the major diseases affecting the local livestock trade. This approach helps to ensure that needs are always taken fairly into account by combining public and private participation in animal health activities.

7. THE ORGANISATION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

7.1. Training for local committees

In order to allow the participative actions of the community to be beneficial and effective, they must necessarily have a defined geographical base, such as an administrative area (municipality, county, district, etc.). However, it is not a matter of compartmentalising the animal health reality by reducing it to small local conglomerates but, in order to cope with an epidemiological and economic reality that differs widely from one sector to another, it is necessary to take up the challenge represented by the introduction of a complex institutional system to remedy the simplification associated with centralism and embrace the complexity of diversity.

The decentralisation of services greatly facilitates community participation in this type of activity. It is within the framework of each municipality that people concerned with livestock production are able to participate in the activities jointly with representatives from the official services. Indeed, alongside the animal population and all its related health infrastructure, we find social players capable of managing and coordinating the available resources, using them in accordance with local requirements and assuming responsibility for interventions at the level of livestock farms and the environment, in a bid to improve the health situation, with all the ensuing benefits in economic, social community and health management terms (4).

One model that embodies this approach has been applied in South America. It works on the basis of local committees whose work not only involves reorganising the care provision of the traditional administrative model, but also clarifying requests for local intervention. Such a form of organisation guarantees greater flexibility, better management possibilities and direct service provision without the use of intermediaries. The resolution of problems at local level effectively channels community participation in this process, leading to the greater effectiveness of measures, whilst ensuring transparency and a lack of administrative bureaucracy (36).

In order to maintain the unity of the system, it is essential for the central administration of the official Veterinary Service to retain its function as coordinator and supervisor of the networks of local committees. This is a new approach that consists of imparting general guidelines to the entire system (networks of local committees), leaving the desirability, effectiveness and participation in the micro-region under the responsibility of the committees.

The eradication of foot and mouth disease in the countries and regions of southern South America aptly illustrates the beneficial results of allowing the social players to participate in animal health programmes. No clinical form of the disease has been observed for at least two years in an area where 170 million cattle, as well as most of the continent’s pig and sheep farms are housed, extending northward to the central regions of Brazil. This massive community participation is organised through local committees in which all the interested social players are represented. Around one thousand committees have been set up in this entire sub-region, mobilising a little over one million producers. In the areas for which they are responsible, these committees manage eradication activities, generate and distribute resources, mobilise and assign human resources, monitor compliance with commitments, evaluate the fulfilment of objectives and rally political will and extra-sectorial resources (8).

7.2. Co-management of the animal health process

It is possible to strengthen animal health activities provided that this involves a suitable participative process, which empowers the community to achieve significant health improvements, by managing and resolving conflicts of interest through negotiation and consultation.
As a result of this participative process, the livestock community has come to play an increasingly important role in the search for and adoption of possible solutions to animal health problems, by producing locally pooled knowledge (deliberation) and by encouraging agreements between the various social players (consultation). The participative process therefore makes it possible to clarify the different economic, social and institutional rationales, by reconciling opposing interests and ensuring a significant degree of joint control. The outcome of this new form of organisation, which aims for collective and concerted solutions, is co-management, a gradually constructed process.

7.3. Stages in community participation

This process of community participation presupposes a series of phases, the first of which is for each of the groups involved to identify the problems or needs. This phase is particularly important as it embodies the ability of the community to reflect on a known reality, an ability that is essential for interpreting and defining problems in the face of vested interests. The priority that the community gives to each problem depends on the interests of the different social players, their position, the context in which the need for a solution has arisen, and the social interactions between the different community groups.

The next phase consists of developing proposals for resolving the problem in question. This involves initiatives developed via a process of reflection and deliberation that convey the interests of the social players who initiated the process. The process of negotiation seeks to reconcile the diverging proposals and aims to secure agreements, build alliances, establish coalitions and define the objectives to be achieved.

One of the essential phases of community participation is the implementation phase, which takes place once the solutions, commitments, responsibilities and activities specific to each group in implementing the action plan, have been defined. This phase results in concerted negotiations and responds to the wish for co-management and solidarity, allowing problems to be resolved based on a strong inter-dependency between the operations.

The final phase is assessment, that is to say reflection on the degree and the dynamic of participation by the various groups, with a view to assessing the contribution and sustainability of the participative processes.

7.4. Education, a medium for participation

According to development experts, a process of education is vital if the people who form part of a community are to take responsibility for their interests and problems, and choose possible solutions. This is a permanent mechanism for providing training in daily activities, conferring the ability to construct, create and promote interventions aimed at transforming the prevailing situation (9). These principles are essential to the participative work of a community for improving the animal health situation. By means of a method of apprenticeship or education, the people participating in the process for improving the veterinary situation are able to devise and implement their own initiatives, which can be translated into constructive actions (19).

A community’s participative apprenticeship for improving animal health mechanisms is reinforced as the participative process itself evolves. In this respect, it is essential for the official Veterinary Services to play a key role in fostering this approach by renouncing their previous ‘top-down’ approach under which the members of the community were deemed to be ignorant. In parallel, these Services must also reinforce their guiding role. This new attitude may involve training and greater openness to the realities. The confrontation between theory and practice must be associated with wide-ranging communication which allows the facts to be analysed collectively (38).

By means of an ‘on-the-job training’ approach, the community players become participants in the training process and jointly responsible for their own apprenticeship. This process, which continues on a daily basis in parallel with the development of their ability to intervene in the veterinary field, allows the importance and value of veterinary actions to be better understood by all members of a community. From this standpoint, the participative education process fosters the identification, interpretation, discussion and awareness (32) of risk factors and animal health conditions, thereby facilitating the choice of suitable health procedures likely to reduce such risks for the animal population (39).

Through the participative methods of the community, practical experience generates knowledge that is useful to health activities and which can be formalised in order, in its turn, to pave the way towards new practices. In this way, action calls for reflection, and reflection is directed back to practice, all the time bearing in mind the fact that the aim of community participation is commitment to an action aimed at transforming the animal health situation, promoting productivity and encouraging trade in livestock products (15).
8. CONCLUSIONS

At the dawning of the 21st century, as countries have opted for open economies characterised by market freedom in order to integrate themselves into the new world economic order, more coherent systems for protecting animal health appear to be necessary. However, the ensuing re-adaptation required is facing a significant reduction in the service provision capacity of the State, which constitutes a considerable handicap in responding to this development.

One of the most interesting solutions is to enlarge the number of participants by means of alliances, covenants or agreements that make it possible to negotiate effective, realistic and lasting solutions. Throughout the world there exists a whole series of experiences of community participation in animal health issues.

In many cases such participation is limited to simple collaboration for implementing health actions or reducing costs in line with criteria established by the central Veterinary Services. It therefore excludes various social players from the joint and consensual search for solutions to the animal health problems that arise. This approach perpetuates the imbalance in relations between the official services and the community, and this, along with centralised decision-making have hampered the effectiveness of the veterinary system in certain countries.

One of the models aimed at profoundly changing the implementation of health services is community participation, that is to say, the initiative of the community itself in seeking to influence the deliberations and the resolution of veterinary problems, by means of an organised approach and by assuming its commitments and responsibilities. Local systems for monitoring animal health have therefore been devised, transferring health activities to a geographical micro-area in which the community shares common interests and conditions in relation to livestock activities and health actions.

The effective participation of the community, together with the administrative decentralisation of the official Veterinary Services, improving the organisation of civil society, as well as inter-sectorial and inter-institutional coordination, eliminate the imbalance between the official services and the community by integrating a social force endowed with a great capacity to mobilise authorities, human skills and material resources. In parallel, the various social players learn to exercise non-State public control over the commitments and responsibilities which each of them assumes, thereby increasing the social capital of the community itself.

The official Veterinary Services and their technicians must face up to the challenge of channelling this process of organisation and participation of civil society into a mission that increases the overall visibility and social force of health activities and the Veterinary Services. Politically, the action of these Services must take into account fully the basic needs of a community, which is no easy task. Indeed it is essential to find a new way of viewing the economic realities of the health situation and of addressing the problems, by accepting that approaches other than purely technical ones are feasible.

The complexity of the field of animal health, which is due to its multidisciplinary nature, its diversity and dynamism, means that the only observable permanent feature is the transitory nature of events. By taking into account the social, economic, ecological and cultural context in which livestock production takes place, knowledge is generated which can contribute to the problem solving process. Its structure and dynamic make it possible to ascertain the epidemiological profile of pathological processes, as well as to identify and select the policies and resources for implementing suitable solutions (33).

The specific form and mechanisms for such participation must take into account the cultural values of each community. This is why the experience acquired in South America, where this model has been applied in the eradication of foot and mouth disease, is not transferable in its entirety, with its operational characteristics, as the latter depend on the cultural configuration of the macro-region and of the continent concerned. The only transferable elements are the concept and methodological approach, which must be adapted to suit each specific area. Collaboration with the community is closely related to a large-scale process of continuing education, which must involve everybody and must inculcate a permanent belief in the necessity for research and learning in daily animal health practices.

REFERENCES


20. Gay J. Privatización de los servicios de salud animal, una opción sobre que hacer y como para reforzar los servicios en los países en desarrollo. Comunicación personal.


