

***Building national capacities in risk communication
and behaviour change***

In the present information age, Veterinary Services need strong communication skills more than ever in order to achieve their goals. Given the importance of communication activities to enhance the good governance of Veterinary Services, the OIE strongly encourages the Delegates of its Member Countries to nominate national Focal Points for communication to support them in this field. Since 2014, thirteen regional and sub-regional seminars have been organised by the OIE Communication Unit to strengthen capacities of these national focal points on risk communication. Thus, more than 300 members of the national Veterinary Services have been trained to date. Discover the main achievements of the second cycle of seminars implemented in each OIE Region¹ in 2017-2018.



COMMUNICATION: A CORNERSTONE OF THE OIE 6th STRATEGIC PLAN

The OIE 6th Strategic Plan, which covers the period from 2016 to 2020, seeks to effectively respond to major societal challenges and adapt to the changes that they entail. As one of these challenges, reinforcing trust through increased transparency and communication on information surrounding animal health issues is one of the three Strategic Plan pillars. The development of strong national communication capacities and regional networks is consequently essential to achieve this objective. In this respect, the 2017-2018 OIE seminars' cycle aimed at preparing national communication Focal Points to take an active role in raising awareness and action generation. The seminars were an opportunity for participants to discuss their role and allowed them to identify as part of a regional

network. The possibility to exchange experiences between countries was highlighted in the evaluation by many participants as one of the main strengths of the seminar. “By interacting with other colleagues facing similar realities and challenges in their countries, more cooperation initiatives could be jointly developed”, affirmed Dr Lagarmilla, communication Focal Point from Uruguay.

THE CHALLENGE OF RISK COMMUNICATION

As highlighted in the OIE Codes, ensuring an efficient and accurate communication is part of the quality requirements for Veterinary Services. To ensure that efficient control measures are applied during outbreaks and epidemics, the health sectors must know how to communicate on hazards, risks and vulnerabilities. The OIE and the World Health Organization (WHO) have developed common tools and methodologies on risk communication to train different health professionals that are summarized in the OIE Communication Handbook for Veterinary Services (www.oie.int/communication_handbook). Moreover, as part of this One Health collaboration, experts from WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) were invited to participate in the seminars.

Focal Points were trained on different risk communication strategies: crisis communication to reduce negative impacts, evidence communication to manage outrage, precaution advocacy to make audiences take action on a new threat and animal health and welfare education to keep audiences informed.

Last but not least, countries’ representatives benefited from a media training session, thanks to a simulation exercise involving a suspected reemergence of Rinderpest, in line with the “[Never Turn Back Campaign](http://rinderpestvigilance.com)” (rinderpestvigilance.com) and immersing the participants in a unexpectedly intense (but very entertaining) press conference.



Photo 2: Several diseases were used as examples depending on regional priorities, such as African swine fever in Europe or Ebola in Africa. Countries also had the opportunity to share their campaigns and communication efforts done at national level as examples of good practices.

CHANGING BEHAVIOURS THROUGH COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

In a modern world where risks are assessed by the public through a perception filter that prevails on reality, working on strategies and interventions to change behaviour has become urgent to trigger actions in the field. Consequently, a section of the seminar was fully dedicated to behaviour change, taking as example antimicrobial resistance. The OIE communication campaign on the responsible and prudent use of antimicrobials in animals was presented as a basis to identify necessary actions for which behaviour change interventions are needed. Focal Points had the possibility to analyse their different target audiences, such as farmers, retailers or policy makers, and the changes expected in each of them. They also discussed the main barriers and challenges in the achievement of the changes and possible interventions to overcome them.

These exercises provide the participants with the necessary tools to address their specific targets while implementing an action plan on antimicrobial resistance at national level.

To learn more about the OIE behaviour change effort, review the “Behaviour change and communications strategies towards reducing antimicrobial use in animals” session of the 2d OIE Global conference on AMR, held in Morocco in October 2018, [click here](#).

BEYOND THE SEMINARS, A NETWORK

Finally, taking advantages of having all regional focal points for communication gathered, a regional network was established at each seminar. Facilitated by the OIE Communication Unit, this network is today active thanks to a web-based platform, allowing continuous exchanges of information and tools between the OIE and the Focal Points. The network, for example, allowed to give more visibility to countries’ activities and success stories during the World Rabies Day and the World Antibiotics Awareness Week 2018. You can read these stories here:

- [Joining efforts to combat Rabies](#)
- [OIE members stand up against AMR during #WAAW18](#)

“Communication should be a continuous process”, as the *OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code* specifies. The next cycle of seminars in 2019-2020 will build on the achievements and experiences of the previous one, to ensure that communication activities become an intrinsic part of all the national Veterinary Services and to offer guidance in their everyday challenges.

MORE INFORMATION

- [OIE Sixth Strategic Plan](#)
- [OIE international Standards on communication](#)
- [Terms of reference for the national Focal Points for communication](#)

¹ Latvia October 2017, Paraguay March 2018, Egypt April 2018, Tunisia June 2018, China July 2018.