OIE reaching out globally

The need to fight animal diseases at global level led to the creation of the Office International des Epizooties through the international Agreement signed on January 25th 1924. In May 2003, the Office became the World Organisation for Animal Health but kept its historical acronym OIE.

The OIE is the intergovernmental organisation responsible for improving animal health worldwide. It is recognised as a reference organisation by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and now, in 2016, it has 180 Member Countries. The OIE maintains permanent relations with other international and regional organisations and has 5 Regional and 7 sub-regional Offices on every continent, 313 OIE Reference Centres, 262 Reference Laboratories, 51 Collaborating centres.

The day-to-day operation of the OIE is managed at the Headquarters situated in Paris and placed under the responsibility of a Director General elected by the World Assembly of Delegates. Monique Eloit is the Director General for the period of 2015-2020.

Since it was created, the OIE has played a key role in its capacity as the sole international reference organisation for animal health, enjoying established international recognition and benefiting from direct collaboration with the Veterinary Services of all its Member Countries. As a mark of the close relationship between animal health and animal welfare, the OIE has become, at the request of its Member Countries, the leading international organisation for animal welfare.

Since 1990, the OIE has adopted a five-year strategic planning cycle for its work programme. Now, the Sixth Strategic Plan covers the period 2015-2020. It builds on the success of previous Strategic Plans. Within the 6th Strategic Plan, a special emphasis is placed on the economic prosperity, social and environmental welfare of population; Protecting animals – Preserving our future.

Three strategic objectives of the 6th Strategic plan are:

- Security,
- Trust,
- Capacity.

In the current trend of globalisation where unprecedented movements of commodities and people are used by pathogens to colonize the entire planet and that nowadays, pathogens are transported around the world faster than the average incubation time of most animal diseases, the OIE's general strategy is to advance governance of Veterinary Services. As a global public
good, Veterinary Services must be able to act and react within an effective, structured national legislative framework, and be provided with the appropriate financial and human resources to enforce it. OIE assists Member Countries with strengthening governance of their animal health systems, and bring them in compliance with OIE standards on quality using the OIE-PVS Pathway including the Gap Analysis tool. This tool provides guidance for preparing five year operational budgets for country Veterinary Services based on their initial PVS evaluation and identified national priorities, and allows determining the tasks and human, physical and financial resources required to enable National Veterinary Services to function in an optimal manner and to comply with international standards of quality. This support to the Veterinary Services also includes addressing laboratory diagnosis capacity.

How Veterinary Services can be effective, what are the key elements? Firstly, it is the early detection and rapid response to animal disease outbreaks that prevent natural or intentional biological disasters and facilitate trade flows and contribute to global food security. Secondly, there must be an alliance between public and private sectors (veterinarians, VSBs, farmers), also biosecurity measures must be taken, as vaccination of animals when it is appropriate. Thirdly, compensation mechanisms have to be set, so everyone would feel safe in case of worst situation. Fourthly, a national chain of command and a clear structure of management have to be set and finally, education of veterinarians and research are one of the key elements that have to be taken into account when talking about the development of veterinary policies.

Furthermore, it is vital that the international organizations cooperate in sharing responsibilities and coordinating global activities to address health risks at the animal-human-ecosystem interfaces in order to secure a safe environment for all of us. This concept was also stressed in the Ministerial Declaration - of G20 Agriculture Ministers Meeting (June 2011): (...) We encourage international organizations, especially FAO, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and WTO to continue their efforts towards enhancing interagency cooperation. (...)

Finally, when thinking about the global objectives and aims of OIE, it must be said that OIE will continue supporting the Members by setting internationally recognised standards and guidelines in animal health veterinary Public Health and animal welfare while protecting biodiversity disseminating scientific and animal health information; recognising disease free status o
countries/zones; providing technical and political support for good governance and Veterinary Services using PVS Pathway and other capacity building activities; providing support to Veterinary Education; supporting the improvement of the quality and organisation of the Veterinary profession and public/private partnership; influencing governments for better recognition of the key role of veterinarians in society.

Prof. Kazimieras Lukauskas

OIE Regional Representative in Moscow