

***A look at the final Steering Committee Meeting for the Standards and Trade Development Facility project on the 'Development of a framework to facilitate e-veterinary certification for international trade on the basis of a single window system'
(Project STDF/PG/609)***



The final meeting of the Steering Committee for the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) project entitled 'Development of a framework to facilitate e-veterinary certification for international trade on the basis of a single window system' (Project STDF/PG/609) was due to be held in Paris, France, on 11 March 2020; however, given the global evolution of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and after a thorough evaluation of the situation, it was agreed that the physical meeting would be replaced by a virtual meeting. However, given that the participants were located all over the world, two virtual meetings were held on 11 March 2020 to ensure that everyone who wished to could join at a reasonable hour.

The purpose of these meetings was to discuss the final draft report of the Committee with the aim of producing a final validated report by the end of June 2020, which will then be published on the OIE website. Participants from six Member Countries and representatives of seven international organisations joined.

Project objectives and management

The overall goal of this project is to assist developing countries by facilitating their understanding and potential use of e-veterinary certification to better engage in international trade of animals and animal products through information sharing, country visits by experts, and providing information on what other international organisations are doing in e-veterinary certification.

The project included a self-assessment by developed and developing countries (Australia, Chile, Eswatini, France, Japan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Paraguay, Singapore, United Kingdom and Zimbabwe) of their current situation in relation to e-certification and single window through the completion of a questionnaire that had been developed by the project's Steering Committee. In the case of Eswatini, Malaysia, Nigeria, Paraguay and Zimbabwe, they also received a visit from an expert on electronic certification and single window to get a deeper insight into the current situation in these countries. In addition, the project included research of existing work undertaken by other relevant international organisations (including the Codex Alimentarius Commission [Codex] and the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention [IPPC]) in relation to sanitary and phytosanitary certification.

Dr Erik Bosker, Senior Policy Advisor at the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture and Food Quality, was recruited as the consultant of the project and drafted a report based on the responses to the questionnaires, the results of in-country visits and his research on the ongoing work of other international organisations.

Outcomes of the Steering Committee meetings

The two virtual meetings of the Steering Committee were chaired by Dr Matthew Stone, OIE Deputy Director General of International Standards and Science.

Dr Stone outlined the OIE's role in standard setting and highlighted the importance of this work in the context of OIE international standards, in particular, Section 5 'Trade measures, import/export procedures and veterinary certification' of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* and *Aquatic Animal Health Code*. He noted that the results of this project highlighted that Member Countries have taken a variety of approaches to certification for international trade.

Dr Bosker provided a summary of the final draft report starting with the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire received from 11 countries, focusing particularly on the different levels of implementation of e-certification and single window and the different perceptions regarding benefits and challenges.

Regarding the results of the in-country visits, Dr Bosker highlighted the large differences in a country's ability to operate electronically at the national level, from an entire paper process to fully digitised processes. He also noted the lack of capacity of some of these countries to exchange certificate information internationally by electronic means which he considered to be an international gap in the technical/administrative infrastructure to introduce electronic veterinary certification based on a single window system.

With regard to the ongoing work of other relevant international organisations, namely, IPPC, Codex, the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and World Customs Organization (WCO), Dr Bosker emphasised that that these four international organisations are facilitating, to different degrees, international electronic exchanges of relevant official documents between regulatory bodies, and each of them is contacting the other international organisations to collaborate.

Participants provided comments on the final draft report that had been circulated prior to the meeting and identified the following as some of the challenges that will need to be addressed to support the implementation of e-veterinary certification:

- For Member Countries: limited financial resources, lack of appropriate legislation and infrastructure, trained staff and the need for cooperation between agencies at the national level.
- For international organisations: development of harmonised data models and stronger cooperation between relevant international organisations to avoid duplication and address gaps.

Next steps

Once the project final validated report is published, the OIE will develop a work programme in relation to e-certification. To do this, the OIE will consider the recommendations in the project report together with other relevant information, taking into account the mandate of the OIE, in particular, its standards development role and Members' needs in this area. The OIE will also consider the work of other international organisations and ensure there is not a duplication of efforts.



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