

## WOAH Africa Continental Conference

### Towards a more resilient veterinary workforce for Africa 2024

26-28<sup>th</sup> of November 2024 Nairobi, Kenya

#### ***Opening Ceremony - Plenary Session 1 – Welcome address Dr. Carolin L. Schumacher***

**Introduction:** Greetings and stage setting:

GALVmed is a non-for-profit animal health product and commercial development organization working with private and public partners to improve the availability, access to and adoption of quality veterinary medicines in the sub-Saharan Africa. Through 15+ years of work on vaccines, pharmaceuticals and diagnostics for major infectious tropical diseases of poultry, cattle, sheep and goats, GALVmed has gained valuable insights into the challenges preventing the veterinary medicines market in sub-Saharan Africa to function:

#### ***What are the challenges that GALVmed seeks to address in Africa to promote animal health among livestock owned by small-scale livestock producers?***

Several important challenges exist when trying to serve the chronically neglected small-scale livestock producer (SSPs) segment in sub-Saharan Africa with quality veterinary medicines. This is particularly pronounced for vaccines which are critically important to not only prevent infectious diseases and preserve animal health, welfare and productivity of livestock, but also provide for employment, food security and development for rural populations.

For the past 15 years, GALVmed has attempted to facilitate the development of new veterinary vaccines and products for small-scale livestock producers through partnerships with private and public stakeholders. Among the most significant barriers preventing quality veterinary product market to reach the market are:

- the relatively low access to and investment in cutting-edge Research & Development of Africa based public and private animal health companies who depend on North-South Technology transfer partnerships between to build up their product portfolios;
- the frequent inefficiencies and side effects of current first-generation vaccines underscoring the need for new affordable, thermostable, safe, pure and efficacious vaccines corresponding to African needs;
- the still fragile and disharmonized veterinary medicines regulatory system in sub-Saharan Africa which renders registration and quality assurance of products in the field rather unpredictable and onerous;
- the fragmented veterinary product supply chain, particularly in rural areas, which is subject to cold chain limitations and policy restrictions for vaccines against transboundary diseases in ruminants.
- the limited numbers of private veterinary service providers assuring on farm disease surveillance, farmer education and oversight over veterinary medicines use, particularly in

remote rural or pastoralist areas.

- the absence of detection and reporting of medicinal side-effects and post vaccination monitoring by the veterinary profession which is needed for quality assurance in general and more specifically to limit overuse of antimicrobials (antibiotics and acaricides) and the circulation of unregistered, altered or counterfeit products in the market.

***What insights have been gained from Africa regarding the enhancement of work force development to ensure accessible animal health services for all livestock farmers, particularly those in smallholders and vulnerable communities?***

In the last 10 years, and prominently aided by the formulation of WOAAH guidelines for education of veterinary professionals (Veterinarians, VPPs and CAHWs), and the evaluation of veterinary service provision (WOAH PVS), the level of education and knowledge of veterinary services providers has become more able to respond to the multiple challenges facing livestock farmers in sub-Saharan Africa.

The number of African Veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals or community animal health workers also appears to have increased, including in remote rural areas. Whether working under the supervision of a veterinarian or as independent, self-employed VPPs and CAHW, animal health technicians are an essential part of the veterinary workforce and generally appreciated and trusted by farmers, particularly if originating from the region where they work.

And the certification and registration of veterinary service providers has clearly enhanced transparency and confidence in veterinary service provision to famers.

Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in veterinary work force development and notably:

- since the overall number of veterinarians and veterinary service providers is still low in many rural and pastoralist areas in sub-Saharan Africa, there would be merit in strengthening and geographically broadening the chain of command between a veterinarian and his or her network of veterinary paraprofessionals;
- new revenue-generating opportunities could be created for private animal health service providers, particularly for young graduates, and benefit from greater efforts in linking them into functioning, well-connected and economically viable livestock value chains that can afford good veterinary service provision levels;
- Any distortion of the private veterinary medicines and veterinary service provision market, i.e. though hyperfocus on TAD diseases or government /NGO interventions with free vaccination should be carefully considered and phased out where such practices are either not sufficient to preserve the health and productivity of livestock or disrupt the effort of private veterinary service providers to support farmers.

***What are the anticipated actions from the WOAAH conference concerning Veterinary Work force initiatives?***

Veterinarians and animal health technicians are the custodians of healthy livestock and a functioning livestock value chain. Their role and mandate needs strengthening in Africa.

It is expected that conference participants will discuss dysfunctions and shortcomings of current veterinary service provision and define new approaches to address the underperformance of veterinary services in sub-Saharan Africa. Notably, new business models allowing public *and* private veterinarians and veterinary service providers to work together (public private partnerships) hold potential to improve surveillance, disease control and veterinary medicine supply and use.

Fee-based, routine vaccination against all relevant infectious diseases of livestock is another potential and powerful lever for veterinary workforce development and a means by which the economic and societal potential of the continent's livestock sector could be harnessed. With vaccination coverage rates of less than 10% achieved through government mandated, emergency vaccination programs in most African countries, there is an opportunity for the private veterinary workforce to complement government efforts through private sector driven disease prevention. As witnessed by the encouraging developments in Africa's poultry sector, private sector-driven vaccination of livestock can become a reality if business barriers are eased and disruption of the emerging local vaccine businesses and private veterinary service provision through restrictive policies and free vaccination is limited.

And finally, the conference provides an opportunity to advocate for greater veterinary oversight over the registration, distribution, prescription and use of veterinary medicines. Veterinary medicine supply and sales are in urgent need of professionalization, and better law enforcement is needed to limit the misuse of antimicrobials and the circulation of unregistered, altered or counterfeit veterinary products. Prescription and dispensing of veterinary medicines needs to be overseen by well-educated and registered veterinary professionals rather than be managed by agro-dealers and farmers alone. To ensure rural livelihoods, functioning livestock value chains, food safety and security and prevent public health issues due to antimicrobial failures, greater veterinary oversight and service provision to livestock farmers in Africa are not only desperately needed but also a great opportunity for future veterinary workforce development on the African continent.