

TWINNING LABORATORIES

The OIE concept of twinning between laboratories

Introduction

The OIE fully realises that the most effective way of detecting, diagnosing, controlling and responding to animal disease and zoonotic incursions is to ensure good veterinary governance in Member Countries. Integral to good governance is the ability and capacity of all Member Countries to comply with the guidelines, recommendations and international standards of the OIE that are mandated by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The OIE has therefore embarked on a unique strategic initiative to develop an assessment and evaluation system to assist countries in identifying weaknesses in their system that make it difficult for them to comply with the minimum standards and guidelines of the OIE. The evaluation system based on the performance, strategy and vision of a country to move towards compliance (commonly referred to as the PVS strategy) is already in operation and applied successfully in a number of developing and in-transition countries. The assessment system considers critical aspects of veterinary service delivery, such as technical capability, human and financial capital, interaction with the private sector and the needs and problems associated with access to markets. The OIE has, by linking this initiative with its overall aim of establishing awareness and acceptance of the delivery of veterinary services as an international

public good, elicited major financial support for this project from the World Bank and other donors, including some of the more financially affluent Member Countries of the OIE. Integral to the assessment process is the identification of the need to establish scientific and technological expertise within these countries to enable them to become self-sufficient in the early detection and diagnosis of diseases and to be able to provide the scientific justification for certification of animals and animal products for trade.

Although already in 2002, the International Committee of the OIE adopted a Resolution identifying the need for support by OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres to enter into partnership as advanced research institutes with developing and in-transition countries, the OIE also realises that this ideal can only be given substance by actively moving towards scientific capacity building with the eventual aim of establishing focal points of expertise and more Reference Laboratories within developing countries. To realise this goal, the concept of twinning between Laboratories or Collaborating Centres was born, the aim of which is to achieve an even geographical distribution of expertise and Reference Laboratories. The result will be easier access to expertise for the rapid detection and diagnosis of disease.

The development and setting of OIE guidelines and standards for both terrestrial and aquatic animals are based on scientific principles and thereby also support of the requirements of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement of the WTO that sanitary measures should be scientifically justifiable. The OIE standards are developed for application by all its Member Countries and this makes it imperative that all Member Countries should contribute to the setting of standards and also be able to debate these standards from a scientific point of view when necessary. It is therefore important to recognise that developing and in-transition countries need a veterinary scientific community to be able to partake in the preparation of standards. To this end, the twinning concept will create the much needed opportunities to enable developing and in-transition countries to become scientifically competent to debate on an equal footing the scientific justification for standards.

Twinning – an integral concept to capacity building for the improvement of veterinary services

Of the current 167 Member Countries of the OIE, almost 72% (120) are from developing countries and have variable scientific capacity or access to scientific expertise within their national laboratories. The majority of OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres and expertise are still situated in the remaining 47 Member Countries. All 167 Member Countries of the OIE are however, obliged to comply or move towards compliance with the international guidelines and standards prescribed in the OIE *Codes* and *Manuals* for both terrestrial and aquatic animals. It is therefore of critical importance to establish the necessary scientific expertise in these countries and eventually ensure an even geographical spread of available expertise

to provide the essential scientific support to the veterinary services within these countries, thereby enabling them to more readily apply the guidelines and standards of the OIE.

The main objective of twinning is therefore to assist laboratories in developing or in-transition countries to build their capacity and scientific expertise with the eventual aim that some of them could become OIE Reference Laboratories in their own right. To practically apply this concept, a link between an existing OIE Reference Laboratory or Collaborating Centre and another laboratory or institution in a developing or in-transition country must be established for exchange of scientific expertise and capacity building. Taking into consideration the current geographical spread and the actual location of OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres, the twinning concept could imply a transfer of knowledge, training and expertise from the 'North' to the 'South' or from an existing OIE Reference Laboratory or Collaborating Centre in the South to another less advanced laboratory applying for such assistance.

- ***Applying the concept of twinning between laboratories***

The procedure for implementing the concept should be flexible to be adaptable to different situations – from helping as a first step to publishing scientific results to eventually achieving the level required to become an OIE Reference Laboratory. The guiding or parent OIE Reference Laboratory and the selected expert(s) from that laboratory will be the driving force, ensuring the success of the twinning agreement; it will also be responsible for the implementation and use of financial resources, under the auspices and control of the OIE.

The initiation and eventual implementation of a twinning relationship between an OIE Reference Laboratory and an applicant

laboratory should be done in a stepwise approach to establish capacity and expertise and eventually move to the final phase when a participatory laboratory could become an OIE Reference Laboratory in their own right.

- ***To ensure the success of a twinning agreement between laboratories, it will be essential that:***

- a) The Delegates of the Member Countries of the two laboratories involved and their respective directors, should agree to such a twinning arrangement.
- b) The twinning arrangement should favour a scientific need relevant to the sanitary situation of the country or region of the applicant laboratory;
- c) Communication facilities between the laboratories and experts involved must be assured;
- d) The objectives, time frames and desired outcomes must be realistic and attainable.

The requirements for compliance by the applicant laboratory to enter into such a twinning arrangement will be detailed by the Biological Standards Commission taking into consideration prevailing guidelines for applicants.

- ***The Scientific and Technical Department of the OIE Central Bureau in close cooperation with the relevant Specialist Commissions, will manage the process by:***

- a) Informing all Delegates of Member Countries under signature of the

Director General of the OIE of the concept and proposed steps for twinning between Laboratories or Collaborating Centres.

- b) Establishing a list of existing OIE Reference Laboratory or Collaborating Centre candidates willing to cooperate and a list of applicant laboratories interested in using the OIE twinning concept.
- c) Collating the proposed projects and applications for twinning for submission of the dossiers to the relevant Specialist Commissions.
- d) Initiating and facilitating negotiations between the OIE and potential financial donors to assist twinning projects.
- e) Selection of eligible projects for financial support on the basis of the estimated budget indicated by the two collaborating partners and as accepted by the relevant OIE Commission.
- f) Ensuring that the project is implemented by the existing OIE Reference Laboratory or Collaborating Centre in close cooperation with the applicant.
- g) Ensuring that technical and financial controls outlined in the mutual agreement between the participating laboratories, are applied and comply with the requirement of the donor involved.

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