

## Curricula Adjustment in Veterinary Faculties of Sub-Saharan Africa

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### Abstract

A mail survey was conducted to assess the current undergraduate curricula in the veterinary faculties of Sub-Saharan Africa. The survey also examined how curricula were adjusted for crucial developments in the veterinary field, such as privatisation, decentralisation and globalisation, with the increasing risk of transboundary diseases. Of 15 faculties contacted, only five answered the questionnaire. Most of these faculties face serious shortages, both in their budgets and qualified personnel, and do not have formal feedback systems allowing former graduates to contribute to periodic reviews of the curricula. Although some north-south and south-south collaboration exists among African veterinary faculties, more intensive regional collaboration at both undergraduate and postgraduate level would optimize the use of available funds and human resources. The creation of a regional veterinary council and a committee of deans would be an excellent step forward in ensuring internationalisation and harmonisation of veterinary education and in establishing a regional accreditation system.

Keywords: Curriculum, education, veterinary faculties, survey, Sub-Saharan Africa

### Introduction and Methodology

Providing veterinary education of the highest quality involves offering training which meets the needs of that particular society and is attractive to the student, while he/she learns skills directly applicable to his/her future working situation. Therefore, to remain relevant to the changing national, regional and international conditions in the livestock sector, university curricula must be updated regularly (Katunguka-Rwakishaya, 1999; Obwolo, 1999). Over the past decades, the veterinary profession has been confronted with major changes and constraints, such as privatisation, decentralisation and globalisation, with the increasing risk of transboundary diseases. In times when expenditure is restricted, it is quite difficult to respond efficiently to such challenges. For this reason, the experiences of different veterinary faculties in the area of curricular review can be very instructive.

A questionnaire was developed and sent by mail to 15 veterinary faculties located in sub-Saharan Africa, to assess the current university undergraduate curriculum and to determine how those faculties address the crucial developments in the veterinary field.

Only five faculties answered the questionnaire. Fortunately, the range of responding institutes provided a comprehensive picture of veterinary training institutes in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>. Albeit, other faculties should fulfil this type of exercise to obtain a better and refined understanding of the situation<sup>2</sup>.

### Assessment of the Current Curricula of Sub-Saharan Veterinary Faculties

Table 1 provides information about new subjects introduced into undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. These subjects are also available as short-term training or 'refresher' courses to help young veterinarians to be efficient in the private sector. All five faculties organise also up-to-date training on the surveillance of transboundary diseases and the disease control requirements for trade in animal products.

Traineeships in private veterinary practices or farms are the most popular new method of education delivery (Table 2). As more veterinarians set up private practices, this type of training is easily organised. The veterinary faculty of Harare takes the view that pre-clinical and para-clinical subjects should be taught from a practical point of view, focusing on clinical practice rather than on the theoretical knowledge.

1 those faculties were : Fac. Vet. Science, University of Zimbabwe, Harare (Zimbabwe); Fac. Vet. Med., Debre Zeit (Ethiopia); École Inter États des Sciences et Méd. Vét., Dakar (Senegal); Fac. Vet. Med., Nairobi (Kenya); Fac. Méd. Vét., Butembo (Democratic Republic of Congo)

2 More details can be found in: "De Deken R., Obwolo M.J., Thys E., Geerts S. (2003). The adjustment of curricula in veterinary faculties in sub-Saharan Africa. *Rev. sci. tech. Off. Int. Epiz.*, 23 (1), 383-390".

**Table 1:** Subjects introduced into veterinary training programmes specifically to help graduates working in the private sector in sub-Saharan Africa

Subject	Number of veterinary faculties (out of 5) which have introduced the subject into their curriculum		
	Undergraduate course	Postgraduate course	Refresher course
Artificial insemination	3	1	1
Business skills/book-keeping	5		
Advising livestock farmers	3		
Ethno-veterinary medicine	3		
Food hygiene and food quality control	5	1	
Natural resource management	3		
Project management	4		
Quality control of Veterinary Services	1	1	
Wildlife production and health	3	1	

**Table 2:** New methods of education delivery in current veterinary training programmes in sub-Saharan Africa

Method of education delivery	Course level	Number of faculties (out of 5) which introduced the subject (year of introduction)
Traineeship in private veterinary practice	Undergraduate	4 (1984/1997/1999/1999)
Refresher course for graduates	Postgraduate	3 (1994/1994/2001)
MSc courses in modular form allowing graduates to attend some of the modules	Postgraduate	1 (1996)
Traineeship in animal production units	Undergraduate	1 (1999)

## Curriculum Review and Related Constraints

Most veterinary faculties do not have a formal 'feedback system' designed to regularly consult graduates. Nevertheless, all five responding faculties do review their curricula in some way. However, reforms are often decided at departmental rather than faculty level, and are not always endorsed by the university management, often because of financial constraints. All participating faculties have a specific committee, having already initiated changes in curriculum content. Usually, major reforms must first be endorsed by specific committees established by the university.

All five faculties stated that a shortage of financial resources is a major constraint in changing or revising programmes. Three out of five faculties reported a shortage of qualified personnel and a lack of continuing education programmes. In fact, for many African countries, maintaining a veterinary faculty is too expensive because the high cost of training a veterinary student, which exceeds the training costs of any other university programme (University of Missouri, 2001). The creation of a regional veterinary faculty, e.g. that of Dakar, which involves 13 countries, is an excellent example of cost reduction. Similarly, six veterinary faculties were planning to start a regional MSc course in tropical animal health and food safety for the Southern

African Development Community. This would minimise duplication and improve the quality of training by combining resources (Coetzer *et al.* 1999). Unfortunately, due to lack of funding, this course has not yet started. Generally, if academic standards are to be upheld, shortages will have to be met by a combination of increased financial government allocations, donor funding, increased student fees and better use of existing resources. Alternatively, the number of students allowed to begin veterinary studies may be restricted in some countries, as is the case at the Veterinary School of Dakar.

Establishing a regional council of veterinary faculty deans could lead to enhanced collaboration and to improved standardisation of curricula, as well as integration of the different levels of livestock service providers (AITVM, 1999), like three out of the five responding faculties experienced. Attempts to harmonise veterinary curricula have been made but often only at the sub-regional or national level, e.g. the Association of African Universities, as well as le Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur for French-speaking countries. All five faculties which participated in the survey were involved in exchange or collaboration programmes with other institutes, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, which is enhancing harmonisation of action.

## References

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