

Africa is ready to implement***OIE Guidelines for Veterinary Paraprofessionals***

It's very humbling to be part of these historic times, being the first time ever that global guidelines for Veterinary Paraprofessionals have seen the light of day. The *OIE Competency Guidelines for Veterinary Paraprofessionals* was published in May 2018¹, and its companion document, the *OIE Curricula Guidelines for Veterinary Paraprofessionals*, is expected to be published in May 2019. These two important documents have been developed thanks to the commitment of the OIE to ensure that past recommendations of OIE Global and Regional Conferences are accompanied by concrete action.

The fact that the idea originated from Africa is not only a demonstration of Africa's vibrant Veterinary Paraprofessional community of practice, but a confirmation that the issue of how veterinary paraprofessionals are trained, registered, and recognised is particularly relevant to the African context, due to its relative shortage of Veterinary Surgeons and the consequential lack of oversight or supervision by veterinarians, and the size of rural areas and nomadic production systems.

The journey started with the Continental Conference for Veterinary Paraprofessionals (VPP) in Pretoria, South Africa in October 2015², organised by the OIE and Africa Veterinary Technicians Association (AVTA), with the support of the Global Alliance for Livestock Veterinary Medicines³ (GALVmed) and the South African Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries⁴ (DAFF). The conference aimed to improve the quality of the field work conducted in Africa by strengthening the linkages and collaboration between veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals.

Two years prior to the above conference, AVTA was founded to promote and defend the interests of all veterinary paraprofessionals, with a special interest in the Animal Resource industry in Africa. This was after realising that a gap existed at the regional level in regard to advocacy for veterinary paraprofessionals. AVTA is further expected to promote and improve the Animal Resource Industry through its services.

The conference noted the various challenges that veterinary paraprofessionals face, which include inadequate legal recognition, inappropriate categorisation, lack of standardisation in training, restricted employment opportunities, ineffective research-extension-farmer linkages, and inappropriate veterinary infrastructure. These challenges informed the development of the conference's recommendations⁵ and paved the way for OIE's future work in this area.

¹ http://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Support_to_OIE_Members/pdf/A_Competence.pdf

² <http://www.rr-africa.oie.int/docspdf/en/2015/VPP/REPORT.pdf>

³ <https://www.galvmed.org/>

⁴ <https://www.daff.gov.za/>

⁵ <http://www.rr-africa.oie.int/docspdf/en/2015/VPP/RECOMMANDATIONS.pdf>

Following this Conference as well as the OIE Global Conference on Veterinary Education⁶ in Thailand in June 2016, the OIE convened the *ad hoc* Group on Veterinary Paraprofessionals, supported by the United States government through the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), with veterinary paraprofessionals included in the Group. The Group will have finished its work with the publication of the *OIE Curricula Guidelines for Veterinary Paraprofessionals* in May 2019 at the OIE General Session in Paris, France.

There is no doubt that the *OIE Competency Guidelines for Veterinary Paraprofessionals* and *OIE Curricula Guidelines for Veterinary Paraprofessionals* will go a long way to help address the challenges faced by Members, veterinary statutory bodies, training institutions, veterinarians, and veterinary paraprofessionals in Africa and around the world. It is envisioned by OIE that together, the two companion documents can be used to:

- Improve Member Country's recognition and definition of qualified VPPs, aligning to appropriate authorisation or registration.
- Programme and curricula development: as a foundation for curricula and training programmes.
- Job description development: as guidance for writing standardised job descriptions based on competencies.
- Needs assessment: as a framework against which tools for self-assessment, observer assessment or both can be developed to identify needs and guide staff development planning.
- Self-assessment: as guidance for individuals to assess their current level of knowledge, skills, aptitudes, and abilities, identify areas in need of improvement, and plan for career development.

These will indeed be useful tools in the African context.



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⁶ [http://www.oie.int/eng/vet-education-conf2016/recommendations/A Final recommendations Thailand education.pdf](http://www.oie.int/eng/vet-education-conf2016/recommendations/A%20Final%20recommendations%20Thailand%20education.pdf)