



The strategies and priorities long advocated by the OIE prove their effectiveness

21/07/2010 The complexity of disease emergencies in a globalised world calls for the identification of effective strategies, based on both science and proven practical experience, to reduce future threats.

The recent 2009 H1N1 pandemic influenza crisis has shown how crucial it is to address persistent global threats at the interface between humans, animals and ecosystems. Moreover, it has shown how a concrete, transparent and consistent approach, based on high-quality scientific advice and practical experience, is vital for the management of these threats and for political credibility, both at the national and international level.

The OIE provides the advice needed by its Members to support them in preventing and managing serious disease outbreaks. For the last few years, it has consistently advocated that improving the governance of animal health systems, in both the public and private sector, is the most effective way to safeguard global animal health and human health when zoonoses occur.

When the world was hit by the avian influenza crisis, the OIE spoke almost alone in urging, from the beginning of 2003, the long-term reinforcement of worldwide veterinary governance, not only to combat avian influenza, but also, thanks to the subsequent investment made for preventing this disease, to promote sustainable mechanisms for preventing and controlling outbreaks of other emerging and re-emerging animal diseases, whether naturally occurring or deliberate.

This message was aimed in particular at developing and in-transition countries. The OIE has shown that a single country which fails to control outbreaks of particular animal diseases can put the whole world at risk. In addition, the OIE has always called for solidarity between richer countries and developing countries since such support is crucial to these poorer countries, in the interests of the entire international community and for the benefit of generations to come. It is a “win-win” concept.

After several economic surveys conducted by the OIE, most parties now agree that the costs of preventing animal disease crises, through early detection of outbreaks and rapid response mechanisms integrated into the national veterinary surveillance systems, are insignificant compared to the social, economic and environmental costs of a serious epizootic.

In wealthy countries, animal industries are constantly threatened by the re-entry of diseases that have been eradicated through considerable investment. In most cases, these disease incursions are again eradicated at great expense, but the countries remain at risk. The best response is to improve animal health governance and to strengthen Veterinary Services in poorer countries, where diseases continue to flourish.

Over the last few years, the OIE has developed its capacity-building activities to assist Members to implement OIE standards correctly. This approach aids in the application of the two basic principles for controlling animal diseases: early detection of an emerging or re-emerging disease as soon as it appears – every minute counts in stopping a pathogen from spreading – and rapid response to the incursion by the emergency slaughter of infected or in-contact animals (while always applying OIE welfare standards to prevent any unnecessary suffering of the animals that have to be slaughtered). Except in case of such emergency situations vaccination remains, of course, the critical tool for the prevention and control of animal diseases.

The OIE regularly organises training seminars for national policy-makers, OIE Delegates and OIE national focal points (six representatives per country) nominated by its 176 Members.

Strict application of the OIE standards, as is currently taking place in the serious foot and mouth disease outbreak in Japan, is the most efficient and effective approach when confronted with this type of situation.

With the support of several donors, the OIE supports good governance of national Veterinary Services to meet current and future challenges, by following the PVS pathway. The OIE Tool for the evaluation of Performance of Veterinary Services (the PVS Tool) is used to evaluate capacity but, above all, to help OIE Members to prepare national investment programmes to bridge the gaps in quality standards. Analysing such deficiencies helps to identify priorities for investment and, for those financial sources that accept the OIE approach, provides solid justification for recommended reforms and investments, using national and/or external resources.

The OIE will continue to advocate that improving animal health through effective Veterinary Services is a global public good. Moreover, the OIE will continue to help countries by setting standards for that purpose and by providing expert advice and missions, on request. The OIE's science-based approach, which calls upon practical experience and commonsense in managing disease outbreaks, is maintained in its 5th Strategic Plan, which was adopted by all Members in May 2010.

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