

Ecowap

news

Issue N°8, Dec 2022

Quarterly Information Bulletin

Special Issue on
Animal Health



- **Updating Institutional, Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for Animal Health and Welfare Management**

- **Controlling the Spread of Transboundary Animal Disease Outbreaks including Zoonoses**

- **Promoting Synergies and Partnerships for Effective Control**

- **2022/2023 Action Plan for Animal Health Networks**

Editorial



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Commissioner for Economic Affairs and Agriculture,
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Dear Partners,

With rapidly increasing globalisation, vigilance against transboundary animal diseases and zoonoses have increasingly become a major concern in preventing their spread. Transboundary animal diseases and zoonoses have a serious negative impact on animal health, public health, socio-economic development, environment as well as food and nutrition security.

Livestock farming in West Africa plays a major socio-economic role in the livelihood of the population, contributing up to 50% of the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) of some countries. Ruminant rearing is the main activity in transhumant pastoral communities, where it guarantees food and nutritional security by producing highly nutritious products (milk, meat) and contributes to poverty reduction by increasing household incomes. Livestock farming is conducted in an area where borders are porous, resulting, in the spreading of animal diseases that are difficult to control by veterinary services.

In recent years, a dozen transboundary animal diseases including zoonoses, have been notified to the World Organisation for Animal Health by ECOWAS Member States. The reported diseases include Bovine tuberculosis, Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia, Foot and Mouth Disease, Lumpy Skin Disease, Newcastle Disease, Peste des Petits Ruminants, Rabies, Trypanosomiasis, Anthrax, African Swine Fever, Rift Valley Fever, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.

In 2018, the ECOWAS Regional Animal Health Centre (RAHC) carried out in collaboration with its partners, the prioritisation of zoonotic diseases in the ECOWAS region under the "One Health" approach with the active participation of the three key sectors (public health, animal health and the environment) of all Member States. This led to the prioritisation of seven zoonoses including Anthrax, Rabies, Ebola and other Viral Haemorrhagic Fevers, Zoonotic Influenza, Zoonotic Tuberculosis, and Trypanosomiasis.

The Centre's role of harmonising and coordinating animal health actions has resulted in the formulation of other relevant strategic and regulatory frameworks including the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, Livestock Identification and Traceability Strategy, ECOWAS PPR Strategy, ECOWAS Rabies Strategy, Regional Strategy to Control Vector-Borne Diseases, Animal Trypanomiasis and Tick-Borne Diseases, the mechanism for the control of transmissible animal diseases including zoonoses, and the establishment of the regional emergency fund for disease control.

This special edition is on animal health and presents an overview of the efforts undertaken at regional and national levels by the ECOWAS Commission and its partners to promote and enhance the contribution of the livestock sector to food and nutrition security in the region. Kindly read it and share with us your thoughts if deemed necessary.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and all the very best for the New Year 2023.

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Updating Institutional, Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for Animal Health and Welfare Management

The ECOWAS Commission through the Regional Animal Health Centre (RAHC) aims to harmonize animal health and welfare policies to contribute to the effective control of animal diseases, including zoonoses.



This requires regional integration and harmonization of animal health and welfare legislations between Member States. To this end, RAHC was created in 2012 as an ECOWAS specialised Agency on animal health issues with the mandate of contributing to the fight against poverty as well as food and nutrition insecurity by improving animal health and continuous development of animal production both at national and regional levels.

In this perspective, ECOWAS has undertaken since 2010 to organise and supervise the practice of veterinary medicine through the adoption of regulations and directives related to animal health and veterinary medicine. These regulations and directives include (i) Regulation on the harmonisation of the structural framework and operational rules pertaining to the health safety of plants, animals and foods in the ECOWAS

region (2010), (ii) Regulation on the establishment and operation of procedures of a regional veterinary Committee (RVC) within ECOWAS (2010), (iii) Regulation on the establishment of Community procedures for veterinary drugs and biologics management (2010), (iv) Directive on ECOWAS veterinary pharmacy (2010), (v) Regulation on the establishment of the regional mechanism for coordinating the prevention and control of transboundary animal diseases and zoonoses in West Africa (2022) and (vi) Regulation on the establishment of the regional emergency fund for the control of transboundary animal diseases and zoonoses (2022).

At national level, several legislative texts regulate the animal health, public health, and trade sectors to protect consumers in the region. The objective of these regulations is to contribute to the preservation and improvement of animal health through the organisation of veterinary services, regulation of the practice of veterinary medicine and pharmacy, as well as the preservation and protection of human health.

Despite significant progress made in recent years in updating and harmonising legislative texts, the texts that serve as the legal basis for the various areas of veterinary activity are not specific. Most of them are not in conformity with international standards as they are outdated and cannot be adapted to current challenges. Furthermore, the enforcement of these texts remains ineffective or even non-existent in some countries.

The need to update and harmonise these national laws is therefore imperative for the region and calls for sustained and collaborative efforts.

Controlling the Spread of Transboundary Animal Disease Outbreaks including Zoonoses

At country level, RAHC actions are supported by the veterinary laboratory network (RESOLAB-Laboratory Network) and the epidemicsurveillance network (RESEPI), which were created in 2007 with the support of FAO and AU-IBAR.

RESOLAB aims to strengthen and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of veterinary diagnostic laboratories, improve communication among them and with epidemicsurveillance networks, foster emergence of expertise in animal disease diagnosis and promote regional synergy by breaking down the silo-working mentality and encouraging networking among professionals.

The Regional Veterinary Committee (RVC) established by the ECOWAS Commission in 2010 completes the regional institutional set-up, thus enabling the ECOWAS Commission, through RAHC, to coordinate animal health

initiatives in the region.

These networks are assembled within the regional animal health networks, commonly known as RAHNs, which meet annually.

The 8th RAHN, held in Cabo Verde, focused on the situation, challenges and prospects for the control and eradication of Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Rabies, Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP), priority animal diseases in the ECOWAS region.

The meeting enabled all actors involved in the fight against animal diseases to evaluate the efforts made in 2021/2022 since the last annual meeting.

Overall, it was noted that the epidemiological situation in the ECOWAS region improved in 2022, with a decrease in the total number of outbreaks reported compared to last year (40% of Foot and Mouth Disease, 13% for PPR and 38% for Rabies).

Stakeholders also committed to improve the epidemiological situation and reduce the risks associated with animal diseases and their products.



Improving Epidemiological Surveillance of Priority Transboundary Animal Diseases

Animal diseases are mainly transboundary nature due to the movement of animals between neighbouring Member States that may result in transmission and spread to areas hitherto free of such diseases making them endemic in nature and difficult to control and eradicate.

Surveillance of these diseases involves the collection, compilation, and analysis of data in a systematic manner, as well as the timely dissemination of information for appropriate action. It provides evidence to show the absence, presence or spread of diseases, or the detection of emerging or re-emerging diseases.

Thus, improving surveillance of diseases requires an evaluation that identifies gaps and limitations to proper functioning of surveillance networks. Such limitations are mostly related to the inadequate human and financial resources. Therefore, in recent years, new approaches have been proposed to optimise surveillance in human and animal health.

Approaches include involvement of grassroots actors in the surveillance system such as livestock keepers and their communities, as well as community animal health workers to improve timely disease detection that triggers an early warning system. However, this approach requires effective awareness creation and capacity building of the actors to recognise the symptoms of targeted diseases.

To ensure efficient surveillance systems in Member States, RAHC, in collaboration with FAO-ECTAD, embarked on capacity building of veterinary epidemiologists in the RESEPI Networks to strengthen the veterinary services of Member States in the field of qualitative risk analysis and mapping. The use of this tool requires availability of reliable epidemiological data on transboundary animal diseases and animal mobility.

Thus, RAHC supports the regional veterinary epidemiological surveillance (RESEPI) and laboratory (RESOLAB) networks in the collection, validation, analysis, and dissemination of epidemiological information. Therefore, the 8th Regional animal health network (RAHN) meeting recently held in Praia, Cabo Verde, recommended regional harmonisation of data collection tools and operationalization of a regional animal health information system, a process in which RAHC is already engaged.

RAHC further encourages capacity building for veterinary epidemiologists to equip them with the necessary skills to investigate and appropriately manage diseases in the field.



Strengthening Veterinary Laboratories Efficiency

Veterinary laboratories are at the core of national animal diseases control and prevention systems. Indeed, the laboratory is the starting point for disease investigations by providing the first element of decision making, which is the diagnosis of evidence when cases are suspected in the field. As such, the quality of disease management (treatment, vaccination, or prophylaxis) depends on the results provided by the laboratory.

Mindful of this challenge, FAO and AU-IBAR have been supporting veterinary laboratories in the ECOWAS region within RESOLAB for many years. This support has led to the eradication of rinderpest.

With the operationalisation of RAHC in 2018, the coordination of actions and support to RESOLAB is entirely dedicated to it. It is within the framework of this coordination that the issue of laboratories was widely discussed during the 8th RAHN. It is all about finding solutions to the transportation of samples, pre- and post-vaccination seromonitoring, biosafety and biosecurity, quality assurance, inter-lab testing and antimicrobial resistance, in relation to priority animal diseases such as PPR, CBPP, Rabies and Foot-and-Mouth Disease.

For the 2022/2023 campaign for example, recommendations to ECOWAS and its partners include (i) facilitating the acquisition of reagents and consumables (ii) training staff and upgrading and calibrating equipment, (iii) facilitating the training of laboratory staff for accreditation, (iv) creating an emergency stock of equipment, reagents and consumables for crisis situations, (v) making the network more dynamic and creating sub-networks per disease, and (vi) including a mentoring programme among laboratories.

In the long run and as part of the "One Health Approach", the planning of support and the harmonisation of methods should be done in collaboration with the other key sectors (human and environmental health).

These harmonisation efforts have already started with WAHO in the framework of the REDISSE and PROALAB projects which directly assist the two supporting laboratories of Nigeria (NVRI) and Senegal (LNERV).



Harmonising and Boosting Vaccination against Transboundary Animal Diseases and Zoonoses

Mass animal vaccination campaigns are organised annually against priority animal diseases including Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP), Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Newcastle Disease, Rabies, and others by ECOWAS Member States thereby contributing significantly to improved animal health, reduced losses due to morbidity and mortality as well as increased animal production (meat, milk) and productivity. All this contributes to food and nutrition security and improved livelihoods.

Ruminant breeding in the Community is transhumant, and mobility of livestock can lead to animals not being vaccinated in their home country if vaccination campaigns are not coordinated among ECOWAS Member States. In the past, synchronized vaccination campaigns have been successful in eradicating rinderpest worldwide.

In 2015, all the Member States of the Community committed themselves to the global programme to eradicate PPR by 2030. In the same vein, RAHC formulated the regional PPR control strategy in 2016 which was adopted in 2022. The strategy is being implemented with the support of financial partners such as the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB) and the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), and with the technical support of AU IBAR, FAO, WAHO and others.

According to FAO, the monitoring of the progress of infected countries towards step 4 (final step of eradication) shows that in 2021, only 15% of countries were at step 3. Two countries indicated to be at stage 4, i.e., the final step, whereas in 2015 no country was at step 4.



Other global eradication commitments include "zero cases by 2030" for rabies, control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) or Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP).

Regional meetings to synchronize mass vaccination campaigns for all 15 ECOWAS Member States and bilateral meetings have been organized at both national and regional levels to ensure that no animal escapes vaccination. The meetings involve representatives of regional livestock producer associations in addition to technicians, to consider their concerns for successful vaccination campaigns.

Among vaccination strategies to be adopted in the current socio-economic context of Member States, stand out (i)

the involvement of community animal health workers in the implementation of vaccination campaigns in insecure areas, in isolated areas and areas without animal health workers, (ii) the contribution of humanitarian NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), (iii) the strengthening of veterinary services capacities, (iv) the allocation, by Member States, of adequate resources for sustainable financing of vaccination campaigns and (v) the involvement and collaboration of transhumant livestock farmers.

Promoting Synergies and Partnerships for Effective Control

The lack of harmonisation of control strategies among ECOWAS Member States is not conducive to the promotion of animal health and welfare in the Community. While in some countries, for example, vaccinations against some priority animal diseases are paid for, in others, they are free, and supporting measures are not always the same.

In fact, the limited consultation among animal health stakeholders within a country on the one hand, and among ECOWAS Member States on the other, means that those involved in vaccination do not always target areas with high concentration of livestock farmers and, in the end, allow animals to slip through the cracks of vaccination campaigns.

To remedy the situation, the fight against animal diseases in the ECOWAS region requires good coordination to be effective. This requires collaboration among the various actors involved in the fight against animal diseases.

Since its operationalisation in 2018, RAHC contributes to the promotion of synergy of action of all actors involved in animal health for effective fight against animal diseases. A five-year regional strategy for animal disease control as well as more specific regional strategies against main diseases such as rabies and PPR have been developed and validated by the ministers in charge of livestock before being adopted by the ECOWAS statutory authorities for implementation.

From now onwards, all actions in favour of animal health should be based on these strategies. That is why RAHC organises each year, in collaboration with its partners, the



meeting of animal health networks. This meeting, which is held at the end of the third quarter of the year, allows for a review of the actions carried out during the year and a projection of the year to come. Furthermore, to better coordinate vaccination campaigns against the main cross-border animal diseases, RAHC holds regional workshops for planning joint vaccination campaigns, meetings that bring together actors from public and private sectors as well as umbrella organizations of livestock breeders' associations.

2022/2023 Action Plan for Animal Health Networks

The 8th RAHN held in Praia, Cabo Verde, from 19th to 23rd September 2022 enabled the representatives of the various CVR, RESEPI and RESOLAB networks to take stock of the implementation of the recommendations and action plans resulting from the 7th meeting held in Abidjan in September 2021. The group and plenary sessions helped the various stakeholders to set measurable objectives for 2023.

The 2023 action plan developed by the Regional Veterinary Committee (RVC) in the presence of the chief officers of ECOWAS Member States focuses on (i) improving vaccination coverage with three specific actions (strengthening capacities of veterinary services, involving community agents and (ii) developing and financing national strategic plans, specifically those against Rabies and Foot-and-Mouth Disease.

RESEPI's workplan focuses on improving the surveillance system through strengthening the capacities of the veterinary services of Member States and improving data management. Specific actions include (i) developing or updating a risk-based surveillance plan for Rabies, PPR, CBPP, FMD and other priority zoonoses, (ii) supporting Member States in building capacity for risk assessment and risk mapping, (iii) strengthening the network in Member States, improving the quality

of surveillance data, strengthening the in-country network to support strategic animal health monitoring and emergency preparedness and response plans, (iv) supporting the sharing of animal health data and the harmonisation of data collection tools, and (v) establishing the coordination and implementation of the ISAVET programme in the region.

The action plan for RESOLAB is mainly oriented towards the training of laboratory technicians and timely supply of adequate consumables. Planned actions include (i) training of technicians on sampling and sample management, chemical and biological laboratory waste management, and quality assurance, (ii) committing the private sector to invest and expand the scope of its services to include transport of biological samples, (iii) supplying adequate test kits and adequate cold chain management system, (iv) supporting national laboratories and (v) assessing national laboratories to update the number of supporting laboratories.

The annual meeting of the regional animal health networks



(CVR, RESOLAB and RESEPI) is organised by RAHC in collaboration with FAO, AU-IBAR and their traditional partners to serve as a framework for exchange, evaluation of the level of implementation of activities during the past year, analysis of challenges and solutions to be envisaged and planning for future actions.

RAHC's Role in the Implementation of Networks Action Plans

The action plan resulting from the 8th RAHN is ambitious, with a risk that some activities will not be implemented in 2023. But behind this ambitious plan lies a well-developed strategy by RAHC to accelerate the implementation of actions.

The strategy is essentially based on the promotion of the activities of the Centre's internal projects under implementation. Such projects include (i) the Dialogue and Investment Program for Pastoralism and Transhumance in the Sahel and Coastal Countries of West Africa (PREDIP) funded by the European Union, (ii) PPR control and eradication project supported by the Swiss Development Cooperation aimed at controlling PPR in ECOWAS Member States and (iii) the Regional Support Project for Pastoralism in the Sahel phase II (PRAPS II) funded by the World Bank and coordinated by CILSS. Some activities of the action plan are directly aligned with the activities of these projects, which will facilitate their implementation.

Traditional partnerships with FAO, AU-IBAR, BROOKE WA, USDA-APHIS will also contribute to the implementation of the action plan. Bilateral planning meetings will be held in early 2023 with each of the partners to identify actions/activities to be carried out jointly. This exercise has the advantage of promoting synergy in the use of human and financial resources, but also of ensuring greater coherence in the support provided to countries thereby avoid duplication of efforts.

Another integral part of the strategy is the appointment of country coordinators to monitor each activity. Representatives from two countries have been identified to ensure close monitoring of progress in the implementation of each activity. Such an approach is already being tested within the framework of RESOLAB for the follow-up of the "biosafety and biosecurity" and



"quality assurance" action plans. Designated persons regularly organise, on a voluntary basis, meetings within each of the networks (CVR, RESEPI and RESOLAB). They will also be responsible for reporting on progress at the next RAHN. RAHC will coordinate all agreed actions with the support of technical partners.

Last but not least, the strategy foresees the development of a strategic and operational plan for the next five years. RAHC will anticipate the needs by developing its strategic plan for 2024-2028. In addition to its sovereign prerogatives, the Centre's ambition is to complete its action for the benefit of Member States through integrating animal welfare and the improvement of livestock production into its mandate.



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