

The Director General's Speech at the HQ Staff Retreat

Fairground Museum, Paris, 7 October 2021



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Good morning. I am pleased to see so many of you here today for this one-day staff seminar. It has been so long since we last had such an opportunity to be together. I am well aware of how difficult the past 18 months have been: they have impacted your personal and family life; they have also had a significant impact on our Organisation. Thanks to the involvement of everyone, both here in Paris and in the Regional and Sub-Regional Representations, we have managed to keep the ship afloat.

‘Thank you for having maintained your commitment despite these difficulties.’

This experience shows that we have managed to get by despite teleworking at 100% for a number of months. Perhaps some of you think we could have continued in this way, since communication technologies enable us to work remotely. I see things differently.

I think the time has come to tighten the links and create a new team dynamic. That is why I wanted to organise this day, which will combine work and entertainment. I hope you will enjoy it.

To begin this morning, I would like to share with you some thoughts on our Organisation, which will help to inform the discussion you will be having later on today.

If I ask you, ‘What does the OIE mean to you?’, some might answer ‘transparency of animal health information’, others might say ‘development of standards’, or ‘control of animal diseases’, ‘management of health crises’ or ‘support for the Veterinary Services of Members’, etc. You would all be right. The OIE is indeed all of this, with many activities that have been accumulated over the years. Yet, the most important point is that we always relate these activities to the key words, namely ‘animal health’.

In 1924, 'animal health' was limited to the veterinary world in the strictest sense, with standards to regulate trade in animals and animal products, and the notification of a few animal diseases hindering trade.

Nowadays, the boundaries between sectors are fading. Animal health is seen as a component of One Health, while our fellow citizens are increasingly worried about the future of our planet: climate change, overconsumption of resources, pollution of our environment, and, of course, the risk of pandemics; so many challenges and concerns in today's accelerating world where everyone considers themselves an expert after reading three pages of Wikipedia and the blog of an influencer.

'In this changing environment, we must find our place and strengthen our credibility.'

The OIE, like other institutions, faces numerous challenges and they have led us to become involved in other topics, with other approaches, and taking into account a far wider public than our regular veterinary network. A century after its creation, I believe it is no longer a question of the OIE evolving but rather of its transformation.

Let me give you a concrete example to illustrate what I mean. Thirty years ago, when our predecessors were writing chapters of the *Code*, they dealt with a disease by mainly considering its animal health aspects. Today, when we develop a control programme, we naturally consider the socio-economic impact of the disease, but we also:

- emphasise the improvement of production to fight hunger and malnutrition;
- contribute to 'producing better' with fewer animals and therefore less environmental impact;
- explain how a vaccination policy allows fewer antibiotics to be used, leading to fewer residues in foodstuffs and the environment and less antimicrobial resistance;
- argue in favour of Veterinary Services that are more robust.

In other words, we have gradually moved away from thinking 'disease' to thinking 'system'. This is what we have done for example with the strategy on antimicrobial resistance, and more recently with the aquatic animal health strategy and the Wildlife Health Framework.

You might well say, 'If we are already doing this, then why is she focusing on this point today?' I am doing so because it is useful to put words to the ideas. It is a way of ensuring that we all have the same understanding; because from this understanding of the context stems an understanding of the changes in working methods I am proposing for the Organisation.

'What are, in my view, the consequences of this paradigm shift?'

1. First of all, externally, it means we need to be more involved politically. It is not my intention to change the OIE's business model, which must continue to be founded on scientific expertise. But, on the other hand, we must no longer consider that our role is purely technical: we must also make our voice heard in political fora. I would like discussions on global health governance to take place with the OIE seated around the table, rather than on the sidelines. I am proud of the successes already achieved.
This explains why the Director General can no longer be as involved in the technical dossiers or in the management of daily issues as was previously the case.
2. Internally, it means we need to adopt a more systematic, collegial approach:
 - your activities are useful for his/her activities, and vice versa; our activities must therefore be designed and implemented in a coherent, coordinated manner;

- the data you generate are of interest to him/her, and vice versa; our databases must be built in such a way as to be complementary and interconnected, to enable the exchange of data.

We are fortunate in having an organisation that is still of a suitable size for this to be achieved.

That is why I regularly emphasise we are a working community and not merely a juxtaposition of teams. The diversity of our professional experience, the diversity of our expertise and the diversity of our views are a source of wealth that we place at the service of a common good: our Organisation, and beyond, our Members.

I say this with the utmost sincerity. This is a major asset and one that we must preserve, as it is the strength of our Organisation, a strength that few other international organisations possess.

3. OK, that's all very well, but what does that mean in practice?

I told you a few minutes ago of my conviction that the OIE is undergoing a period a transformation. We have already begun the change, but in a slightly disorganised manner. Today, I am inviting you to be actors of change whatever your position in the Organisation, and to do so thanks to two major federating projects that are helping us to build our common future.

- ➔ The first project, which will create a link between us all, is an exciting venture: the **rebranding** of our Organisation. I do not intend to reveal anything right now; I must ask you to wait a little as Gerrit is going to explain everything. However, there is something important I should emphasise; the rebranding – that is starting – is an extraordinary opportunity to rethink the core features of the Organisation: who we are, what we do and why we do it.

Beyond the logos and colours, I am asking you to consider rebranding as a necessary complement to the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is the backbone on which we build our programmes. This is an opportunity to ask ourselves questions about the appropriateness of our activities to meet current global challenges and the expectations of our Members, and to make any necessary adjustments during the implementation of the five-year plan.

Branding is the expression of why we exist, our *raison d'être*. We must be aware of our identity to be able to move forward, and to be able to build while staying true to our basic values. Let us not forget that animal health is recognised as a global public good and that we are working to improve it.

As I said earlier, we are experiencing the transformation of the OIE. Our image must reflect this transformation.

We are all going to be involved in this rebranding exercise: we are going to take ownership of the messages it conveys, and it also provides us with an excellent opportunity to integrate those who have joined us recently; all of us also will act as ambassadors of this new image to our Members and partners.

The Council is unanimously positive about this project. Now it is your turn to be enthusiastic.

- ➔ The second federating project is the **digital transformation** of the Organisation. We have already succeeded with several projects, which are immediately apparent on a daily basis: management of

teleworking and holidays, the internal translation platform, and soon the management of invoices, and, of course, all the logistics for virtual meetings, with the successful organisation of the General Session as the masterpiece.

However, the changes to come are even more profound. Digital transformation does not consist of the development of IT tools to meet technical requirements. Digital transformation is not the project of the Digital Transformation and Information Systems Department. It is our common project for the Organisation.

- It consists of rethinking our policies by specifying their objectives. What do we want to do? What results do we want to achieve?
- And then to organise or adjust the way they are implemented, asking oneself how to answer these questions. In particular, this means being able to identify the data these strategies need – and only those – the data they generate and to know who holds them, and how these data interact in synergy.

This will be the major objective of the working group on data management, due to be set up shortly and jointly run by Audrey, Laure and Thomas.

I would like each one of you to feel they are involved, for the future of our Organisation is at stake. The Heads of Department will grant you all the time needed for this transformation to be a success, even if it means revising the prioritisation of other activities.

To conclude, let me reiterate the conclusion of the editorial of the September edition of our *In-house Times*. I invited you to

‘look ahead, think together and mobilise our energies to move forward’.

Given that we shall soon be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the World Organisation for Animal Health, I should like our day, today, to be an opportunity to begin this approach, discuss these questions, and may it remain an important milestone along the way.

● *OIE In-house Times* – October 2021