

The OIE PVS tools and expert evaluations: key elements for improving the governance of Veterinary Services

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Summary

The OIE tools for evaluating the Performance of Veterinary Services (OIE PVS tools) were drafted using the same science-based and mutually agreed procedure as for the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*. The aim of the PVS tools is to improve Veterinary Services (VS) in accordance with their own specific context by harmonising the fundamental principles of VS quality and the criteria for evaluating it. Experts use the OIE PVS tools to propose ways of improving VS governance in any context. Clearly, the weakest states do not have the capacity to implement structural reforms without the support of development partners, themselves acting in a coordinated and complementary manner on the basis of OIE PVS analyses.

Special attention must be paid to four areas of critical competencies for improving VS governance:

- Veterinary legislation is the subject of an OIE expert evaluation to enable VS to take ownership of the legislative development process, which is manifestly lacking in many countries.
- Initial education for veterinarians enforces the gradual but clear harmonisation of curricula under the aegis of the OIE, in partnership with relevant authorities.
- Maintenance or restoration of the VS chain of command must be clearly identified as a priority factor of governance that is vital to VS effectiveness and efficiency.
- Lastly, although it is based on multiple criteria, technical independence of VS requires sufficient income levels not only to meet the basic needs of staff (both public and private), but also to ensure that they receive recognition and social and professional protection.

These elements must be integrated into the functional analysis and can be analysed using the OIE PVS tools.

Keywords

Chain of command – Expert evaluation – Governance of Veterinary Services – Income of veterinarians – OIE PVS Tool – Technical independence – Veterinary education – Veterinary Services.

Introduction

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) designed its Tool for the Evaluation of Performance of Veterinary Services (OIE PVS Tool) and its PVS Gap Analysis Tool on the basis of Section 3 of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (*Terrestrial Code*) on the quality of Veterinary Services

(VS) (3, 4, 5). As the link between the quality of VS and their good governance has already been confirmed, use of these tools should logically lead to an overall positive improvement of VS governance.

After being involved in designing and developing the two tools and in using them in the course of around 30 field

missions, as well as re-reading and studying 100 or so expert evaluation reports, the author is in a position to analyse critical points for the effective improvement of VS governance.

Part one of this article reviews the elements in the PVS tools that are used as the basis for improving the quality of VS, which are described in detail elsewhere in this *Review*.

Part two distinguishes between the general contexts in which the tools have been used and the key points in the PVS expert evaluation that can be used to improve VS governance.

Part three endeavours to illustrate the fundamental points made by the evaluation and gap analysis of certain critical competencies in the PVS tools.

Harmonising and improving the quality of Veterinary Services: links to be clarified

The OIE *Terrestrial Code*, which is based on scientific principles and international consensus, is a powerful tool for improving the effectiveness of measures to control animal diseases and ensure veterinary public health worldwide. The science-based and mutually agreed nature of the texts therefore leads first and foremost to harmonisation and improvement based on common objectives and deliverables.

The link between harmonisation and improvement needs to be explored in more detail.

The texts relating to the quality of VS (Section 3 of the *Terrestrial Code*) define, and thus harmonise, the fundamental principles of VS quality (Chapter 3.1.1) and the criteria for evaluating it (Chapter 3.1.2).

The commonly used term 'VS quality standards' can sometimes cause confusion because in no way do these texts define quantitative standards for resources or models of functional or institutional organisation. On the contrary, the texts are intended to enable VS to present their resources and operation transparently and objectively in order to demonstrate that they abide by the fundamental principles, in accordance with their national and international context. The term 'harmonisation of VS' is therefore inappropriate. More objectively, they are standards of transparency concerning the criteria for evaluating compliance with the fundamental principles of quality of VS within their own context, which ought perhaps to be summed up as 'standards of VS transparency'.

The entire 'PVS Pathway', introduced by the OIE in 2005, has been constructed in the same spirit. The PVS Tool has four fundamental components: access to markets; interaction with stakeholders; technical authority and capability; and human and physical resources. All the critical competencies that comprise the PVS Tool are listed under one of these categories and are underpinned by the relevant technical chapters of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*. The wording of the definition and levels of advancement of each critical competency is designed to allow VS to progressively improve their quality based on indicators or sources of verification, without at any time imposing a specific ratio or system. Subsequently, the progressive and participatory methodology, the structure of the report, and the tools used during PVS Gap Analysis missions enable VS to define the appropriate resources and organisation based on their national constraints and priorities.

Lastly, OIE Veterinary Legislation missions, described elsewhere in this *Review*, are based on VS taking ownership of an internal legislative development methodology that can also be geared to the national context. This legislation must, of course, be harmonised with international standards whenever these are established (OIE standards, the standards of the Codex Alimentarius, and the standards in the World Trade Organization Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures).

Initially it would appear, then, that OIE operating principles, which are based on scientific analysis and consensus, and the resulting PVS tools and expert evaluations do indeed allow the harmonisation of concepts and improvement of VS within their own context, without the strict need to harmonise resources or the ways in which VS are organised.

However, since PVS evaluations were introduced, the analysis of two specific critical areas – the professional competencies of veterinarians, i.e. their initial education (critical competency I.2.A), and veterinary statutory bodies (critical competency III.5) – has highlighted wide variations between countries.

Obviously, the quality of initial education for veterinarians impacts on all the VS activities described in the critical competencies of the PVS Tool. It would therefore appear essential to ensure progressive harmonisation of veterinary education curricula. This process of harmonisation is the subject of a separate article in this issue of the *Review*. Unlike other critical competencies, this harmonisation will involve some kind of quantitative definition of curricular content. This provides a strong link between harmonisation and improvement.

As regards veterinary statutory bodies, the analysis of PVS evaluation reports has shown, first, that the existence of VS

depends mainly on the country's political and historical context, and, second, that their quality depends mainly on the socio-economic context. Therefore, there is no conclusive link with quality of VS. By contrast, there is a link between the quality of VS and the core functions of a veterinary statutory body, which are: accreditation of diplomas; registration; continuing education; and effective regulation of veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals, particularly in the private sector.

The variability of situations calls for a review of current texts detailing the evaluation of veterinary statutory bodies as structures. This would bring to the fore the functional analysis and then specify the efficiency criteria that would ultimately enable countries, where appropriate, to establish a veterinary statutory body geared to their own particular context. This is perhaps an instance where harmonisation that is overly contingent upon an organisational concept does not necessarily lead to the improvement of VS.

Part one of this article may be summed up by the following points. The PVS tools are underpinned by science-based, mutually agreed OIE texts. Harmonisation concerns primarily the fundamental principles and criteria for evaluating the quality of VS. This international harmonisation is intended to improve the performance of VS as a global public good.

Use of the OIE PVS tools to improve Veterinary Service governance

Veterinary Services requiring rehabilitation

Countries in conflict or in economic crisis are known as 'fragile states'. More than 1 billion people across the globe (i.e. one person in four) live in a fragile state or a country affected by extreme levels of violence. According to the World Bank's *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*, the longer the violence persists, the greater the aid volatility (2). Some of these countries have seen their entire civil administration, and therefore their VS, pulled apart by major conflicts. In such countries it is crucial to strengthen governance and legitimate institutions nationwide to ensure public safety, justice and employment, and to break cycles of violence (2).

In some countries, the VS no longer have any staff at all. Other VS have survived over the years, but only in an informal setting or thanks to humanitarian aid. Other countries, impoverished by successive economic crises, have seen their VS deteriorate to such an extent that they have been left with no real scope for action, except

to receive funding for projects whose agenda they do not control and whose funding ebbs and flows with conflicts and the length of time they persist. In both cases, representatives of VS sometimes lose touch with even the basic concepts underpinning their existence. Key players take little ownership of the PVS process. The key function of PVS missions is to provide a form of 'continuing education' for senior managers in charge of VS, where they learn the basic concepts set out in the critical competencies of the PVS Tool. The only way to improve the quality and governance of these *de facto* 'non-existent' VS is to provide medium- and long-term institutional and structural support, which must include a strong component of initial education and technical assistance.

The use of the PVS tools offers a unique opportunity to build a strategic plan and then an operational plan for rehabilitating those VS that are emerging from a period in which they were reliant on short-term measures and humanitarian aid and are now endeavouring to impose a structural process of reconstruction. Over and above the qualitative improvement of VS that any conventional support would provide in such a context, use of the OIE PVS tools reflects the view that overall improvement of governance can be achieved by the VS reclaiming ownership of strategies.

While such an expert evaluation is often welcomed by all at the outset, it soon comes up against severe implementation constraints. The usual reasons put forward are the need to move quickly and the inability to raise the large sums needed. In this post-crisis context, VS are unable to manage such a structural process and may be subject to multiple agendas from external partners and to their targeting or disbursement constraints.

In some cases, faced with the need to train veterinarians or to promote their establishment in the field, a decision is made to work with untrained personnel. As a result, there are countries where, more than 20 years after the end of conflict, no veterinarians have been trained or work in the field because donors and 'VS managers' have continued to fund training for community animal health workers (who are very useful during a war and when emerging from one). There are a number of different reasons for this: there is an established payment procedure that is easy to manage; there is a socio-political agenda that says it is more 'politically correct' to train thousands of poor people than a few dozen veterinarians at an equivalent cost; and there are captive markets of international solidarity organisations specialising in such projects.

In this post-crisis context, there are three particular aspects of a PVS expert evaluation that can help ensure that the rehabilitation of VS is accompanied by a genuine improvement in their governance, as follows.

1) At the very least, OIE PVS expert evaluation reports must place great emphasis on the structural rationale to be implemented and stress the need to organise a single multi-stakeholder platform to ensure consistency of items and terms of funding in the livestock sector, especially the VS. In particular, it should be made clear that some problems cannot be resolved in five years, making it all the more urgent to initiate immediate reform programmes in order to meet OIE quality criteria in the medium term (five years) and long term (ten years).

2) To ensure compliance with these long-term reform programmes, which guarantee the foundations of good VS governance, the PVS expert evaluation may propose that the OIE should provide technical support for organising donor round tables, in order to support the argument of VS based on the outcomes of PVS reports.

3) Ultimately, the genuine improvement of governance can only be validated by fairly frequent OIE PVS follow-up evaluations. It is therefore particularly important that the PVS Gap Analysis report includes plans to carry out an evaluation half-way through the first five-year structural plan for rehabilitating VS and to conduct another at the end.

Resource-poor Veterinary Services

The second group of countries in which the PVS tools can helpfully be used consists of developing or transition countries. Despite being politically stable, VS in these countries do not receive enough attention from the national authorities or international partners to achieve a satisfactory level of quality to meet their international commitments.

In general, use of the PVS tools in this context is very much welcomed and missions are truly participatory. In most cases, the PVS tools are used to demonstrate that resources are inadequate to meet the national and international policy objectives assigned to the VS. During PVS expert evaluations it is, therefore, particularly effective to refer to national priorities and strategies, which are often set out in agricultural policy documents.

It is undoubtedly in this context that the structure of the PVS tools – which is based on a precise and detailed evaluation of all the critical competencies and designed to achieve the international harmonisation of OIE fundamental principles and criteria for evaluating the quality of VS – is at its most effective. In particular, the PVS expert evaluation will hinge its argument on the need to progress up the levels of advancement in the critical competencies for resources and technical capability to level 3, 4 or even 5, where the analysis of effectiveness, adaptability and evaluation will be priorities. A PVS Gap

Analysis mission is able to draw upon appropriate tools to enable strategic choices to be made concerning the institutional organisation of VS.

For each ‘pillar’ of the Gap Analysis (trade, veterinary public health, animal health, veterinary laboratories and VS management and regulatory services), an Excel tool is used to simulate the human, physical and financial resources required for each organisational option (i.e. the way in which VS choose to organise their activities). These tools are used to determine the full-time equivalents needed for the various activities, and so to rationalise human resources. They are also used to demonstrate the financial implications of VS organisational options. This enables policies for the transferral of certain activities to the private veterinary sector to be analysed pragmatically in terms of the workforce required to perform delegated official activities (animal health mandate). It also enables them to evaluate these policies in terms of geographical access (essential for epidemiological surveillance, early detection and rapid response) and economic stability (necessary for a sustainable animal health network in the field) (Fig. 1).

These tools usually reveal that the strategic guidelines for the organisation of VS were not based on a rigorous and structural rational analysis, but more often than not were imposed for cost-cutting purposes and fail to provide VS with enough resources. The undeniable fact is that many VS struggle to influence budgetary decisions for lack of arguments and economic analysis tools.

In general, PVS expert evaluations show that, although policies of transferral to the private veterinary sector are more efficient financially, they are always hindered by a lack of vital public funding, having been designed as simple transfers to the private sector without taking into account animal health and international constraints or the possibility of improving services for livestock producers. In a few other cases, PVS expert evaluations have demonstrated that transferral to the private sector was inefficient because

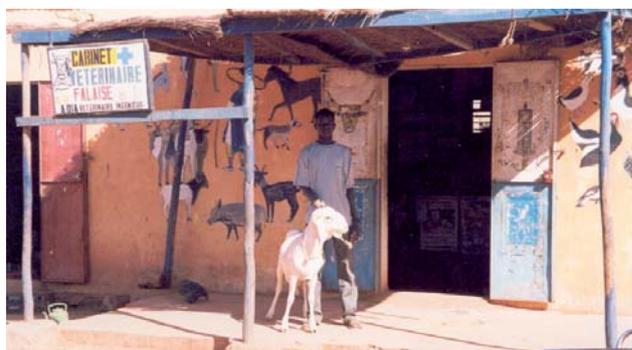


Fig. 1
A private veterinary practice can be efficient, even in a remote, arid area

it followed a policy of recovering costs for activities relating to private goods and services that could have been implemented by a reformed public veterinary sector, as such costs account for a very minor share.

These tools help to determine the necessary resources for VS operation or investment to ensure VS stability by comparing the different organisational options. They therefore contribute significantly to improving VS governance, as they justify using public resources for the proposed organisation because it is more efficient, over and above any improvement in the quality of VS in the strict sense.

Veterinary Services with adequate resources

A number of VS in developed or transition countries have adequate resources. PVS expert evaluations performed in these countries are of particular interest because they demonstrate the relevance of the PVS tools to all countries, irrespective of their level of economic development. In developed and transition countries, the PVS tools will mainly be used to revisit and improve the organisational efficiency of VS, develop reform strategies or prevent any restructuring imposed unduly by budgetary or political decisions.

A thorough analysis of critical competencies makes it possible to determine the evaluation and audit needs for activities that VS have undertaken routinely, sometimes for years. In particular, it prevents VS activities suddenly being called into question and its organisation being restructured by a political authority acting under budgetary constraints, and enables the VS to review their disease control strategy and organisation under optimum conditions in advance of any outbreak.

However, the greatest improvements are often achieved through stakeholder participation (the third fundamental component of the PVS Tool). Stakeholder participation across all six critical competencies relating to this third component can result in general improvements; it can, however, also make it possible to improve the level of advancement of many other critical competencies relating to the other three fundamental components (human, physical and financial resources; technical authority and capability; and access to markets).

So, by systematically developing auditing of activities and stakeholder participation, the PVS expert evaluation clearly contributes to improving VS governance across three key areas:

- 1) strong institutions and appropriate legislation
- 2) enhanced and efficient technical and financial capability
- 3) increased stakeholder participation.

Table I summarises the situation for the three groups of countries.

Key points for improving Veterinary Service governance

While the structure of the PVS tools and expert evaluations should, in theory, lead to improved VS governance, actual improvement is hampered by deficiencies that cannot be rectified merely by allocating adequate financial resources.

Table I
Core critical competencies and improvement of Veterinary Service governance

Country context	Post-conflict or post-crisis country in need of restructuring	Developing or transition country with budgetary constraints	Developed or transition country requiring state reforms
Veterinary Service status	Veterinary Service must be rehabilitated	Veterinary Service is resource-poor	Veterinary Service must be reorganised to improve efficiency
Budgetary implications	Continuity of international aid over the medium and long term with technical assistance essential	Enhanced budgetary resources, topped up with international aid	Primarily the national budget, topped up with public-private partnership funding
Legislation	Acquire the capacity to develop legislation	Acquire the capacity to adapt legislation with a view to harmonisation	Align legislation with that of trading partners
Initial education for veterinarians	Must be initiated immediately	Must be geared to the country's quantitative requirements	Curricula must be harmonised and adapted
Chain of command	Must be set up immediately	Must be maintained or restored	Must be maintained
Technical independence / incomes	Set a decent and stable income level	Critical to smooth operation	Avoid social regression

Within the PVS Tool, these structural deficiencies can be summarised by four critical competencies upon which the PVS expert evaluation should focus rigorously:

- initial education (critical competency I.2) and legislation (critical competency IV.1)
- technical independence (critical competency I.4) and internal coordination (critical competency I.6).

The first two critical competencies – initial education and legislation – have over time been identified as problematic in a number of countries, mainly those in the post-crisis group described earlier. It is puzzling that such fundamental VS deficiencies should persist when, for decades, development partners have supported international and national expert evaluations of both veterinary education and veterinary legislation.

The structuring of the PVS Tool has ushered in a different diagnostic approach, based on an analysis of the deliverables described in the levels of advancement, which must be interpreted and linked closely with the context. However, it is not possible to perform a detailed expert evaluation of both these areas in the time allotted for PVS Evaluation and Gap Analysis missions. It requires the OIE to address the deficit by starting to develop, jointly with the appropriate partners, new fields of action relating to veterinary legislation and harmonisation of veterinary curricula, as described elsewhere in this *Review*, as well as to consultations on regulating the profession, chiefly via veterinary statutory bodies.

The other two critical competencies identified as essential – technical independence and internal coordination – touch upon the very foundations of a country's national sovereignty. This may make it too tricky to intervene on such subjects during PVS expert evaluations. It is therefore appropriate for the expert evaluation to develop impartial and factual arguments, leaving the political responsibility to the national authorities. The latter should not, however, distort the expert evaluation made on the basis of criteria of VS quality.

In many cases, internal coordination has been undermined by inappropriate decentralisation policies. In this case, it is important to establish a diagnosis of a broken VS chain of command and to demonstrate the functional inadequacies and impaired capabilities observed during official VS activities. 'Parallel chains of command' set up in an emergency or by joint government administrations or projects should not be mistaken for the real thing and are unacceptable. An expert evaluation performed as part of a Gap Analysis must clearly state the consequences of failing to restore the chain of command on the expected levels of advancement of other critical competencies.

In terms of PVS Gap Analysis proposals for improvement, changing the institutional organisation to restore the chain of command may take time or be blocked. In this case, the expert evaluation may propose three 'standby techniques' to strengthen the chain of command pending its legislative reinstatement, which are compatible with a context of decentralisation: the establishment of a unified system for managing data on activities and resources; the development of official delegation of powers to private veterinarians (assigned, monitored and paid by the central level); and increased central budgets for major activities.

Finally, an analysis of technical independence will reveal strengths and weaknesses that the authors believe are the most crucial to VS governance. As the technical independence of VS staff depends on the legislative and institutional framework in which they operate, building their capacity to establish effective procedures is part of the expert evaluation of legislation developed and supported by the OIE. Technical independence also encompasses staff competence, and hence initial education for veterinarians, as mentioned earlier. Even though technical independence is contingent upon a country's political organisation, staff assessment and the introduction of clear appointment procedures limit pressure to an acceptable level and are therefore relevant indicators. However, it should be borne in mind that a political authority may legitimately appoint officials at central level to ensure that they implement government policy faithfully.

A last, highly sensitive, point is the pay level of staff (including private veterinarians in charge of official activities, where applicable). All too often pay levels are undermined by corruption. However, the fight against corruption, a crucial part of improving governance, calls upon a set of social, economic and political considerations that it would be futile to reduce to income improvement alone. Instead, the PVS expert evaluation must endeavour to analyse VS levels and forms of pay pragmatically. Indeed, while all analytical tools are based on matching human resources to the activities to be carried out, a PVS expert evaluation would be totally discredited if staff pay was insufficient to enable them to work full time or if they had to resort to illegal or parallel activities.

The pay level to be set for VS staff should at least cover basic family needs (food, shelter, clothing, health and education), as well as providing staff with adequate social recognition from the beneficiaries with whom they have dealings (farmers, manufacturers, craftspeople, locally elected representatives and traders). In addition, it is important to back the expert evaluation by comparing the income of VS staff to that of professionals with similar responsibilities: human health professionals (in relation to levels of competence), and police officers, judges, customs officials, or enforcement inspectors paid by exporters (to compare the need for technical independence).

This frequently leads donors to top up pay levels with project bonuses, in spite of international agreements on aid effectiveness, such as the Paris Declaration (1). PVS expert evaluations cannot compromise pay levels without jeopardising the credibility of the evaluations. This is a key aspect of governance and one that must be made clear in the OIE PVS evaluation. It must be made even clearer in the Gap Analysis budget as a structural factor to be considered, without which there is no hope of achieving the expected improvements in the levels of advancement of other critical competencies.

Conclusion

The aim of the OIE PVS tools, which were drafted using the same science-based and mutually agreed procedure as for the Terrestrial Code, is to improve VS in accordance with their own specific context by harmonising the fundamental principles of VS quality and the criteria for evaluating it. Experts use the PVS tools to propose ways of improving VS governance in any context. Clearly, the weakest states do not have the capacity to implement structural reforms without the support of development partners, themselves acting in a coordinated and complementary manner on the basis of PVS analyses.

Special attention needs to be paid to the following four critical competencies for improving VS governance.

- **Veterinary legislation** is the subject of an OIE expert evaluation to enable VS to take ownership of the legislative development process, which is manifestly lacking in many countries.
- **Initial education for veterinarians** enforces the gradual but clear harmonisation of curricula under the aegis of the OIE, in partnership with relevant authorities.
- **Maintenance or restoration of the VS chain of command** must be identified clearly as a priority factor of governance that is vital to VS effectiveness and efficiency.
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