The global public good concept: a means of promoting good veterinary governance

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Summary
At the outset, the concept of a ‘public good’ was associated with economic policies. However, it has now evolved not only from a national to a global concept (global public good), but also from a concept applying solely to the production of goods to one encompassing societal issues (education, environment, etc.) and fundamental rights, including the right to health and food.

Through their actions, Veterinary Services, as defined by the Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code) of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), help to improve animal health and reduce production losses. In this way they contribute directly and indirectly to food security and to safeguarding human health and economic resources. The organisation and operating procedures of Veterinary Services are therefore key to the efficient governance required to achieve these objectives.

The OIE is a major player in global cooperation and governance in the fields of animal and public health through the implementation of its strategic standardisation mission and other programmes for the benefit of Veterinary Services and OIE Member Countries.

Thus, the actions of Veterinary Services and the OIE deserve to be recognised as a global public good, backed by public investment to ensure that all Veterinary Services are in a position to apply the principles of good governance and to comply with the international standards for the quality of Veterinary Services set out in the OIE Terrestrial Code (Section 3 on Quality of Veterinary Services) and Aquatic Animal Health Code (Section 3 on Quality of Aquatic Animal Health Services).

Keywords

Introduction
Globalisation has compounded problems and made them harder to resolve. However, it has also highlighted the common interests of groups of countries, or even citizens, in areas such as financial stability, the environment, health and access to knowledge. The concept of a ‘global public good’ has been formulated progressively and is now widely used to legitimise the need for public action.

It is crucial to apply the global public good concept to the agricultural sector, and in particular to livestock production, in a context of resource scarcity, environmental change in pastoral zones, the emergence or spread of animal diseases beyond borders and long-term food crises. A review of the background is useful in understanding the crux of the matter, especially the implications for policies conducted by, and in aid of, Veterinary Services. Only judicious use of the global public good concept will ensure its continued relevance and protective role.

National Veterinary Services are key institutional players in the development and implementation of public policies for preserving animal resources and reducing poverty and hunger worldwide. Their public health actions also contribute to the wellbeing of the planet. For this reason,
The structural and economic resources allocated to national Veterinary Services to carry out their programmes and fulfil their responsibilities, in accordance with recognised principles of 'good governance', represent an investment that generates benefits for the economic and social development of the entire community.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) works alongside national Veterinary Services to build international consensus for setting standards to regulate trade according to harmonised health rules. In addition, the adoption of standards and guidelines on the quality and good governance of Veterinary Services helps to unify policies, building donors' trust in the ability of Veterinary Services to handle health crises effectively or to prevent them, minimising their impact wherever possible.

The global public good concept

For many years, the ‘public good’ concept was reserved for national assets and was usually applied to the economic sector, where market failures encouraged, or even legitimised, intervention by public authorities (4, 5, 7).

The writings of Paul Samuelson, the 1970 Nobel Prize winner for economics, concerning collective goods and the economic analysis of public choices, provide a historic reference point. In the 1950s, he came up with the definition of a ‘public good’ based on two main criteria:

1. Non-rivalry of consumption: each individual’s consumption of a good leads to no subtractions from any other individuals consumption of that good.

2. Non-excludability of use: use cannot be reserved for some and the good is available to all.

For example, just as the light from a lighthouse indiscriminately guides all boats navigating in the area, health checks for imported animals and animal products by a country’s Veterinary Services benefit the whole community of livestock producers by reducing the risk of introducing livestock diseases.

The production of these public goods is therefore in the public interest. As such public goods tend to be unprofitable for private operators looking for a return on investment, there is a strong probability that they will either not be produced at all, or in insufficient quantities. This is why the best solution is seen to be for the public authorities to deliver them, funded by taxation.

In the 1990s, globalisation went hand in hand with the increasing influence of markets, economic decisions and private operators (8). The involvement of the public authorities, and even their power to modify the laws of the market, came under challenge. In many cases, the quest for budgetary savings and the need to rationalise expenditure resulted in the restructuring and privatisation of areas formerly within the remit of the public sector. The harmful consequences observed in many countries led to deep discontent and the finger was pointed at public services for failing to preserve goods of general interest. The merchandisation of public goods had reached its limits.

At the same time, the emergence of public concerns about the environment, and the implementation of environmental policies in many countries, contributed to the use of the public good concept in a whole new – not purely economic – area.

In this context, the debate on global problems took on new life and the public good concept that had been formulated by Paul Samuelson in the 1950s was adapted to the new global situation. As a result of discussions in various bodies, there has been gradual endorsement of the idea that the most basic public goods must now be global.

However, it is proving difficult to arrive at a consensus on the definition of a global public good:

– some see the global public good concept as a complement to market opening, as it introduces collective interests (peace and security, environmental protection, etc.) and takes into account the individual fundamental rights (right to health, food, etc.) that are required to balance the liberal globalisation of the market

– others see it as more of a backward step with a risk of gridlock and a return to state intervention, which is generally considered to be ineffective.

In addition, national interests, differing socio-cultural characteristics and development gaps make it difficult for countries to reach unanimous agreement on a definition.

Nevertheless, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has attempted to provide a definition to reinforce the legitimacy of the Millennium Development Goals. The UNDP proposes a division into three main categories: natural global public goods (climate, biodiversity, etc.), global public goods of human origin (education, culture, etc.) and global public goods resulting from policies (peace, health, financial stability, etc.) (5).

Finally, even though it has not been definitively decided which types of goods can be recognised as global public goods, there does appear to be sufficient consensus on health and food safety for states, regional and international organisations and private stakeholders to accept that health programmes should be considered to be a global public good.
What does the concept mean?

**Universality**

Based on Paul Samuelson’s definition of a public good, Charles Kindleberger (6) defines global public goods as all goods accessible to all countries that do not necessarily have an individual interest in producing them. The concept can be readily applied to non-economic fields, such as the environment, or air or water quality.

Kindleberger’s definition underscores the universal nature of global public goods, but also raises a question that does not apply to national public goods, namely that of coordination between states concerning the universality of the global public good, as there is no supranational competent authority to handle issues associated with promoting and defending global public goods.

**The timeless or transgenerational dimension**

The positive outcomes of successfully managed global public goods or, conversely, the harmful consequences of poor management, are easiest to observe over the medium to long term. The time lag between an event and its impact means that the management of global public goods should take into account not only the interests of the present generation, but also those of future generations (1).

The environmental and health effects of the reckless use of chemicals, mass deforestation to create new arable or pasture land, and overfishing of certain species to the point of upsetting the balance of the marine food chain, are just a few well-known examples illustrating the concept.

The universality and timelessness of global public goods give new meaning to international cooperation and public governance. Lack of international regulatory policy, in cases where national regulatory policy is also deficient, often results in the exclusion of certain sections of the population from access to global public goods such as water, food, health or education.

International cooperation should enable (and facilitate) coordination between partners, first and foremost between states. International organisations provide a forum for consultation and independent expertise, and can orchestrate the quest for consensus. However, most analysts stress that international cooperation must not override the principle of subsidiarity and that the international cooperation component of global public goods must remain linked to the national public goods component.

Good governance must boost the capacity of public authorities to manage public goods effectively and fairly. For this reason, good governance mechanisms have now become a priority for most international organisations, whatever their mandate, as the following organisations exemplify:

- **a)** UNDP has defined a global partnership for development as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals
- **b)** the World Health Organization (WHO) has made recommendations on what it considers to be the essential components of a health system that functions properly
- **c)** the OIE has set quality standards for Veterinary Services.

**Crop and livestock production, priorities for feeding the world: animal health, a global public good**

While crop and livestock production are not themselves considered to be global public goods, they are indirectly linked to the concept because of their impact on human and animal health.

Indeed, some global public goods are interdependent and synergies between them may confer mutual benefits. Progress in one field may lead to improvements in others.

Animal health is therefore taken into account because of its connections with:
- public health, which is associated with zoonotic diseases
- environmental protection and biodiversity, which is associated with diseases and wildlife preservation
- sustainable development, which is associated with changing production systems.

In recent years, food crises have reminded global decision-makers that ‘feeding the world’ remains a key priority, with three-quarters of the world’s poor households subsisting solely on their food crop production, meaning that the impact of animal diseases on their livestock seriously jeopardises their resources and the future of their children.

Nowadays, not only health but also crop and livestock production are posted systematically on the agenda of the meetings of the principal international decision-making bodies – G8 and G20. Improving agricultural production is recognised as imperative for fighting hunger and poverty.

The first meeting of G20 Agriculture Ministers, held in Paris on 22nd and 23rd June 2011, provides a perfect illustration. Faced with a situation that continued to cause...
concern, agriculture ministers reiterated the need for more effective agricultural policies on a global and national scale and the need for better international coordination (3).

The ministers stressed in particular ‘the importance of strengthening international and regional networks, international standard setting taking into account national and regional differences, information, surveillance and traceability systems, good governance and official services, since they ensure an early detection and a rapid response to biological threats, facilitate trade flows and contribute to global food security’. The ministers encouraged international organisations, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), WHO, OIE, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the International Plant Protection Convention and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to pursue their cooperation efforts in order to mobilise more public and private funding for programmes and initiatives.

The nature of the commitments made by the main public donors (World Bank, European Union) and private donors (foundations) shows how wholeheartedly they have assimilated this new approach. The prevention and control of transmissible animal diseases and of the risk posed to humans is considered to be in the global public interest. The benefit of promoting prevention programmes to reduce these risks is another message that has been taken on board (2): ‘Prevention is better than cure’!

The economic and social crisis associated with avian influenza in 2005/2006 probably helped to raise awareness, as did several international economic studies outlining the exorbitant cost of animal disease-related health crises.

Three economic studies commissioned by the OIE on the prevention and control of animal diseases worldwide, co-financed by the World Bank and presented at a conference organised jointly by the World Bank and the OIE in collaboration with FAO, confirmed that the cost of preventing such diseases, through appropriate surveillance networks of farmers and veterinarians, was extremely low compared with the cost of crises (Prevention and control of animal diseases worldwide. Part I: Economic analysis – Prevention versus outbreak costs [10]). These studies also emphasised the importance of veterinary governance.

In a similar vein, the 2010 World Bank report entitled People, Pathogens and Our Planet: Volume 1: Towards a One Health Approach for Controlling Zoonotic Diseases (9) emphasised (with the support of figures) that animal diseases have a crucial economic impact on poverty and a significant impact on human health, and that they therefore hamper the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. For example, the authors of the report estimate that, over the past decade, the crises associated with bovine spongiform encephalopathy, severe acute respiratory syndrome and avian influenza caused by the H5N1 virus, have cost more than 20 billion US dollars (USD) in direct economic losses, and more than USD 200 billion in indirect losses (border closures, loss of markets, control of trade flows, reduction in tourism, etc.). This does not include the recurring cost of many livestock diseases, whether zoonotic (brucellosis, tuberculosis, etc.) or otherwise (mastitis, parasitosis, etc.), which undermine livestock productivity and erode the income of farmers and associated professionals. Accordingly, it would seem that any action to prevent the emergence of animal diseases and contain the spread of existing ones is likely to help to limit economic losses. Major global donors therefore perceive any investment to support the structured organisation of a mutually beneficial partnership between public Veterinary Services and private professional organisations as an investment in the protection of a global public good – animal health.

**Veterinary Services are working to ensure animal health – a global public good**

In a world of open borders and escalating cross-border trade, there is a high risk that a local failure will have repercussions beyond the national territory.

Experts agree that responsible national development is the starting point and cornerstone of sustainable globalisation, summed up by the maxim ‘international cooperation starts at home’.

According to the definition in the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code) (11), Veterinary Services are ‘governmental and non-governmental organisations that implement animal health and welfare measures and other standards and recommendations in the Terrestrial Code and the OIE Aquatic Animal Health Code in the territory. The Veterinary Services are under the overall control and direction of the Veterinary Authority’.

Veterinary Services are in the forefront for drafting and implementing animal health policies and programmes to control animal diseases. To achieve the objectives of reducing production losses and protecting livestock health (and indirectly public health) by preventing zoonoses and foodborne infections, Veterinary Services encompass their actions within broader policies to fight hunger, reduce poverty and promote economic development.

This gives them a key role in the preservation of livestock health.
For this reason it is essential for public policies to support the development and reinforcement of structured national Veterinary Services, endowed with appropriate human and financial resources for their tasks and operating under a hierarchical chain of command. Any shortage of resources or fragmentation of tasks among several departments reporting to different authorities can only undermine the sustainability and efficiency of animal health programmes.

Given that animal health is considered to be a public good and, in an interdependent world where the harmonisation of animal health and welfare policies has become necessary for the collective management of transboundary diseases, it is desirable for such policies to be part of a long-term planning framework that will outlive national political divisions and changing economic fortunes.

The role of the OIE

In his address to the meeting of G20 Agriculture Ministers (Paris, June 2011), French Minister Bruno Le Maire stated his conviction that strong global governance was crucial to achieving global food security, adding that the question of ‘how?’ was a matter of concern for political decision-makers. The recommendation to reinforce international cooperation endorses international organisations, such as the OIE, in their mandate to promote institutional interaction (3).

Countries are called upon to transcend national issues and international organisations provide them with a forum for consultation.

As the WTO recognises the OIE as the international organisation responsible for setting health standards for international trade in terrestrial and aquatic animals and their products (under the mandate granted by the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures [SPS Agreement]) the OIE has the authority to promulgate international law on the subject.

The representativeness of the OIE, with its 178 Member Countries, makes this normative framework all the more meaningful and effective.

Moreover, in view of the universal and transgenerational nature of the global public good concept, the OIE carries out its mandate and implements the objectives of its Strategic Plan by:

- ensuring that all Member Countries are involved in preparatory work prior to the democratic adoption of animal health standards in the Codes and Manuals, according to the rule ‘one country, one vote’
- encouraging dialogue and the adoption of international standards and recommendations by consensus
- ensuring balanced representation of Member Countries in the OIE governing bodies, specialist commissions and working groups
- setting up and leading a network of Delegates and their national focal points, who benefit from training seminars designed to build the technical capacity of national Veterinary Services
- committing to support forward-looking programmes, such as the modernisation of national veterinary legislation or improving the quality of veterinary education.

The OIE also seeks to provide a platform for consultation between countries and non-institutional actors. Accordingly, it has developed a policy of cooperation with a wide range of global and regional professional organisations to support partnership between the public and private sectors, which is strongly encouraged at the level of national Veterinary Services.

The OIE’s consistent policy and the scientific quality of its recommendations and established standards, the independence of its expert opinions as regards particular national or economic interests, and the transparency of its animal health information, inspire trust among Member Countries and donors that finance OIE programmes through contributions to the OIE World Animal Health and Welfare Fund.

For many years the OIE has promoted the introduction of a suitable legal framework and the allocation of resources to national Veterinary Services. Many Veterinary Services are in urgent need of support to help their countries to secure the infrastructure and capacity needed to take full advantage of the WTO’s SPS Agreement and safeguard animal and public health more effectively. This OIE policy is based on the belief that help should be given to potential ‘weak link’ countries in terms of controlling epizootic and transmissible diseases, which would pose a major risk for neighbouring countries and even the entire planet.

Operationally, this strategic objective takes the form of an active policy to support national Veterinary Services and the implementation of activities such as:

- the OIE PVS (Performance of Veterinary Services) Pathway, a global programme to promote the sustainable development of national Veterinary Services
- regional programmes to build the capacity of the Veterinary Services of OIE Members in the fields of animal disease surveillance and control and the early detection of outbreaks (these programmes also encourage networking between countries’ Delegates to the OIE and OIE national focal points)
programmes for twinning diagnostic laboratories with OIE Reference Centres.

Further information on these programmes and initiatives can be found on the OIE website (www.oie.int).

To date, more than 120 countries have benefited from OIE support, enabling them to improve their governance and, in some cases, to receive financial support following donor round tables.

Conclusion

The OIE considers Veterinary Services to be key players in safeguarding and improving animal health – a global public good. Ensuring that they comply with international standards on governance, organisation, resources, capabilities and interaction with para-professionals is a priority that must be recognised when allocating public funds.

References


