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VETERINARY STATUTORY BODIES IN AFRICA

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Abstract : Within the 52 Member countries of the OIE in Africa, no more than 36 have established formal *Veterinary Statutory Bodies* (VSBs) which conform to some or all of the OIE criteria, as listed in the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Article 3.2.12.). The remaining countries, for a variety of reasons, are in the process, did not manage or do not envisage to establish such Bodies. Most African countries do have professional interest associations (general veterinary associations, small animal practitioners, veterinary nurses). These associations do not have the same role and function as a VSB, according to the OIE definitions. However, in countries that lack a VSB these associations may perform some relevant functions, such as keeping a register of their members and the set standards for the profession by establishing a code of conduct against which the behaviour of the members may be measured and dealt with.

The findings in this paper are based on the outcomes of the PVS evaluation missions conducted in Africa since 2006 and the analysis of an online survey of representatives of VSBs, veterinary associations and veterinary authorities administrations.

Most VSBs in Africa do not regulate the quality or establish minimum standards of veterinary education, nor do they have a role with respect to veterinary para-professionals. Their scope is usually limited to regulating the professional activities of private and public sector veterinarians.

At the basis of these shortcomings lie three fundamental features of veterinary service delivery in Africa: (a) the relative scarcity of resources, making it difficult for VSBs to generate the required financial resources, (b) the fact that the veterinary profession largely evolved from and/or is still widely dominated by the public services and (c) the inadequate awareness of stakeholders. Functional VSB's require the rule of law, democracy and the strict separation of the three powers of the State, which is not attained everywhere in Africa today.

The authors conclude that while progress has been made in the past decades, more needs to be done to (a) continue raising general awareness of requirements for good governance of the veterinary services, (b) establish VSB's in countries that have not yet done so, (c) improve compliance with OIE standards in others and (d) improve the linkages between VSBs and VEEs in order to strengthen the grip of VSBs on the supply and demand for professionals of the highest possible quality in years to come.

Key words: Africa, PVS evaluation, Veterinary Statutory Body, Veterinary Education.

Introduction

The various ways in which legislators have (or have not) established *Veterinary Statutory Bodies* (VSBs) or veterinary councils in Africa since independence from the former colonial powers, has, to the best of our knowledge, never been thoroughly researched. As international standards on the quality of Veterinary Services become more and more enshrined in national legislation, VSBs too are under increased scrutiny from the public and the stakeholders. Any veterinary statutory body today should be able to demonstrate that it has the capacity and authority, supported by appropriate legislation, to exercise and enforce control over all veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals. These controls should include, where appropriate, compulsory licensing or registration, participation in the definition of minimum standards of education (initial and continuing) for the recognition of degrees, diplomas and certificates by the competent authority, setting standards of professional conduct and competence, investigating complaints and the application of disciplinary procedures. In addition, the VSB should be able to demonstrate autonomy from undue political and commercial interests and where applicable, the implementation of regional agreements for the recognition of degrees, diplomas and certificates for veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals should be demonstrated (Article 3.2.12 of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* on the evaluation of the veterinary statutory body). The last statement is becoming increasingly important as supra-national and regional alliances, associations and interest-groups dealing with some or all of the veterinary statutory bodies' mandates, are ever-increasing, pursuing region-wide harmonization and compliance with international standards. The *World Organisation for Animal Health* has since 2006 included the VSB in its standardised *Performance of Veterinary Services* (PVS) evaluation matrix and now possesses valuable information on the "level of advancement" (levels 1 to 5, according to increasing compliance with international standards) of VSBs in Africa and around the world (critical competency III.5.).

Materials and methods

The results presented in this paper are based on two sources: a continental survey conducted in the course of July and August 2013 amongst representatives of veterinary councils, veterinary associations and chief veterinary officers in Africa; and an analysis of the outcomes of PVS (*Performance of Veterinary Services*) evaluation and PVS Gap-Analysis reports with respect to the critical competency (CC) III-5., dealing with veterinary statutory bodies.

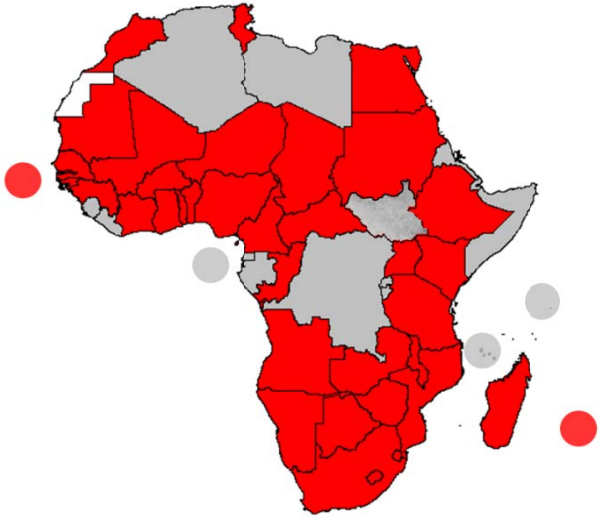
The continental survey was conducted using an online survey form, developed by the authors on a platform called eSurveyPro (www.esurveypro.com). The questionnaire contained 35 mostly multiple choice questions and was available in French and English. Invitations to complete the questionnaire were sent out to the chairpersons and registrars of veterinary councils, as listed on the OIE Africa website (http://www.rr-africa.oie.int/en/RC/en_vsbs.html), to the representatives of veterinary associations, as listed on the World Veterinary Association website (<http://www.worldvet.org/about.php?sp=members>) and to the OIE Delegates (chief veterinary officers), as listed on the OIE Africa website (<http://www.rr-africa.oie.int/delegates.html>). The data were collected over a period of 7 weeks and reminders were sent out to non-respondents every fortnight. The collected data were analysed in part by the embedded data-analysis tools of eSurveyPro and in part through the use of an exported Microsoft Excel 2010 spreadsheet.

The analysis of PVS mission reports was conducted using a simple Microsoft Excel 2010 spreadsheet.

Most data presented in the present paper are anonymous, as several PVS reports have not been cleared for the public domain; furthermore, the purpose of this paper is to provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of veterinary statutory bodies in Africa, not in respect of specific countries or sub-regions of the continent.

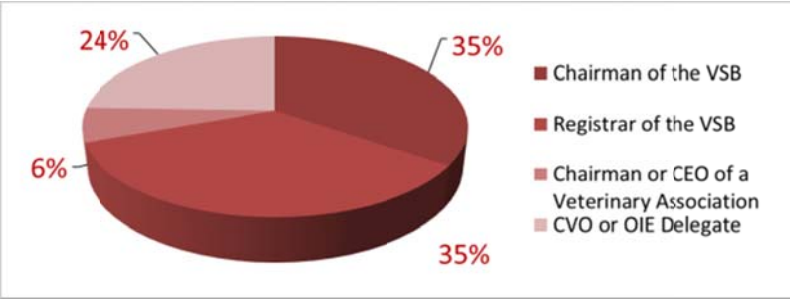
Results

Forty-seven individuals submitted a completed questionnaire, representing a total of 45 countries out of the 54 countries, recognized by the UN in Africa. Only Burundi, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Liberia, Malawi, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Somalia did not contribute to the questionnaire. From these 9 countries, only Senegal is known to have a VSB (based on PVS reports). Hence the participation of countries was 83 % and the participation of VSBs was 97 %. Veterinary Statutory Bodies are present in two-thirds of African countries (67%)



Map 1. African countries (in red) with a VSB, established by Law. The red dots correspond to the island states of Cape Verde (west) and Mauritius (east).

Most questionnaires were completed by the chairpersons or the registrars of VSBs (35% each), with the remainder being completed by the chairpersons or chief executive officers

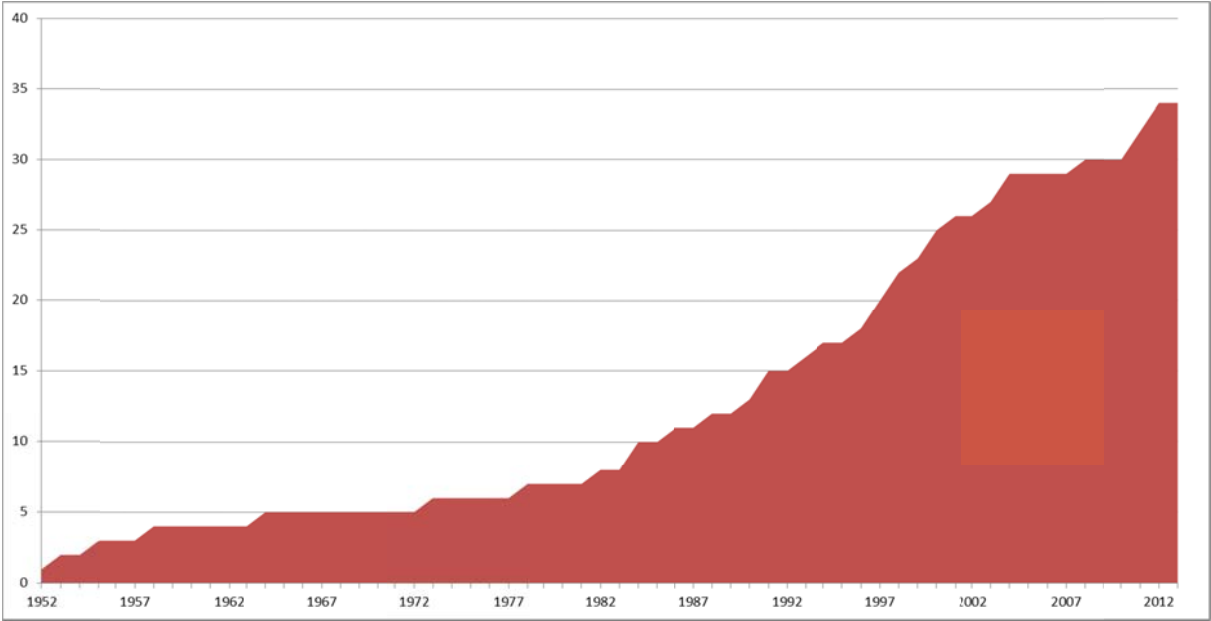


(CEOs) of veterinary associations (24%) or the chief veterinary officer (CVO) or OIE Delegate (6%), usually where there is no VSB established.

Graph 1. Source of information for the online survey.

From the respondent countries, 84% have legislation defining the establishment of a Veterinary Statutory Body and 78% have indeed established a VSB, irrespective of whether this body is compliant with the quality of veterinary services standards of the OIE (article 3.2.12. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*, edition 2013). In 73% of countries there is also at least one veterinary association active and in 42% of countries at least one association of veterinary para-professionals. In the vast majority of countries VSBs are called veterinary councils or veterinary boards, but there are also countries where the VSB, whilst duly established by Law, in accordance with OIE standards, is nevertheless called an Association. In Egypt, the Veterinary Council and the Department/Directorate of Veterinary Services are merged as the *General Organisation of Veterinary Services* (GOVS) which registers public sector veterinarians only.

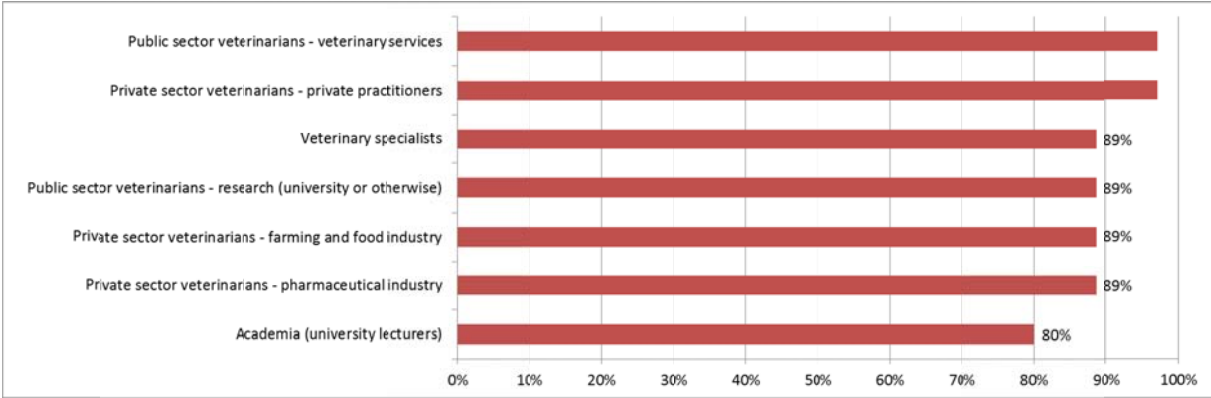
The oldest VSB in Africa is the *Veterinary Council of Nigeria (VCN)*, established in 1952. The cumulative establishment of VSBs since 1952 is presented in graph 2 below :



Graph 2. Cumulative number of VSBs established in Africa since 1952, when the Vet. Council of Nigeria was established.

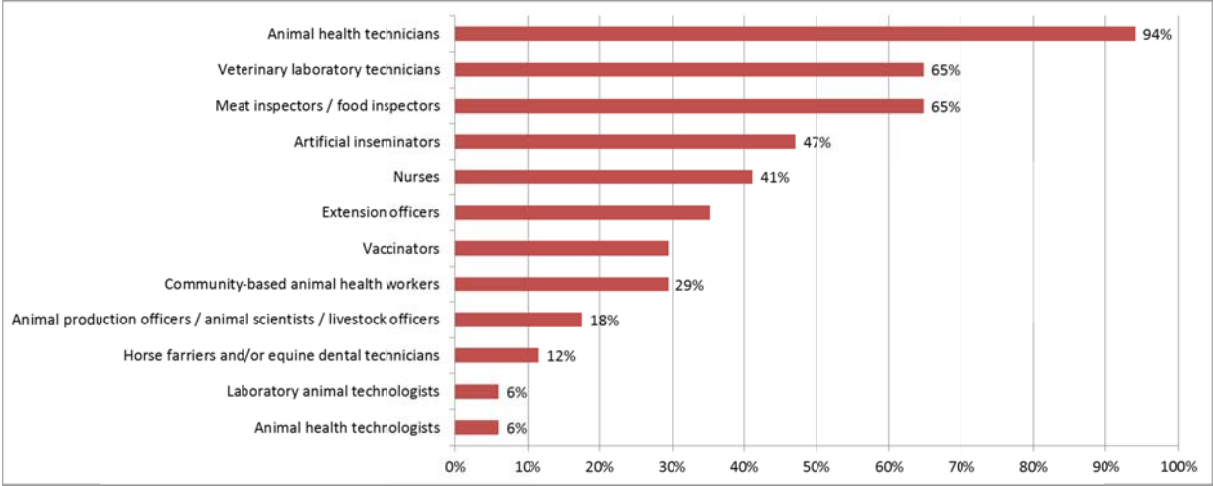
Only 31% of Veterinary Statutory Bodies today communicate via an official website.

Where these exist, VSBs license the following categories of veterinary graduates (some respondents did not answer this question, hence the maximum is not 100%) :



Graph 3. Categories of veterinarians licensed by the VSBs in Africa, in decreasing order of frequency.

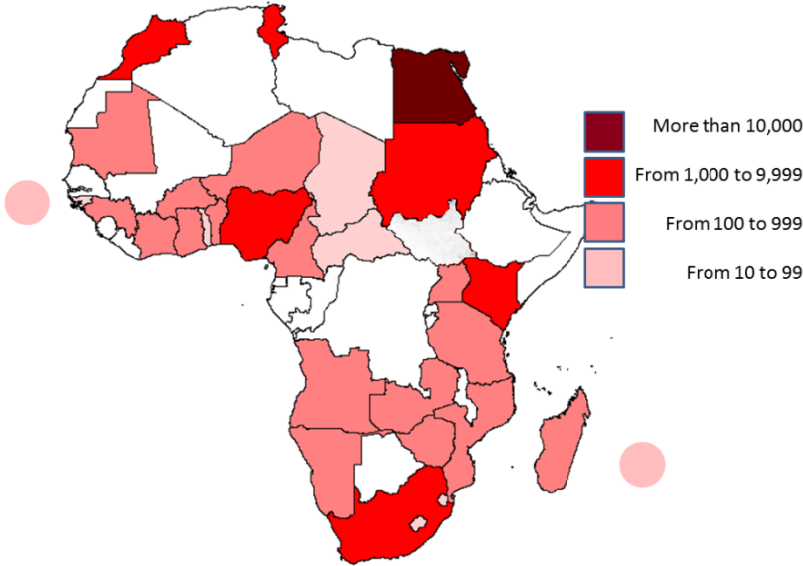
There is one VSB which licenses private veterinarians only. As far as veterinary para-professionals are concerned, 57% of VSB do not register this category of professionals. For those that do register veterinary para-professionals, the different categories that require registering are :



Graph 4. Where legislation permits, categories of veterinary para-professionals registered by the VSBs in Africa, in decreasing order of frequency.

It is important to highlight that 29% of VSB that do register veterinary para-professionals include *community-based animal health workers* (CAHW) in their definition of para-professional. This corresponds to 5 countries.

The size of VSBs, in terms of members, varies from 13 to 15 in some very small countries to 6,000 to 11,000 in the most populated countries in Africa (i.e. Nigeria, Egypt).



Map 1. African countries (in red) with a VSB, established by Law. The number of registered veterinarians is indicated by the intensity of the red colour (increasing from pale red to dark red).

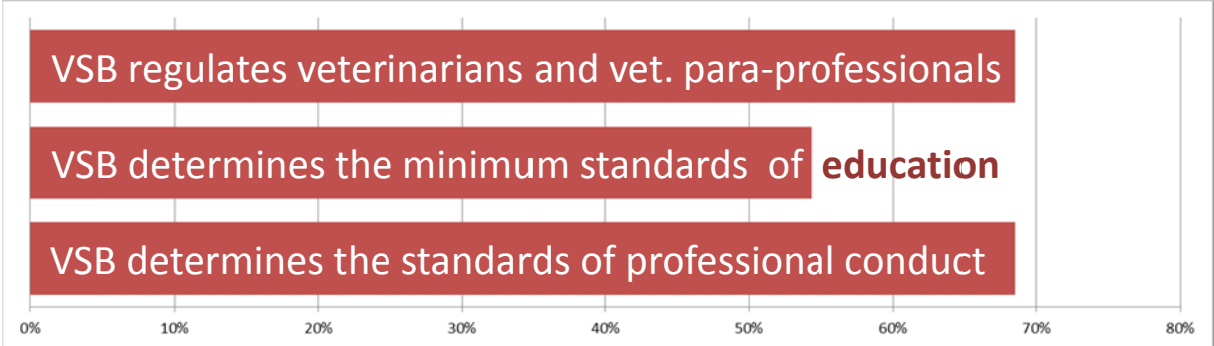
The membership of these VSBs consists of 46% private sector veterinarians, 19% public sector veterinarians, 11% veterinary academic staff, 7% veterinary research staff and 1% “others”, e.g. retired veterinarians, members of parliament, etc... This also explains why the percentage of registered veterinarians, as compared to the total number of working veterinarians in the country (89% in average) is sometimes higher than 100%.

When examining the compliance of VSBs with the main terms of the international standards, as defined by the OIE in Chapter 3.2. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (2013), it appears that few VSBs in Africa meet all three main tasks of a VSB, i.e. (a) the licensing or

registration of veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals to perform the activities of veterinary medicine/science; (b) the minimum standards of education (initial and continuing) required for degrees, diplomas and certificates entitling the holders thereof to be registered or licensed as veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals; and (c) the standards of professional conduct and competence of veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals and ensuring that these standards are met.

Overall, only 15 VSBs in Africa comply with all three requirements (43% of respondents with a VSB).

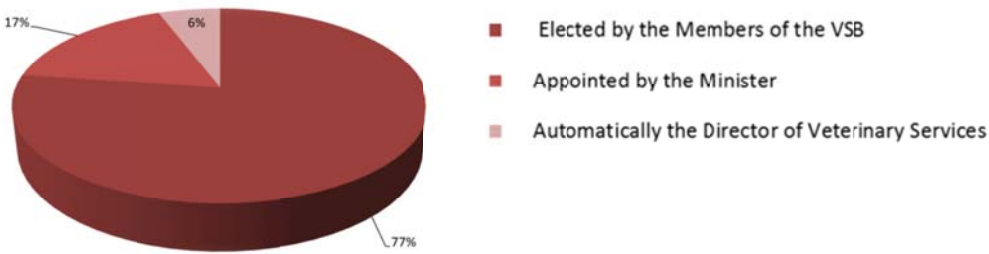
The only reason for non-compliance with statement (a) is of course the fact that the VSB does not register veterinary para-professionals. The main reason for non-compliance with statement (b) is the fact that the country does not train its own veterinarians (no national faculty or school of veterinary medicine or sciences).



Graph 5. Compliance of VSBs in Africa with three important mandates of any VSB, as defined in the Terrestrial Code.

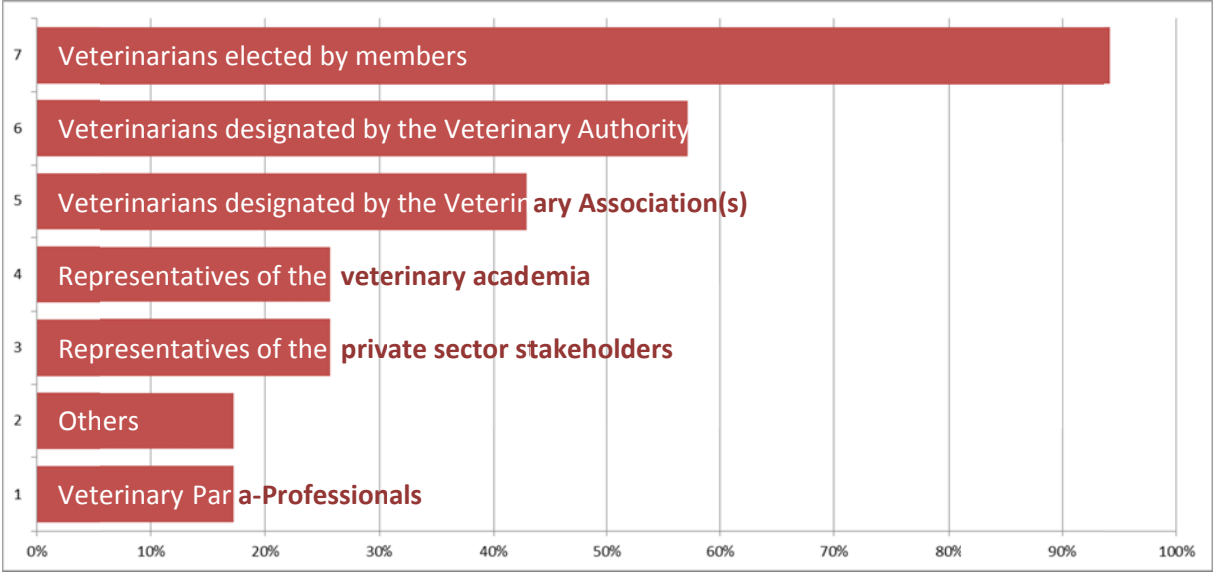
On average, any given country in Africa has 1.3 faculties or schools of veterinary medicine or sciences, offering university degrees in veterinary medicine and 4.2 institutes or schools for mid level training in animal health, nursing schools etc (diploma level).

Another requirement deals with the statutes of the VSB which should clearly define (a) the election procedures and duration of appointment; and (b) the qualification requirements for members. Compliance is 87% for both requirements. Non compliance, as can be seen from the graph below, is often linked to the lack of “*autonomy from undue political and commercial interests*” when chairpersons are designated by the line-Ministry (17%) or are synonymous with the position of Director of Veterinary Services (6%).



Graph 6. Three ways in which Chairpersons of VSBs are elected or appointed.

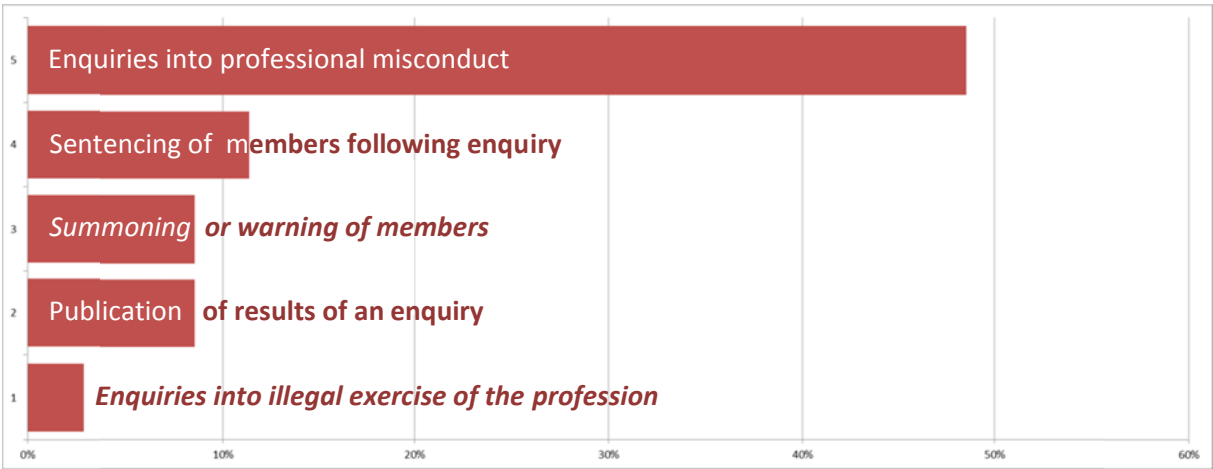
The members of the governing body of the VSB are listed below :



Graph 7. Categories of veterinarians constituting the governing body (e.g. board) of the VSBs in Africa, in decreasing order of frequency.

Other indicators of compliance with international standards and best practice, as defined by the OIE are the respect of the duration of appointments and the interval between elections. From the survey, it appears that most VSBs have defined these intervals in their statutes or in their legislation (91%) and appointed a Council or Board for a duration of 3 years (on average 3.3 with a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 5 years). Nevertheless some VSBs organised their last elections as far back as 1998 (15 years). On average, the last elections were held 2.9 years ago. Likewise, the last time the financial report was presented to the members was on average, 1.56 years ago (19 months ago).

The willingness to exert its role to the full extent of the law is illustrated by the number of cases in which VSBs engage in punitive or repressive measures, which is generally low. Less than 50% of VSBs launched (one or several) investigation(s) on professional misconduct by members over the last 12 months, whilst only 4 VSBs actually sentenced their members for such misconduct (11%).



Graph 8. Corrective or punitive measures taken by the VSBs in Africa, in decreasing order of frequency. The measures printed in italic where additional measures, suggested by the contributors to the survey (under "other").

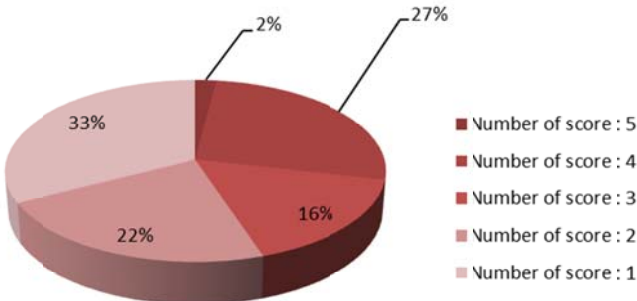
The cost of registration of veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals was also investigated. The fee for a first time registration of a national veterinarian is on average USD 46, for a foreign veterinarian, on average USD 161. The average annual retention fee is USD 62, with sometimes special fees for retired veterinarians or private sector veterinarians. In some countries, no retention fees are payable at all, whilst in other countries retention fees may be as high as USD 280 per annum. For veterinary para-professionals, the average registration fee varies from USD 30 to 35, depending on the category of veterinary para-professionals and the average annual retention fee is USD 19 (from free to USD 60).

When queried (as an open question) about the relationship between the VSB and the line-Ministry (the Ministry in charge of the Veterinary Authority) most respondents highlighted the independence of the VSB from government (whether operational or financial) and consider the Ministry as one of many partner institutions represented in the Council, whilst others referred to financial support provided by the Ministry and describe the Ministry as part of the decision-making process, e.g. validation or ratification by the Minister of decisions taken by the VSB.

Based on the analysis of PVS reports (PVS Evaluations and in addition PVS Gap Analyses, where applicable) from 49 countries (91% of countries) it would appear that 16 countries (33%) at the time at which the mission was conducted, were allocated a level of advancement score 1, which means that *there is no legislation establishing a VSB*. According to the 2013 survey, only 15 countries would appear not to have legislation establishing a VSB. The difference may be attributed to the time at which the PVS missions¹ were conducted.

Eleven countries (22%) were categorized at level of advancement 2, which means *that the VSB regulates veterinarians only within certain sectors of the veterinary profession and/or does not systematically apply disciplinary measures*. According to earlier versions of the PVS Tool, this could also mean *that there is a VSB, but it does not have legislated authority to make decisions nor to apply disciplinary measures*.

Eight countries (16%) were assessed as being at a level of advancement 3, which means *that the VSB regulates veterinarians in all relevant sectors of the veterinary profession and applies disciplinary measures*. According to earlier versions of the PVS Tool, this could also mean *that the VSB regulates veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals only within certain sectors of the VS (e.g. public sector but not private sector veterinarians)*.



Finally, 14 countries (29%) were awarded a level of advancement of 4 (13) or even 5 (1), which means (at least) *that the VSB regulates functions and competencies of veterinarians in all relevant sectors and veterinary para-professionals according to needs*.

Graph 9. Levels of advancement of VSBs in Africa, as compared to the international standards, rendered based on 49 PVS evaluation reports (levels 1 to 5, according to increasing compliance with international standards).

Discussion

Within the 52 Member countries of the OIE in Africa, no more than 36 have established formal VSBs which conform to some or all of the OIE criteria, as listed in the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Article 3.2.12.). The remaining countries, for a variety of reasons, are in the process, did not manage or do not envisage to establish such Bodies. This finding is mirrored by the analysis of the PVS reports, with 16 countries not having a (operational) VSB.

Thirty-three African countries have (at least one) professional association(s). These associations do not have the same role and function as a VSB, according to the OIE definitions. However, in the countries where there are no VSBs these associations may perform some relevant functions, such as keeping a register of their members and the set standards for the profession by establishing a code of conduct against which the behaviour of the members may be measured and dealt with.

Compliance of the VSBs with OIE standards is generally low (43%) primarily because the VSB does not define the minimum standards for veterinary curricula and to a lesser extent because it does not register veterinary para-professionals and/or does not engage in corrective measures when confronted with malpractice. With a few exceptions, in countries where *veterinary educational establishments* (VEE) exist, veterinarians are still pretty much tacitly accredited by the VSB of that country and licensing of veterinarians is very much an administrative practice, which seldom leads to complaints and appeals, though these are generally defined in the statutes.

Based on licensing numbers, combined with the annual retention fee, one could argue that annual budgets of VSBs vary from as little as USD 75 per annum to close to USD 800,000, which might explain why some VSBs stress their financial independence from outside influences and authorities, while others stress the fact that their operations very much depend on government support, as is the case e.g. in Angola and Morocco. In addition, many respondents acknowledge the fact that decisions taken by the VSB still need to be ratified, validated or endorsed by the line-Ministry to be implemented, as e.g. for the accreditation of private veterinary surgeries in Cameroon. In a few countries, VSBs are basically government entities under the authority of the veterinary administration or the line-Ministry, and where the Chairperson of the VSB is *ex officio* the *Chief Veterinary Officer* (CVO) or Director of Veterinary Services.

In countries which have not yet established a VSB or where no veterinarians and/or veterinary para-professionals have been registered yet, the vast majority of countries point the finger at delays in the approval of legislation. It is relevant to note as well that initiatives dealing with regional integration in other sectors do not seem to extend to the VSBs. Only Burkina Faso referred to harmonisation of legislation pertaining to the Council across the *West African Economic and Monetary Union* (WAEMU). Most responding countries (63%) indicated that they did not have any form of coordination with VSBs in neighbouring countries, which is surprising given the fact that most countries will have to open up their borders for veterinarians and para-professionals in the foreseeable future, as common markets take shape across the continent.

Conclusions

Three fundamental features of veterinary service delivery in Africa: (a) the relative scarcity of resources, making it difficult for VSBs to generate the required financial income, (b) the fact

that the veterinary profession largely evolved from and/or is still widely dominated by the public services and (c) the inadequate awareness of stakeholders; explain the shortcomings described in the previous sections. Functional VSB's require the rule of law, democracy and the strict separation of the three powers of the State, which is not present everywhere in Africa today.

While progress has undoubtedly been made in the past decades, more needs to be done to (a) continue raising general awareness of requirements for good governance of the veterinary services, (b) establish VSB's in countries that have not yet done so, (c) improve compliance with OIE standards in other countries and (d) improve the linkages between VSBs and VEEs in order to strengthen the grip of VSBs on the supply and demand for professionals of the highest possible quality in years to come.

In this respect, regional coordination and harmonisation is critical. Unfortunately, there is to date no continental organisation or union of VSBs, nor are there such bodies at regional level. With the support of –amongst others- the OIE, *Veterinary Educational Establishments* (VEE) in some parts of Africa have started engaging in regional coordination in basic core curriculum, continuing education and innovations in the delivery of courses; and involve the VSBs of those countries as part of the (main) stakeholders. This is currently the case with the *Southern and Eastern Africa Association of Veterinary Educational Establishments* (SEAAVEE) and the *Mediterranean Network of Veterinary Educational Establishments* (REEV-Med). The OIE recommendations on day-one-competencies of graduating veterinarians (2012) and the OIE guidelines on the veterinary core curriculum (2013) are used as reference documents, whereas some VEEs are currently considering entering an OIE-facilitated twinning agreement with another establishment. The same will shortly apply to African VSBs wishing to enter into a twinning agreement with another VSB.

Acknowledgements

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