



Photo: A. Cartley

Villagers gain professional experience by working together with vets and NGO personnel.

Changing animal health policies

William Wolmer and Ian Scoones

Globally, livestock contribute to the livelihoods of approximately 70 percent of the world's poor. In Africa livestock are vital for poor households, and predictions of future global demand for livestock products indicate considerable opportunities for African producers, particularly through exports to parts of Asia. This presents a major opportunity for livestock-driven poverty reduction activities in Africa. Increased demand for livestock commodities in growing urban and peri-urban areas could provide markets for small-scale producers, and consequently increase their incomes.

Many of the emerging challenges in livestock production are not technical, but are found in the complex area of policies and institutions. Many past investments in livestock and animal health, dominated by a "technical-fix" approach, have not worked out. The challenge now is to develop the capacity of African governments and stakeholders to meet the new policy and institutional challenges across a range of scales, from national to regional to international settings. A strategic player in this effort will be the African Union.

The Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (IBAR) is a technical branch of the African Union's Directorate of Rural Economy and Agriculture, and has been operational for over 50 years. Building on the extensive field level experiences of others, particularly in the non-government sector from the 1980s and 1990s, IBAR's Community-based Animal Health and Participatory Epidemiology (CAPE) programme has been working in the Horn of Africa and East Africa regions to improve policy and institutional arrangements with government and global partners. One of the successes of this programme has been to create an enabling environment for understanding and changing policies and institutions in ways that benefit poorer livestock producers. The two following examples highlight how the programme has prompted and provided technical direction to

change both national policies and the international standards on veterinary services to recognise, for the first time, the role of privatised veterinary para-professionals as appropriate service providers in rural areas.

Community-based animal health workers

In countries such as Ethiopia, conventional animal health care services were often lacking for many reasons, including lack of infrastructure and funding. This had negative impacts on livestock production and pastoral livelihoods and contributed to the emergence of an illicit trade in veterinary drugs. In the late 1980s, new ideas for the delivery of animal health services in remote pastoral areas of Africa started to emerge. These built on the extensive experiences in a range of countries of field-based projects, often run by NGOs.

Community-based animal health workers are trained to recognize and treat (or prevent) common and predictable local animal diseases on a fee-for-service basis. This practical approach to delivering animal health services has a history of strong resistance from the veterinary profession. Another area of controversy has been the notion that for community-based animal health workers to be financially sustainable they must be "privatised". This has been perceived by some NGOs as contrary to the charitable nature of their work. But community-based animal health workers have been successful: in 1994, twenty community-based animal health workers achieved 84 percent vaccination efficiency of cattle, compared with 72 percent vaccination efficiency of Ethiopian government teams. This contribution played a major role in Ethiopia being able to declare provisional freedom from rinderpest. Following this experience, many people in Ethiopia were trained as community-based animal health workers by a wide range of bodies, and increasing numbers of vets working with NGOs gained professional field experience working alongside these animal health workers: a critical mass began to form.

The CAPE programme has had a very high level of influence within the Ethiopian government in promoting these ideas, helped by the support of key individuals such as Dr. Berhanu Admassu, former government veterinarian, and president of the Ethiopian Veterinary Association. Other important lobbying techniques included making presentations to the Ministry of Agriculture, demonstrating the effectiveness of community-based animal health workers, taking policy makers to the field and holding conferences and workshops. For example, a workshop on animal health and pastoralist livelihoods organised for Federal Members of Parliament resulted in these MPs regularly following up community animal health issues in Parliament. Similarly, in 2003, sceptical Ethiopian policy makers from three regional states were taken on a study tour to Zambia to see privatised livestock services in action. They all agreed that the tour had provided “enormous lessons” and a commitment to formulate a comprehensive veterinary privatisation strategy for Ethiopia.

This mainstreaming of community animal health has been aided by CAPE’s parallel strategy of targeting influential veterinary journals to publish research on community-based animal health care. This was complemented by the production of a widely distributed book on the subject, and extensive popular materials such as policy briefing notes and how-to-do-it videos.

Towards institutionalisation

With large numbers of people being trained as community-based animal health workers, it became apparent that better coordination was needed to address the very varied curricula and lengths of training, inadequate supervision and other difficulties arising. This was often a donor-driven rather than a community-based process. To share experiences and harmonise policies, the CAPE programme supported the 2003 workshop on “Integrating Community-Based Animal Health Services into the existing animal health delivery in Ethiopia”. This brought together a wide range of community animal health practitioners from NGOs, the federal Ethiopian parliamentary Pastoral Standing Committee, the professional veterinary association and many others. An action plan was produced that led to the endorsement of community-based animal health workers as fourth layer of service provider in Ethiopia. This recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture, IBAR and FAO together draft national minimum guidelines for community animal health services.

Central to the process of policy-making has been to enable linkages between field experiences and policy-makers, through impact assessments and training events. The CAPE programme has been involved in establishing a national impact assessment team with representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, the veterinary faculty, the national animal health research institute, NGOs and the private sector. This team, which reports directly to policy-makers, has proved to be a useful way of linking communities with influential professionals, for example bringing veterinary professionals in the NGO, state, research and education sectors together to share experiences. It has also allowed for senior officials to have more contact with the realities in remote and often harsh environments in the field. One of the first participatory impact assessments of the programme was reported back to the Ethiopian Veterinary Association conference and was influential in changing the minds of many sceptics.

A Community Animal Health Coordination Unit has now been established in the federal Ministry of Agriculture, paid for by the federal government. This is an important achievement as

it marks the handing over of ownership of the community animal health agenda to the ministry. For the first time there is a unit in the central government for the quality control and harmonisation of community-based animal health workers. In collaboration with the CAPE programme, the unit has now agreed on national minimum standards for community-based animal health workers. The Veterinary Services Team, in the newly established Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, was upgraded to departmental level in early 2004. IBAR was approached by the new ministry to assist them to review and define the core functions of government veterinary services. Furthermore, they were asked to develop a structure at federal, regional and district levels that better supports national-level disease control, international trade and privatised services. With this formal recognition of the centrality of community animal health systems in the new restructuring of veterinary services in the country, a decade of experience had come to fruition in an institutionalised new policy, owned by the government.

There are now around 1500 government- and NGO-trained community-based animal health workers in Ethiopia. Despite improved communication and collaboration, significant policy and institutional challenges remain. And, as Ethiopia’s privatised system of community-based animal healthcare becomes more established, there will also be questions of affordability for poorer users, the need to identify who is excluded, and how to reach them.

Changing global standards

Under the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement of the World Trade Organisation, the World Animal Health Organisation (*Office International des Epizooties*, OIE) is responsible for setting global standards on animal health. The OIE, established in 1926 and based in Paris, sets the benchmark against which the quality and effectiveness of a veterinary service is judged internationally. This has important implications for trade, as importing countries require OIE standards to be met.

The move towards accepting community animal health approaches by a growing number of African countries raised the question as to whether such para-professionals would be acceptable under the OIE Code. The OIE represents a global focal point of the mainstream veterinary profession, so discussions about changing standards for acceptable veterinary practice made for a challenging engagement. Until recently, the OIE Code was assumed to rule out the recognition of para-professionals. At an OIE meeting, a paper was presented to Chief Veterinary Officers, scientists and policy-makers, showing how community-based animal health workers “can complement public sector veterinary activities and also help to develop private sector veterinary services under professional supervision”, and thus help to achieve the OIE standards: the promotion of trade in a safe and transparent manner. These arguments were well received and opened peoples’ eyes to the fact that community-based animal health workers are not the threat they were often made out to be; indeed, they even may be an opportunity. This proved to be an effective means by which an agenda emerged, with a view to convincing the OIE. CAPE programme staff reasoned that veterinary policy-makers were more likely to be influenced by each other and the international standard setting body than by researchers and NGOs, and therefore brought together the OIE, FAO and senior veterinary policy-makers from around the world to discuss policy and institutional constraints to primary animal healthcare. The Primary Animal Healthcare conference, held in Mombasa, Kenya in 2002, was attended by 120 delegates, a

What has worked and why in influencing policy and changing institutions?

Telling persuasive stories

Some policy “stories” are rooted in particular institutional structures. These are difficult to change and can drastically limit thinking. In the Ethiopian example, the assumption that the only legitimate form of expertise is a qualified veterinarian, was challenged. But it is not enough to criticize the conventional wisdoms: alternative storylines must be presented, for example that community-based animal health workers can offer the opportunity for improved disease surveillance and control. A simple personalised story, with clear implications for how things need to change, is ideal material for briefings with officials or presentations in key forums.

Building networks and encouraging champions of change

It is one thing to come up with a convincing story, but convincing others that this is the right idea is more challenging. Being effective in policy change means understanding where power lies at the global, national and local levels, and tracing the connections between them. With this knowledge it is much easier to target the right people, in the right places and at the right time. For example, in pushing for the acceptance of community-based animal health workers in Ethiopia, the trip to Zambia by Ethiopian policy-makers was an important turning point. Building and linking networks is a key part of policy change. New ideas gain ground when there is strong backing. Without support and advocacy, even brilliant new ideas may sink without a trace.

Coordination, facilitation and networking

Bringing diverse groups together – as part of workshops, conferences, impact assessments or field visits – and sharing ideas among them has been a key activity. But this has not been networking for networking’s sake. There have been strategic objectives and outcomes in mind. They are specific enough to generate enthusiasm, commitment and possibilities for change.

Learning by seeing

Getting senior professionals out to the field to interact with remote pastoralist communities - sometimes for the first time - gave them direct experience of the isolation, limited facilities and, in some areas, insecurity

of these regions. According to one staff member “of the various methods used by the project, simply putting policy makers face-to-face with livestock keepers was probably the most influential in changing mindsets and thus influencing policy change”. Having access to a range of field experiences, which demonstrated that alternative ideas actually worked in practice, was vital.

Convening key events – workshops and conferences

Well planned workshops have been successful, where policy makers could consider the issues for themselves, but in a directed way to find out for themselves what needed to be done. By learning from each other, resolutions had more force, through being generated and owned by the participants. The event was not just to share information, but centrally part of building networks around new ideas. Follow-up is often as important as the event itself. A key requirement is making sure that people are kept in touch and feel involved afterwards. As a result, they feel part of the success of the workshop and so have a shared responsibility for conveying its message.

Well-targeted communications strategy

A sophisticated communications strategy is vital to support policy change work. Different audiences require different outputs in different formats. The programme team has produced a range of outputs in a range of different media, from strategic publication in key academic and professional journals, to short briefing papers, consultancy reports and books.

Opportunism and serendipity

Sometimes all the best laid plans go wrong; sometimes new, wholly unexpected, opportunities arise; sometimes spontaneous, seemingly unconnected, actions or groups come together. Opportunism and serendipity are thus key aspects of any strategy. They are difficult to fit into fixed, formal plans or log-frames, while administrators are often fearful of such apparent randomness and donors are often reluctant to play along. It is useful to have a talent for seizing particular policy moments or windows of opportunity as they arise, to get policy messages on the agenda and argue for policy reform.

gathering which had the authority to come out with a statement that would really carry weight. Crucially, the conference recommendations included a call to the OIE to define the functions and responsibilities of private veterinarians and para-professionals (including community-based animal health workers), and clarify the roles, links and regulations required to incorporate them into the structure of national veterinary services.

The OIE acted quickly on the recommendation, and in February 2003 a working group was set up. This OIE *ad hoc* committee officially accepted, for the first time, community-based animal health workers as one type of veterinary para-professional. The committee recommended changes to the OIE Code so that, within each member country, a veterinary statutory body should be responsible for the licensing and registration of veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals. In May 2004, member states at the OIE General Assembly endorsed the changes to the OIE Code to recognise veterinary para-professionals, thereby creating new global standards to support community-based animal health workers.

The Mombasa conference was a critical moment in scaling-up these issues to the global policy arena and getting acceptance from an international organisation historically suspicious of community-based approaches. By extension, this is and will be a powerful means of influencing national Chief Veterinary Officers from above. Within two years of the Mombasa conference, global standards had changed to recognise community-based approaches – a significant success.

Policy issues are increasingly important

Many talk about the need for policy change in the livestock sector, but few actually know how to do it. A technically-driven approach, with specialist veterinary or livestock production expertise, is no longer enough. Issues as far ranging as international trade, marketing, service delivery, private sector involvement, standards and certification, all affect the day-to-day issues which occupy veterinary department officials in Africa. No longer is the life of a vet only concerned with technical issues: policy and institutional issues are increasingly central. There has been a general recognition that policy change is both technical and political, that it requires processes of change that bring ideas and people together around positions, and that there needs to be a link between field experience and wider change. Substantial investments in capacity building will be needed, as being confident in how to influence policy, at national and international levels, is not straightforward, and needs to be a hands-on, experience-led, practical approach. The opportunity to engage with policy processes is often limited, and the challenges are great, but the potential impacts can be significant. ■

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Reference

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