

Opening remarks François Caya 26/11/24

Honourable Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture and Livestock Development

Principal Secretary for Gender and Affirmative Action

Chief Executive Officer of GALVmed

Director of the African Union for Intercontinental Bureau for Animal Resources

President of the WOAHA Regional Commission for Africa,

Distinguished guests,

**Commenté [BA1]:** To be updated with names and checked up to the very last moment

On behalf of the Director General of the World Organisation for Animal Health, Dr Emmanuelle Soubeyran, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this Continental Conference on strengthening the resilience of the veterinary workforce in Africa.

I thank the Government of Kenya for hosting this event. My thanks also go to our financial partners, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency of the United States of America, the French Development Agency, AFD, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the, and to our co-sponsor, GALVmed.

Thanks to all for the vision, commitment and resources that made this important meeting possible: a true collaboration with FAO, WHO and the African Veterinary Technicians Association- or AVTA.

Africa is home to extraordinary animal resources, including livestock, wildlife and a growing number of companion animals. These resources are essential to communities' livelihoods. They support livestock farming, animal products and wildlife tourism. However, transboundary animal diseases pose a major challenge, in particular due to the risk of transmission between animals and humans, or between wildlife and livestock.

Addressing these threats requires robust and well-structured national Veterinary Services, supported by a competent veterinary workforce able to prevent, detect and respond rapidly to animal diseases.

Yet, maintaining an adequate veterinary workforce remains a challenge for all countries. And particularly, ensuring that all actors-veterinarians, veterinary paraprofessionals, community animal health workers both in the public and private sectors-are recognised and fairly valued for their vital role. Determining the appropriate workforce composition is an exercise unique to each nation and depends on the economic, human, physical and educational resources available.

This challenge is particularly acute in Africa where shortages of veterinarians, especially in remote areas, make the role of veterinary paraprofessionals even more critical. They must be fully recognised and integrated into all national Veterinary Services.

To address this need, WOAHA convened the first Continental Conference on the Role of Veterinary Paraprofessionals in Africa in 2015. A variety of issues crucial for an enabling environment and effective integration were identified. Educational reforms, legal frameworks for the recognition of

Opening remarks François Caya 26/11/24

VPPs, better regulation through Veterinary Statutory Bodies, enhanced collaboration between veterinarians and VPPs... to name a few.

Since then, I am pleased to say that significant progress has been made:

- Guidelines on VPP Competencies and Curricula have been published,
- The PVS Pathway continues to evolve to better support WOAHA Members in workforce development,
- Donors have shown increased interest in funding workforce development initiatives in Africa.
- These dynamics have triggered much change at country level: more Members have actively engaged in updating curricula and training for VPPs and some, like South Africa, now recognise private VPPs.

WOAHA remains committed to supporting the recognition of all actors of the veterinary workforce and the provision of optimal tools to help them succeed in their role.

I am proud to announce that new competency and curriculum guidelines for Community Animal Health Workers will be launched tomorrow. They complete a comprehensive framework covering the full spectrum of animal health professionals. This milestone will, I am sure, further strengthen the capacity and efficiency of the veterinary workforce.

Yet, challenges still prevail to allow the smooth, effective integration of all relevant actors in the veterinary workforce. Ensuring harmonised, fit-for-purpose education and training is an ongoing effort, necessary to guarantee the availability of competent, work-ready veterinarians and VPPs. Better recognition and registration of VPPs by Veterinary Statutory Bodies and legislation gaps must be addressed to ensure that VPPs can access opportunities to provide needed services in both the public and private sectors. Gender disparities in workforce also affect service provision, with women livestock keepers often underserved.

Looking ahead, complementary relationships and improved communication between veterinarians and VPPs must be promoted.

Training opportunities must evolve to meet new challenges faced by animal health professionals, and better incorporate competencies such as data management and artificial intelligence which will become key across professions. Addressing global risks such as climate change and pandemic threats will require updated skills, organisation and infrastructure to build adequate preparedness and response strategies.

WOAHA will remain a tireless advocate for the need for stronger and better recognised animal health professionals. This conference will be critical in sharing insights, creating opportunities, and finding solutions towards more inclusive Veterinary Services, across age, gender and other dynamics.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as leaders in your field, across a range of expertise and functions, you have a key role to play in identifying and addressing these challenges and co-creating impactful solutions.

Investment in veterinary workforce planning takes time, efforts, skills, funds, commitment and vision.

Opening remarks François Caya 26/11/24

I hope that this conference will inspire you to build on your strengths, identify areas for growth, and motivate new collaborations to shape further developments in the veterinary workforce.

Distinguished guests, I wish you a successful conference. Thank you.