

## My life as an OIE Delegate

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At the end of the 1990's I was a young official who was promoted and ranked second in seniority responsible for carrying out the development policy of agro-pastoral resources (entity grouping agriculture and livestock farming). From the beginning, I was very enthusiastic about the idea of restoring the image of the livestock farming sub-sector which had been lost in my country, following the example of so many other African countries after the famous restructuring of departments of agriculture.

I felt, and quite correctly I believe, that this sub-sector had been relegated to second place for the benefit of agriculture in a country like mine which was suited to pastoral activities. This became understood in time and was confirmed by the fact that in spite of efforts made, the State showed less and less political will to support the development of livestock farming. This resulted in a progressive year by year regression of investments allocated to the sector, the deterioration of services (human and material resources, skills, etc...), the absence of a strategy and planned initiatives in many areas, particularly in animal health, etc....

For myself, I definitely held my country responsible for this situation, but particularly international authorities and co-operation partners in the framework of guidelines imposed in order to benefit from their finance. This idea had become an obsession for me and was exacerbated when I was appointed as a delegate at the OIE. I thought that my presence in international forums such as the OIE, was an opportunity (often unfortunate, owing to youthful enthusiasm and inexperience) to express my indignation with the aim of bringing about change..

My 15 years as an OIE delegate has enabled me to draw the following conclusion. In the beginning I lacked experience and I was not properly equipped, but with the passage of time I am able to say that in all humility and gratefulness and without being the OIE's "sage", I learned a lot in method and organisation, conception, orientation and the implementation of policies and strategies in the field of animal health. However, perhaps more importantly, I saw the progressive expression of political will as well as recognition from Co-operation Partners in this sector. In addition, it must also be stated that the skills and representativeness of our continent have been improved.

I was saying above: *inexperienced and ill-equipped*. I was appointed as a delegate like many of my colleagues and today I can say without hesitation, although I did not have a good knowledge of the objectives, role and functioning of the organisation and, worse still, I did not even know my prerogatives as a delegate.

In the beginning, it was the pleasure I derived from the position and of discovering Paris... We used to come alone without experts (although other countries came with large delegations), sometimes having only partial knowledge of all the matters under discussion, which resulted in minimal participation as well as random and un-coordinated remarks. These remarks were often, as mine were in the beginning, even irrelevant and irritating.

On the subject of resolutions, Africa's impact was less because of our lack of cohesion in defending either national or continental interests.

Regarding the country and our authorities, we did not appreciate the importance of this organisation. We were often asked to answer the following question: what is the OIE and what does it bring to the country, making reference to the financing of certain other organisations like the WHO, UNICEF, etc.

Since little consideration was given to the delegate - the proof is his status at national level and the low level of participation of African delegates because of the lack of funding for travel (costs often borne by projects and programmes) or arrears in subscriptions - you can imagine the damage which occurred when voting for resolutions and the participation of African experts in the main authorities and commissions of the organisation...

Matters of normalisation, health security, health code etc sometimes involved a number of ministerial departments and we were confronted with problems of co-ordination, the collection of health information, even general information of application and follow up of resolutions.

Regionally and sub-regionally the impact to the organisation was not felt either and very few structures continuing the work were present on the continent. Resolutions were simply shelved once they had left Paris. We were especially good at carrying out large projects of combating diseases (rinderpest). These efforts were often badly co-ordinated and this even occurred within our only organisation worthy of the name, which at that time was OAU-IBAR. Often all there was at a regional level was the organisation of seminars and meetings which did not result in anything owing to the lack of monitoring and evaluation.

Problems revolving around normalisation were not of great concern to us, the reason being that we did not have the skills and particularly the fact that Africa did not participate with authorities in the drawing up of standards. We only really benefited from the training and information sessions in respect of decisions taken. These sessions were financed by scraping money together. Here too, one can imagine the damage to Africa in the field of commercial exchanges and access to markets.

The prevention and fight against transferable diseases between animals and people, was in particular within the jurisdiction of our human health services through the WHO and there were few joint co-ordination initiatives with veterinary services. I would even say that we were often marginalised or at worst, accused.

Were they right, as it must be recognised that our warning and quick reaction systems were inefficient and virtually non-existent.

Finally (and this is not our final conclusion) our training and research institutions were ill-equipped and reduced to fundamentals: Training programmes which were not adapted properly or did not correspond with the realities and the context of the continent, very little importance given to development research, absence of reference institutions...

I learned a lot. The skills and representativeness of member countries and Africa in particular, have been improved. Regarding this and to be brief (because I have often been criticised for that, but rest assured I have improved) I will content myself with quoting major advances amongst others and in particular regarding the continent with the help of the OIE in collaboration with a revitalised OAU-IBAR and the RECs as well as other regional and sub-regional organisations.

Allow me to express thanks, on behalf of us all, for the wonderful work done by the Director General not only for the influence of our organisation, but in particular for what he has done for Africa. Our thanks, of course, must also go to the leaders of our regional and sub-regional organisations who contributed to that. In my humble opinion, these advances are:

1. the establishment of regional representation and of sub-regional representations and contribution to the activities of the CRSA;
2. pleas and lobbying carried out in states and regional and sub-regional organisations to raise the status of the delegate;
3. financing of the training of delegates and meetings of the Africa Commission;
4. The appointment of focal points who support the delegate in the implementation of his task;
5. Organisation of training seminars and discussions for cadres on strategies and policies at a regional and sub-regional level;
6. work done in the field of normalisation which has resulted, amongst others, in the idea of zoning and compartmentalisation and the recognition of the status of disease-free countries (the advent of the status of a country free of rinderpest in Africa);
7. Agreements concluded with the other world organisations (WHO, FAO, AIEA, WTO, etc) and the implementation of the strategic plan which have contributed to recognition of the predominant role of the OIE in public health, trade exchanges, animal welfare, food security and the alleviation of poverty;
8. The establishment of excellent and revolutionary tools following the example of the PVS and its implementation in member countries, has contributed to the mobilisation of States, donors and co-operation partners in respect of veterinary services;
9. Establishment of a database of health information;
10. Inauguration of reference laboratories and collaborating centres;
11. Thoughts on training in institutions concerned, for better adaptation to needs;
12. Reinforcement of the health governance of national systems and veterinary services (the following conference on veterinary legislation is an example of that);
13. Since the advent of avian influenza, the role played by our organisation for the recognition of veterinary services like International Public Welfare and the need to reinforce these services;
14. The importance given to developing countries in all the strategies and policies of the organisation and the increase in their level of participation within international decision-making institutions and also in international conferences;
15. Revitalisation seen in regional representation and CBRs by means of the holding of training and discussion sessions on policies and strategies which are specific to our countries and regions;
16. Lastly, under the auspices of the OAU-IBAR and with the help of the OIE, the holding of co-ordination meetings for our participation in international authorities, the taking up and defence of the common African position.

These are all matters which have contributed to facilitating the delegate's task.

I may have forgotten certain points which my colleagues will be kind enough to fill in, but in summary here are the main stages in my life as a delegate to give you an idea of the importance of training for delegates to enable them to play their part fully. Some of those from my generation did not benefit from this training or rather benefited in a different way through errors made over time and the help and advice from the previous generations, to whom I would like to pay tribute. This training will result in the following:

- improved knowledge of your prerogatives and claiming your national status,
- a clearer understanding of the problems at national level while co-ordinating with the relevant structures and departments through your focal points,
- better expressing and defending your needs in terms of strategies and policies at national, regional and sub-regional level,
- finally, to reinforce the common position on questions relevant to the continent within international authorities. It will also contribute (I sincerely hope it does) to encourage our governments to create more stability for our posts.

I would not like to conclude without adding that this training will also help you to know your organisation better and to give it greater support, as well as to those who lead the organisation for us and who are responsible for its international influence.

I would like to thank the organisers for having allowed me to speak in this training session as well as for the excellent organisation and importance of matters discussed.

My thanks go to the Director General for his efforts and for my part, from this time I would like to confirm the support of Mauritania for his future re-election.

Dear colleagues, without attempting to influence you, I would still like to ask you to join me in supporting the candidature of Dr Bernard VALLAT if only as a motion of thanks for his consideration and his work towards fairness in developing countries and African countries in particular.