

Report of the 1st OIE - AVTA - GALVMED regional conference on the role of veterinary para-professionals in Africa held in Pretoria South Africa, October 2015

Ameda B.

Africa Veterinary Technicians Association, Nairobi, Kenya. b.ameda@yahoo.com

Summary

The Africa Veterinary Technicians Association (AVTA) was founded to promote and defend the interests of all Veterinary Para-professionals. The Continental conference for Veterinary Para-professionals in Pretoria was organised by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and Africa Veterinary Technicians Association (AVTA). The conference brought together about 100 participants, including the representatives of Veterinary Authorities and Veterinary Statutory Bodies (VSB). The key observations considered during the conferences included the definition of veterinary services in the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code; The recommendation of the 3rd OIE Global Conference on Veterinary Education and the roll of the VSBs (held in Brazil on 4-6 December 2013) and outcome of the past PVS evaluation conducted in 51 African countries. Recommendations were made during the conference to the Veterinary Authorities of the OIE Member Countries, and to the OIE.

Introduction

The Continental conference for Veterinary Paraprofessionals (VPPs) took place in Pretoria, South Africa, from 13th to 15th October 2015. It was organised by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and Africa Veterinary Technicians Association (AVTA), with the financial and technical support of the Global Alliance for Livestock Veterinary Medicines (GALVmed) and the South African Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF). The conference aimed to improve the quality of veterinary field work conducted in Africa by strengthening the linkages and collaboration between veterinarians and VPPs.

The Africa Veterinary Technicians Association (AVTA) was founded to promote and defend the interests of all Veterinary Para-professionals, with a special interest in the Animal Resource industry in Africa. This was after realising that a gap existed at regional and continental levels in regard to advocacy for the Veterinary Para-profession. AVTA is further expected to promote and improve the Animal Resource Industry through its services.

Structure and content

The conference brought together about 100 participants, including a selection of African representatives of the national associations/federations of VPPs, as well as the representatives of Veterinary Authorities and Veterinary Statutory Bodies (VSB).

It was opened by the Minister of Agriculture (DAFF) and focused on presentations of key concepts, standards and regulations. The participants benefited from presentation of key organisations (OIE, AVTA, GALVmed). The OIE standards pertaining to veterinarians and VPPs were discussed. The conference noted the various challenges that VPPs face, which include - inadequate legal recognition, inappropriate categorisation, lack of standardisation in training, restricted employment opportunities, ineffective research-extension-farmer linkages and inappropriate veterinary infrastructure.

During the event we had country testimonies by associations of VPPs in Africa, as well as testimonies by representations from other regions (Nepal and Afghanistan). The conference also focused on training of VPPs in Africa, and veterinary oversight, medicines and vaccines. Participants were concerned about the future of the profession and consensus building. This resulted into narrowing down the discussion under three topics, namely, recognition of VPPs in different sectors, streamlining terminology pertaining to VPPs and their qualifications, and linking veterinarians and VPPs while in compliance with OIE standards. The participants welcomed the perspectives of the Africa Veterinary Association, World Animal Protection, African Union, FAO, and OIE.

Earlier findings and recommendations

A number of existing provisions and recommendations from previous meetings and activities of OIE and other institutions provide a useful perspective on the role of VPPs in veterinary service delivery. These include:

- The provisions of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* related to veterinary services and veterinary paraprofessionals.
- The recommendations of the 3rd OIE Global Conference on Veterinary Education and the role of the VSBs, held in Brazil on December 4-6, 2013.
- The recommendations of the 14th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for Africa, held in Arusha (Tanzania) on January 23-26, 2001.
- The conclusions and recommendations of the regional seminar jointly organized by OIE, FAO, and the AU-IBAR on Animal Health Policies, Evaluation of Veterinary Services and Role of Livestock farmers in the surveillance of animal diseases, held in Ndjamena (Chad) on February 13-15, 2006.
- The outcomes of the past PVS evaluations conducted in 51 African countries which highlight the lack of well-trained staff in the Veterinary Services as well as the weakness of the interactions between the parties interested in the implementation of animal health policies.

In view of the above findings, the participants made various recommendations to the Veterinary Authorities of the OIE Member countries. These include;

- To address the shortcomings highlighted in the PVS pathway mission reports, in particular the critical competencies relating to human resources, mainly to Veterinarians and VPPs.
- To facilitate and where possible, harmonise the legislative framework of the establishment and management of VSBs where these do not exist or do not comply with OIE standards, or to update it for a better recognition of the issues related to the tasks undertaken by VPPs as an integral part of Veterinary Services.
- To support the VPPs to establish independent national, regional and/or sector-wide associations, able and competent to represent the profession in the VSB.
- To take into account their expectation that the National VSB will include VPPs in their decision making bodies, beyond the mere registration or listing of these para-professionals.
- To take into account their expectation that the National VSB will define conditions and admission criteria for continuing education and post-graduate education for VPPs.
- To mobilise Veterinary Education Establishments and Veterinary Associations to develop the required training opportunities for VPPs.
- To take necessary steps for the enactment and enforcement of required legislation that will ensure the implementation of these recommendations.

The participants further made recommendations to the OIE. The seven recommendations under this category were;

- To continue to support the OIE member countries involved in the OIE PVS Pathway for the implementation of the recommendations made through the OIE PVS missions.
- To continue to advocate that the donors allocate funds for the continuation of the PVS Pathway in a long-term sustainable framework.
- To consider developing minimum day-one competences for the various categories of VPPs that exist, in scope and in level of qualification.

- To consider developing minimum core training curricula for the various categories of VPPs that exist, in scope and in level of qualification.
- To encourage the participation of representatives of national, regional and continental associations of VPPs to participate in the fourth OIE Global Conference on Veterinary Education, to be held in Thailand in June 2016.
- To take appropriate steps in terms of monitoring progress made in the implementation of these recommendations.
- To reconvene as appropriate, regular regional forums on the role of VPPs and Veterinarians in Africa where progress made will be assessed and further recommendations made towards the achievements of the goals of this initiative.

In conclusion, the issue of how VPPs operate is particularly relevant to the African continent, due to its relative shortage of Veterinary Surgeons, the size of the rural areas and nomadic production systems, and the consequential lack of oversight or supervision by veterinarians. The existence of community-based animal health workers in addition to VPPs is also not exclusive to Africa, but has been widely experimented in the continent, in situations of peacetime, and in areas of conflict.

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