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Doing it for themselves: how communities developed messages and communication methods for rinderpest eradication in southern Sudan

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Introduction

As explained in the paper by Jeff Mariner and colleagues in this issue of *PLA Notes*, rinderpest is a devastating livestock disease of major international importance. In southern Sudan, livestock keepers associate the disease with disaster. Without cattle, they lose their main source of food, social capital, and reason for being.

The Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) Southern Sector Livestock Programme is a consortium of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) coordinated by FAO-OLS (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and OLS). The programme aims to improve food security for the war-affected communities in southern Sudan through improving animal health. In 1993 a community-based approach was developed which focused on training of community-based animal health workers (CAHWs) to vaccinate cattle against rinderpest and treat common ailments. In 2001, the programme comprised approximately 1400 active CAHWs supervised by 180 animal health auxiliaries (AHAs) and stockpersons. Overall technical supervision was provided by 35 veterinarians and livestock officers working for 12 NGOs and FAO. In collaboration with the Pan African Rinderpest Campaign (PARC), the programme contributed towards a global effort to eradicate rinderpest. In 2001, PARC was replaced with the Pan African Programme for the Control of

Epizootics (PACE) and Vétérinaires sans frontières-Belgium (VSF-B) was given the task of implementing rinderpest eradication activities.

Complex messages in a complex situation

The community-based approach to rinderpest control in southern Sudan proved very successful and by late 2001 there had been no confirmed outbreaks of rinderpest for over three years. However, at this time the programme was faced with a major dilemma. Typically, rinderpest eradication involves mass vaccination followed by a period of no vaccination, but actively watching and waiting to see if the disease reappears. During this surveillance period, new outbreaks are detected rapidly and further, localised vaccination removes the disease for good. Rapid detection of outbreaks requires good relationships with communities who act as the programme's eyes and ears on the ground.

However, for many years people had been very happy with regular vaccination campaigns and they recognised their effectiveness. Therefore, programme staff realised that a new surveillance strategy would be a major change for communities and field-level veterinary workers. It was anticipated that people would not be happy with the change, would not understand the reasons for change, and might lose confidence and reduce their involvement in the programme. The

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challenge was to explain the new, potentially confusing strategy to communities, remove fears about the cessation of vaccination, and create momentum and commitment for a period of ‘watching and waiting’.

As the need for a good communication campaign began to emerge, there was also recognition of the operational constraints in southern Sudan. The area has very little infrastructure due to chronic civil war, and mass media communication methods such as newspapers, radio or television were not available. There was also the challenge of developing communication methods to maintain awareness and interest in the issues for a long period – the surveillance period after stopping mass vaccination and before declaring freedom from rinderpest is five years.

An approach to local development of extension messages and materials

For many years, veterinarians have been describing how livestock keepers in southern Sudan possess considerable indigenous knowledge on livestock diseases. This knowledge formed the basis for the community-based programme and contributed towards programme design, implementation, and impact assessment. Furthermore, it was known that verbal communication and song was central to the culture of cattle-keeping communities in southern Sudan.

Given this situation, VSF Belgium decided to use community members to assist them to develop appropriate messages and methods for communicating the new rinderpest control strategy. The idea was to explain the new strategy to some field-level workers, artists, songwriters, and storytellers and request them to develop stories, songs, poems, and illustrations for transferring the messages within their communities. Any new message and method was to be tested in the field using a real community audience.

Stage 1: Explaining the new strategy to programme managers and technical staff

The first stage was a series of awareness-raising and training events with programme managers and various levels of veteri-

Box 1. Creating awareness among partners and training veterinary workers

Awareness-raising workshops for programme coordinators, field veterinarians, and county/district veterinary coordinators

The new strategy was introduced during two two-day workshops, which aimed to build on the existing knowledge of the participants, introduce the components of the new strategy and allow discussion and raising of fears, and then develop action plans of how to implement the strategy for vet workers.

Training course for field veterinarians and Animal Health Auxiliaries (AHAs)

A six-day training course was developed to train vets and AHAs in detail in the new strategy and the components, and carry out practicals in outbreak investigation, active surveillance and develop action plans. This was field-tested and modified and then later edited again in the light of further experience.

Training course for CAHWs

A training course was developed, field-tested and modified before being documented and circulated for all animal health workers to use to inform the CAHWs of the new strategy. Also, a Community Dialogue Meeting Programme was developed, field-tested and modified before being documented and circulated. Some existing cloth flip charts (copied from the Pan African Rinderpest Campaign in Uganda) were put into use to assist with training, and some photographs from FAO archives were printed and laminated as rinderpest identification cards.

nary workers in the programme. These events were designed according to the roles of the participants in the programme and ensured that all technical staff were well informed about the new strategy and had an opportunity to ask questions and clarify any misunderstandings. Bearing in mind the scale of the programme it was necessary for all animal health workers to understand and be able to explain the new strategy to the livestock owners. Many participants were familiar with participatory approaches and worked closely with communities during normal CAHW project activities.

Stage 2: Developing messages and methods with communities

Once the programme staff and veterinary workers were trained, a four-day workshop was organised to bring technical staff together with community members to develop and test extension messages and methods for the new rinderpest strategy. The workshop was carried out in Marial Lou, Tonj County. Participants included AHAs and stockpersons, field veterinarians, animal health trainers, community members from Tonj County (singers, composers, teachers, story-tellers), and an artist and a film maker, both from Equatoria in southern Sudan. The participants from the community were selected by asking local people for the names of people who were known for their musical, story-telling or artistic skills. The teachers were invited from the local school.

Box 2. Activities in the first community workshop

- Introductions and expectations.
- Methods of communication: discussion on what methods people use within their community to pass information (traditional and modern).
- The new rinderpest eradication strategy: explaining the key points of the strategy that needed to be communicated to the wider community.
- The target community: discussion on who are the different types of people who need to know about rinderpest eradication in order to play their role.
- Development of community awareness-raising materials: break up into groups to develop different methods of communicating some of the key pieces of information; groups were song/dance, stories and drama, pictures, community dialogue, education.
- Demonstration of community awareness-raising materials: the groups came back to the main workshop and performed or presented their work, and received feedback from the other participants.
- Preparation for the community dialogue meeting: a programme for a community meeting was developed and different people assigned to lead different sessions, and pictures, songs, poems, and stories were integrated to introduce, illustrate or stimulate discussion.
- Community dialogue meeting on rinderpest eradication: a four-hour meeting was held for community leaders and members from in and around Marial Lou. Participants numbered over 100 and included men, women, and children.
- Review of community dialogue meeting: the workshop participants evaluated the meeting and identified improvements for future meetings.

The workshop aimed to build on the existing knowledge and experience of the participants, and used several participatory techniques: plenary discussion, group discussion, brainstorm, and question and answer. The sessions were conducted in English with translation into Dinka, the local language.

The workshop was felt to be a great success for the development of materials for extension of the rinderpest eradication strategy and as an opportunity to explore generally the process of dialogue and communication methods. Levels of participation and innovation were high. The singing and dancing group attracted the most interest from the participants and from the local community. This is a very entertaining and powerful way of passing messages. The use of dramas and stories captured interest and appeared to increase understanding of the points being made. The apparently difficult concept of stopping rinderpest vaccination was easily understood.

Stage 3: Scaling up

Following the success of these workshops, the next stage was to spread the approach throughout the programme. The community-level workshops (Stage 2) were incorporated into

Below: Practising a song in the workshop in Marial Lou; and (bottom) Women's Association in Akobo sing and dance with John Jooyul, VSF Belgium vet



A song: We are fighting rinderpest (led by Luka Malok)

I do not like dwelling with the devil disease whose eyes look bad
 We are fighting rinderpest
 I do not like dwelling with devil disease whose horns look very rough
 We are fighting rinderpest
 I do not like dwelling with devil disease whose claws look rough
 We are fighting rinderpest
 This disease which has come
 It used to give the cow diarrhoea, eye discharge, tearing and nasal discharge
 Call the people of VSF to draw the blood for checking rinderpest
 Call the people of FAO to draw blood for checking rinderpest

Traditional stories were also adapted to explain the new rinderpest strategy

Imagine you must to kill your most dreaded enemy and you see him enter his hut. You take your gun and fire into the hut. You fire a lot of bullets into that hut to make sure your enemy is finished. But do you keep firing forever? No, sooner or later you stop. You wait outside the hut to see if the enemy reappears. Then when you see no sign of him, you approach the hut and look very carefully inside to make sure that once and for all, your enemy has gone. This is like rinderpest. We vaccinate for many years and then we stop, wait, and watch.

Simon Gatweek and Thomas Tut Pal use cloth flip chart pictures in Akobo



Example of a picture used in the cloth flip charts



the training course for field veterinarians and AHAs, so that as they learned the new strategy, they also explored and practiced methods of communicating that strategy to their community.

The rinderpest eradication training course has now been held in thirteen counties or states including the communication component. The communication component is also included in the AHA training course as a practical example of how to communicate important information to the community. Innovation among the veterinary workers is encouraged so that communication methods can vary according to the preferences of different communities, and language and cultural variations. The important point is to retain the key concept in all the methods – of stopping vaccination and conducting surveillance.

In different areas a variety of communication methods have been developed. Some groups focused more on drama and poems, others on songs, others on stories, and others on pictures. All put these to use during the subsequent community dialogue meeting. In one area, it was noted that the youth were not really included and therefore, a dance was organised. Input from the project was some batteries for the music system and some bars of soap for prizes. In an interval during the dance the AHAs made a presentation on rinderpest eradication and gave a prize to the person who could describe the clinical signs of rinderpest the best.

In another area a football and volleyball match was held for competing teams of youth. Again the opportunity was seized to pass some information on rinderpest eradication.

In another area they went to the local school and made presentations on rinderpest to the school children. There has been demand for audiotapes and batteries so that songs developed in their home areas after the training courses could be recorded.

Lessons learnt

- In rinderpest eradication, the shift from mass vaccination to surveillance is a difficult concept – some vets find it difficult to understand! Despite this, artists, songwriters, poets, and others in communities were able to grasp the idea and transform it into locally appropriate messages and methods.
- The incorporation of songs, drama, pictures, and so on makes communication with the community more fun, and easier to get and hold people's attention.
- The animal health workers have reached a wide audience including women, children, and youth. Serious formal speech-type meetings mainly attract mature men, but when a song or drama is performed all members of the community are attracted to find out what is going on and the reduced formality allows them to stay and participate.
- The approach has increasingly moved the responsibility for communication to the Sudanese animal health workers and away from the field veterinarians (who are mostly from other communities or countries). It has encouraged them to interpret the information into their own language in a way that lay people can understand and can actively communicate.

Nhial Riek and Simon Gatweek practice a drama about rinderpest surveillance



- It has brought out skills of some of the animal health workers who may be less academic but are good performers and communicators.
- The workshops tried to encourage people to think more

innovatively and not to stick to the usual method of talking only. Information flows quickly and as some animal health workers have heard about what has gone on in other areas, the method has gained some momentum and almost competitiveness to produce better songs or pictures or dramas for their own area.

- It is an effort for some field vets and animal health workers to be innovative and some are initially reluctant to participate, but as they see others getting involved this reluctance breaks down and some individuals suddenly demonstrate hidden talents!
- More ideas for different communication methods are regularly coming up. It is hoped that these will continue to maintain interest and awareness in the programme until rinderpest eradication is finally achieved.

Is this a participatory process?

Rinderpest is a disease of global concern and our work contributes to the Pan African Programme for the Control of Epizootics and the Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme. The eradication strategy is designed by epidemiologists far from the field, who expect communities to ‘participate’. In southern Sudan, this is not a problem. Here, people have long recognised the terrible impact of rinderpest and have been working with the programme for nearly ten years. Therefore, the programme is a good example of ‘outsiders’ and communities working together.

Now if you go to Marial, even the children are singing the rinderpest songs.

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NOTES

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