

OIE Laboratory Twinning Feedback Workshop

OIE Headquarters, Paris, 30-31 March 2011

On 30-31 March 2011, experts from laboratories participating in OIE twinning projects joined representatives from donor organisations and other international organisations to participate in the first OIE Laboratory Twinning feedback workshop. The objective of the meeting, held at OIE headquarters in Paris, being to share experiences from twinning projects to improve the overall effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the OIE Laboratory Twinning Programme. Participants focussed on four key areas – identifying needs for capacity building, overcoming barriers and obstacles, communication and networking, and maintaining benefits beyond the twinning project.

The workshop is one component of the on-going monitoring and evaluation of the OIE Laboratory Twinning programme. Its outputs will be considered together with those of three Twinning Project audits undertaken in March 2011 and will be reflected in future revisions of the Twinning Guide.

This non-exhaustive summary highlights points of discussion and suggestions that were put forward by participants during the workshop. Some of these points may be addressed easily while others will require further analysis and consideration.

Identifying needs for laboratory capacity building

Livestock diseases

According to geo-biological criteria such as high livestock density (more than 100 heads/square kilometer) combined with low laboratory capacities (less than 25 livestock's diseases that can be tested in national veterinary laboratories), or economic criteria, such as high share of agriculture in the GDP (more than 10%) combined with low livestock export (less than 1 000 000 heads/year), the regions in need for capacity building are mostly Africa and South Asia. Some twinning projects already exist in these regions, the number could still be increased.

Aquatic diseases

Regions with high fish production (more than 250 000 tons/year) and moderate fish export (less than 1 000 000 tons/year) and low laboratory capacities (less than 5 aquatic diseases that can be tested in national laboratories), are mostly South America, South Asia, and a few African countries (Morocco, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa). Very few twinning projects exist today in these regions.

Bee diseases

Regions in need of capacity building are mostly developing countries, e.g. those not able yet to comply with the international standards for organic honey and wax export.

Overcoming barriers and obstacles

Certain barriers and obstacles to twinning projects are universal, recurrent or foreseeable.

Suggestion: A checklist of key issues, risks, and solutions for twinning laboratories could be developed and posted on the OIE website or included in the twinning manual. These points could guide twinning project applicants when considering, planning, and implementing projects.

Twinning laboratories are facing problems in sending and receiving samples (biological materials, reference reagents). Delays in sample shipment are a general problem not restricted to twinning.

Suggestion: Specifically for twinning, a material transfer agreement (MTA) signed by the OIE Delegates of countries where the twinning projects are active may facilitate more efficient and rapid sample shipment.

Candidate Laboratories do not have direct access to Twinning Project funds; these are transferred from OIE to the Parent Laboratory who manages them. Candidate Laboratories are dependent on Parent Laboratories for transfer of funds, which in most cases get delayed due to administrative problems.

Suggestion: A direct allotment for certain expenses including travelling allowance and for purchase of reagents, where possible, may help the Candidate Laboratories in reaching their targets on time.

Named responsible experts on the twinning contract may change owing to unforeseen reasons.

Suggestion: OIE may consider validating alternative competent experts when a change has occurred.

Communication

Better planning and more effective implementation is facilitated when contact has been made between the two participating twinning laboratories prior to the start of the twinning project.

Suggestion: Some funds could usefully be sought for project formulation, including pre-twinning visits to laboratories. If the twinning project is approved funds could be used to recover the cost of the pre-twinning visit.

Individuals who can understand languages and cultures of both twinning partners facilitate smooth implementation of projects.

Suggestion: Interpreters/mediators could play a significant role in enhancing communication.

Effective communication avoids misunderstanding, facilitates setting of achievable targets, and allows timely corrective actions to be taken.

In some cases the reporting process may benefit from a more structured approach and streamlining.

Networking

A clear policy/strategy on how to relate twinning to regional networks is desirable. OIE, FAO, and IAEA can play a role in supporting regional networks and can work to maximise synergy.

A regular forum to share experiences/ solutions between twinning laboratories (Parents and Candidate Laboratories) would be beneficial. There is potential to build networks between laboratories that are twinning for the same subjects.

OIE, namely its regional/sub-regional offices, can play a role in better coordinating twinning projects and facilitating links between a Candidate Laboratory and other laboratories in the region.

Maintaining momentum beyond twinning

A monitoring process with suitable performance indicators will be useful to ascertain the status of Candidate Laboratories and - for certain Candidate Laboratories - their continued development towards Reference Laboratory status.

Performance standards of Candidate Laboratories should be maintained or further improved after the

Suggestion: All opportunities should be explored to maximise communication, including visits, calls and informal meetings back-to-back with international conferences. Progress of on-going projects can be publicised on the OIE website to improve visibility and sensitise policy makers.

Suggestion: Reporting can be facilitated with proforma templates provided by OIE.

Suggestion: This could be achieved by taking advantage of existing platforms including conferences, and regional meetings.

Suggestion: OIE Regional and Sub regional offices can play a role in promoting more twinings and raising the regional profile of Candidate Laboratories.

Suggestion: guidance on performance indicators and ways to monitor and maintain performance can be included in the twinning manual.

twinning project has finished. Two key areas are:

- Training standards (train-the-trainers, increase accountability, cross-over to regional level)
- Technical sustainability; proficiency testing under auspices of the parent lab, common publications, organisation of regional workshops; long-lasting personal relations and contacts.

Provision of resources to Candidate Laboratories after completion of a twinning project would assist in sustaining the laboratory through a 'transition phase' until it becomes established as a centre of excellence. The full commitment and support of the National Authorities is critical to maintain investment in the Candidate Laboratory beyond twinning.

OIE Laboratory Twinning does not provide funds for equipment. However appropriate up to date equipment, regular calibration and maintenance of equipment, and maintenance of the building itself essential are essential for effective operation. Upgrades to equipment and the laboratory building itself should be sustainable.

Increasing a sense of ownership of the overall capacity building process is a key to enhance sustainability.

Suggestions to take Candidate Laboratories through the 'transition phase' include:

- *Laboratories in transition should be recognised and advertised in the region so that they receive national and international diagnostic samples.*
- *Logistic, financial, and legal issues need to be analysed to ensure that the Candidate Laboratory is able to play a supportive role.*
- *Joint actions of twinning partners can be considered including requesting grants from third parties with the political support of the OIE e.g. using PVS pathway procedure on laboratories.*
- *Joint scientific activities can be encouraged.*
- *Candidate Laboratory visibility can be raised at national, regional, international conferences and meetings.*

Suggestion: OIE twinning can fund a consultant to study sustainable third party investments (hardware etc.).

Suggestion: Important factors to ensure sustainability should be built into the initial project proposals.

On-spot Feedback from Presidents of OIE Specialist Commissions (Aquatic Animal Health Commission and Biological Standards Commission)

Aquatic animal diseases are still under-represented in the overall OIE Twinning Programme. The project finding and planning process is important.

The terms of reference for OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres are currently under review. OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres

have a worldwide, or at least regional, mandate, and OIE twinning extends beyond a conventional bilateral cooperation. OIE Delegates, and both parent and candidate countries, should be fully engaged in supporting the Candidate Laboratory. Recognition of an interim status for Candidate Laboratories completing twinning projects is desirable.

Feedback from the Director General of OIE (in addition to some technical suggestions above)

The OIE is already actively addressing a number of issues raised during the meeting at a high level; this includes working to improve the efficiency of sample shipment. OIE is also working closely with WHO and FAO in the tripartite framework to improve coordination between the three organisations at the global level.

The OIE could offer a number of solutions to issues raised during the workshop and was committed to improving the efficiency and impact of the twinning programme in the context of improving animal health, animal welfare, and veterinary public health world-wide.

