

Veterinary Privatization

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An historical perspective

In the immediate post-independence period, African veterinary services were essentially a government monopoly. The state took responsibility for providing all services, often at subsidised cost to the livestock keepers. Although services were acceptable in some areas, many rural and remote areas were poorly served. In these systems livestock keepers, even if they were paying some incentives to governmental staff, had the feeling of an omnipresent and omnipotent state devoted to solving all their animal health problems. These systems were also characterised by high staffing levels in government and consequently, substantial payroll burdens on state veterinary services.

During the last 20 years, most African countries have not been able to maintain an exhaustive organization of veterinary services with a national coverage. Some have tried to introduce cost recovery policies but typically, revolving funds have performed badly - it is well known that from a business management viewpoint 'the state is a wretched manager'. While cost recovery was nearly always inefficient, government budget allocations to veterinary services also declined.

The reality in many African countries is that ecosystems favour extensive farming systems. Almost by definition, these systems are in rural areas which are out of reach of conventional government veterinary services. Recent studies have shown that the market for veterinary drugs in Africa represents only 1.6% of the global market. Within the African market, 45% of veterinary drugs are used in South Africa and 35% in North African countries. ***That means that sub-Saharan countries are consuming only 0.32% of the veterinary drugs produced globally.***

A Need to Respond to the Global Trading Environment

In the light of the World Trade Organization agreements relayed by the Office International des Epizooties, exporting countries are obliged to develop national veterinary services able to produce valid certifications meeting international sanitary regulations. In most African countries, state veterinary services are not able to produce certificates connected to the real animal disease situation on the field. In general, disease reporting systems are not functioning effectively and basic data on many important livestock diseases is limited.

There is a pressing need to improve this situation and adopt animal health policies that both relieve state burden and optimise the delivery of services. Crucially, changes are required to enhance the quality of national veterinary services and ensure with the validity of official certifications for animal products.

Experiences from Veterinary Privatization

Experience from many countries indicates that clinical veterinary service delivery by the private sector, financed by a normal commercial relationship between the provider and the customer, seems to be the most successful and economically viable option. For the last ten years, the promotion of this strategy in African countries has been improperly defined as "privatisation of veterinary services", when only the commercial facet of veterinary activities were concerned. This has been the cause of a lot of misunderstandings and fears in government staff that have led them to a reluctant attitude in front of the "privatization" concept itself. A major weakness has been the failure to re-organize state veterinary services and use savings derived from a withdrawal from the provision of clinical services to improve key public sector functions.

Therefore, new policies should clearly define the different steps that should be followed by African countries to re-organize their National Veterinary Network (National Veterinary Services, according to OIE terminology) by creating space for the enhancement of the private sector. In addition, there is a need to revisit the concept of 'safe consumption' of animal products and lead to regulations to protect consumers accordingly. A third consideration is the divergent strategies adopted by different actors involved in veterinary service delivery and the need to reconcile and build synergies between veterinarians, para-veterinary professionals and farmer associations.

In summary, the key messages from this policy briefing paper are:

- Adopt a clear national policy on veterinary service delivery
- Structure the animal health manpower
- Update the legislative environment for animal health interventions

The Organization for African Unity/Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources

The Organization for African Unity/Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (OAU/IBAR) is a specialist technical agency of the OAU mandated by member states to promote livestock development in Africa. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, OAU/IBAR implements major livestock development programmes including the Pan African Programme for the Control of Epizootics (PACE) and Farming in Tsetse Controlled Areas of Africa (FITCA).

The objectives of OAU/IBAR are to:

- Co-ordinate activities of all OAU member states in the field of Animal Health and Production
- Collect, collate and disseminate information in all aspects of Animal Health and Production
- Initiate, develop and execute projects in the field of Animal Health and Production
- Liase with appropriate authorities of member states, regional groups, inter-governmental and international organisations.

For many years, OAU/IBAR has been African success story by attracting donor funds and providing technical and policy support to the member states, particularly state veterinary services. In the new millennium, the bureau understands that livestock issues are becoming increasingly complex due to forces such as globalisation, rapid technological advances and the demands of stakeholders. Stakeholders at all levels are becoming more vocal, influential and involved in governance, priority setting, financing and evaluation of development interventions. OAU/IBAR provides effective responses by having a clear vision of its direction, policy and strategies.

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The Policy Briefing Paper Series

This series of Policy Briefing Papers aims to provide short and easy-to-read introductions to some of the key policy issues affecting the livestock sector in Africa. In particular they show how livestock can contribute to the following widely held policy objectives:

- Food security
- Economic growth
- Equity
- Export promotion
- Revenue generation
- Resource conservation

Each briefing paper provides an overview of an issue and directs readers to source documents (many produced by OAU/IBAR) where further information and more detailed analysis can be found.