FAO vision for the EUFMD Commission in the context of the FAO-OIE Agreement and the Global Framework on the Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases

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1 - Introduction

The European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (EUFMD) was created 50 years ago and this event will be celebrated in Dublin this year. After these 50 years of action and progress in disease control, the country members and FAO can be proud of the work accomplished by the EUFMD Commission. There is a need to continue and to further strengthen its role and this can be done in a context of the recent positive step in the working relations of FAO and OIE.

The EUFMD can continue to act as a regional specialized body, with strong collaboration between the European countries, FAO, OIE and the European Commission.

2 – FAO-OIE Agreements

On 24 May 2004, a new agreement was signed between FAO and the OIE, replacing a preceding agreement almost half a century old. The new agreement is a highly important development, in updating the agreement to reflect present reality and vision, and redefines the fields and methods of collaboration between the two organizations according to their respective missions and mandates. The complementarities and synergies between the organizations will be required in putting into practice the operation of common activities and programmes, including the early warning system for animal disease risks; the collection and analysis of animal health information; the definition and the setting in place of strategies for control of the major diseases; the promotion and coordination of research on animal and zoonotic diseases, and those with impact on food safety, and with the organization of meetings of experts. The participation of FAO in the development of the standards of the OIE and that of OIE in the standards of CODEX also forms part of the fields of collaboration between FAO and the OIE.

An initiative of international significance, the Global Framework for the Control of the Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADS) was the subject of a particular agreement between FAO and OIE, signed on 24 May 2004, and which relates to the regional and international approach to the control of the principal transboundary diseases in the developing countries.

Even prior to the current HPAI crisis, FAO and OIE have examined the problem of transboundary animal diseases from the perspective of the complexity of environment, market access, food chain and human welfare, as well as considering the international public good goals of Social Equality, Sustainability of Natural Resources Use, and Veterinary Public Health. Thus the GF-TADs proposes the effective prevention and progressive control of major TADs as an effective contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by providing assistance and guidance to member countries through existing regional specialised organisations and their regional representation offices. To achieve this objective,
it is suggested that focussed efforts for the control of the major TADs must be at the source of infection and prior to the spread of the disease. The GF-TADs programme will be developed along four main thrusts:

1. A regionally led mechanism, to operationally address and implement action against priority diseases as agreed by relevant stakeholders;
2. The development of Regional and Global Early Warning Systems for major animal diseases;
3. The enabling and application of research on TADs causing agents at the molecular and ecological levels for more effective strategic disease management and control; and,
4. The completion of the Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme set for achieving global declaration of freedom by the year 2010.

The Outputs and Outcomes for the six-year programme (2004-2009) are:

- Country-based surveillance and disease reporting enhanced through capacity building of epidemiology units and of laboratory personnel.
- Concerted animal disease control programmes developed through the establishment of regional support units within ongoing regional specialised organisations and/or Regional Commissions. These regional support units will be in a position to assist in the direction of animal disease surveillance, and to provide mechanisms to meet specific regional needs.
- Regional and Global Early Warning Systems for TADs established with the collaboration of FAO, OIE and WHO, connected to regional epidemiological systems.
- Internationally verified global freedom from rinderpest - The Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme, GREP secured.
- Animal populations where primary endemic circulation of FMD and other selected TADs occur identified and characterised.
- International, regional, and national early response capacities for prompt and authoritative disease diagnosis and for targeted local disease control to limit the spread of new outbreaks of TADs established.
- Referral diagnostic and molecular biological capacity of OIE-FAO Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres strengthened and technology transfer provided to National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), primarily through the established system of networks of national and Regional laboratories supported by the FAO/IAEA Joint Division and through North-South/South-South laboratory partnerships including the network of OIE-FAO reference laboratories.
- Assistance in the development of TAD research programmes provided through FAO and OIE Collaborating Centres and other advanced research institutes (ARIs) as appropriate.

The concepts underlying this GF-TADs initiative and the mechanisms of implementation will be used henceforth as a model for the preparation of programmes and regional projects for control of animal diseases and it is in this context that are already under development of the projects in several parts of the world, in particular for avian influenza in Asia and on foot-and-mouth disease in Asia and in the area of the Caucasus.

This GF-TADs could therefore provide an excellent platform for the implementation of actions against FMD in Europe.
3 – FMD and Europe

FMD remains one of the major threats to livestock productions in Europe. It is one of the most contagious diseases easy to transmit from one region or country to another. The recent crisis in several member countries of the European Union unfortunately demonstrated this reality. FMD viruses still circulate in regions close to the EC, such as the Caucasus region, or not very far such as Northern Africa or the Middle East. The threat from the developing world, particularly Asia and Africa, is a fact that the European countries have to permanently take into consideration.

In the wake of the 2001 FMD epidemics in Europe, South America, Africa and Asia, the OIE International Committee, through Resolution XIII\(^1\) of its 69\(^{th}\) General Session, in 2001, and Resolution No XXI\(^2\) of its 70\(^{th}\) General Session in 2002, called on both the OIE and FAO to pursue an international concerted effort against a certain number of diseases having significant effects on food security, poverty alleviation, food safety, public health and access to formal markets. The report of the *Temporary Committee on Foot and Mouth Disease* of the European Union Parliament (3 October, 2002)\(^3\), concluded: "In view of the intensification of world trade and global warming, a thorough analysis of the existing and likely future threats arising from the introduction of animal diseases into the EU which could cause major economic damage is urgently needed at European level"; and, “Lasting success can be achieved in efforts to control FMD worldwide only if it proves possible, through close international cooperation, to curb the disease decisively in areas where it is still endemic. The Commission should therefore do more to assist the countries concerned in their efforts to control or eradicate FMD and seek to improve cooperation with regard to information (early warning systems)”.

The global nature of the problem of FMD and other TADs was also highlighted during the Ministerial Meeting on the occasion of the 31\(^{st}\) Session of the FAO Conference (2001). The Conference recognized the widespread and increasing impact of epidemic animal diseases, like FMD, on agricultural development, trade and food security; and stressed the need to continue the work at the national, regional and international level to combat the disease by involving all relevant stakeholders. The World Food Summit: five years later (WFS:fyi, 2002) reiterated the 1996 commitment and called for specific action and voluntary financial contribution to the FAO Global Trust Fund to facilitate food security programmes and combat TADs.

The increasing importance of trade and expanded access to world markets by developing countries has also received high attention at the Doha Ministerial Meeting of WTO in November 2001, the UN Conference for Development in Monterrey in March 2002 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. Enhanced trade in agricultural products in the South-to-North direction as well as among developing countries themselves is increasingly seen as a major factor in poverty reduction strategies. However, in order for developing countries to participate in formal trade in livestock products it is imperative that a concerted international effort be made for these countries to be able to fulfill the basic elements of the SPS Agreement. Central to this will be the effective

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prevention and progressive control of transboundary animal diseases in livestock production systems by these countries. Thus, developing countries also require increased and sustained support in their efforts to be more fully integrated in the setting of animal health and food safety standards. Improvement in animal health and food safety status is bound to have a beneficial impact not only on the ability to participate in external trade but also on internal trade and the market integration of poor communities.

There is definitely a need to continue to have a focussed specialized mechanism/organism, the EUFMD Commission to prevent the FMD extension to Europe. For this purpose, the participation and support from the 3 international and regional institutions, namely FAO, OIE and EC, are crucial, together with the country members.

4 – EUFMD Commission

4.1 Roles and activities

EUFMD has a role which is basically at the service of the European country members. The European Commission as well as the OIE and the FAO benefits from the activities of EUFMD and these 3 bodies provide support and participation.

The mandates, missions and activities of EUFMD do not have to duplicate the ones of EC, FAO and OIE which are perfectly known and which are implemented by their respective offices in their Headquarters, Specialized Commissions, Representations and various Ad Hoc Working Groups.

EUFMD was established with the initial goals to combat and eradicate FMD in Europe and to co-ordinate national control programmes. The main thrusts are to prevent re-introduction, limit the risks from countries surrounding Europe and other countries and elevate the technical expertise.

The EUFMD structure is composed of an Assembly of the CVOs representing the 33 member countries (22 EU countries and 11 non-EU countries), an Executive Committee of 8 CVOs and observers, a Secretariat in Rome (2 persons plus 1 assistant), a Technical Committee of 12 elected specialists from member countries. In addition to that, 2 Tripartite groups were created between EUFMD, EC and OIE for the Caucasus Region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and for Bulgaria-Greece-Turkey.

EUFMD acts as a sort of specialized observatory for FMD in the world. It facilitates the exchange of information, experts and key players. It serves as a Think Group for the elaboration of new ideas and to design strategies, activities and specific programmes.

EUFMD develops its activities in strong collaboration with the OIE through the participation to ad hoc groups of OIE and vice versa, Reference Laboratory contracts, development of guidelines, joint participation to the EUFMD Tripartite Groups – FAO/OIE/EC - and continuous exchange of information. The collaboration with the EC includes continuous exchanges through the participation of EC to EUFMD meetings (Executive Committee meetings, Tripartite meetings...), and strong operational relationship through the FAO/EC Trust Funds for actions to protect Europe.
The main activities of EUFMD can be summarized and regrouped in several categories such as:

- Capacity building, through the organisation, for example, of training courses.
- Exchange of information and promotion of research, through the organisation of scientific workshops, seminars and specific research activities.
- Support to the Veterinary Services and Laboratories in the countries where it is needed, through expert missions, evaluations, assistance to project design...
- Promotion of identification of strains circulating in contaminated countries (improve the virus isolation and identification and final precise characterisation in the World Reference Laboratory) and exchanges of strains between the Reference Laboratories.

In the field of normative activities EUFMD circulates information on all aspects of FMD to the member countries and provides advice on preventing and controlling the diseases, through the organisation of technical workshops, the contribution to the establishment of guidelines and standards of reagents, security measures or contingency plans and through the revision of the FMD monograph of the European Pharmacopoeia.

Concerning the operational activities in the field, EUFMD implements or participates in the implementation of field projects such as the co-ordination of measures to combat the disease, if it occurs, the organisation of vaccination campaigns in regions at risk, the control of the disease and the creation of buffer zones, the support to surveillance activities or the development of appropriate contingency plans.

4.2 – Future of EUFMD

The missions, mandates and activities of EUFMD should continue with similar main global mechanisms and priorities than the current ones. The situation with regards to the FMD risks in the World and particularly the risks for Europe is not improving. Therefore, there is a need to maintain and to strengthen EUFMD and its position as a statutatory Commission of FAO and to improve its role through a definition of a new strategic mid-term programme and a possible evolution of its functioning.

The EUFMD Commission remains an excellent example of an efficient structure, through an application of key criteria such as:

- Focus on the main issue, FMD.
- Good collaboration between the European Countries, FAO, OIE and the European Commission.
- Catalytic in operating style, promoting and supporting actions from a small structure.
- Proper balance between zoo-sanitary technical experts and laboratory scientific experts.

EUFMD should focus on the protection of the European countries, through activities to support them and through developing activities in the neighbouring regions/countries to Europe, such as the Caucasus Region, the Middle-East/Central Asia and Northern Africa.

The work in these neighbouring regions is indispensable but in addition, and considering the necessity to improve the information on the virus circulation in the developing countries (epidemiological information, virus strain identification), EUFMD should link with the laboratories and field services, promote the exchanges of strains and the participation of
researchers and experts of the developing countries to the international fora (particularly the different workshops and conferences organised by EUFMD), but without EUFMD implementing control actions in these regions.

Actually, EUFMD should play a real role of an “FMD Observatory” and should give more support to experts and researchers from the regions where the disease exists. This should be done through improvement of experts and researchers exchanges and, support from specialised OIE and FAO Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres, in order to increase the epidemiological situation knowledge, including virus identification. One of the major stakes is to build a common understanding of FMD disease prevention and control policies and to improve the quality and transparency of the information for better monitoring of the situation, with early warning, detection, reporting and response. To reach these goals, it becomes indispensable to bring the scientific and expert community from the Developing World to the international arenas.

Concerning the functioning of the EUFMD bodies and mechanisms, there is a need to find ways to increase the participation of the members of the Executive Committee. An evolution of the functioning of EUFMD could be considered with, for example, less meetings, replacement of some of them by Video conferences or Teleconferences, organization of meetings with the 3 or 4 main actors to replace some of the Executive Committee meetings, or back-to-back meetings. A greater involvement of deputies to members of the Executive Committee in the work of EUFMD would also benefit to EUFMD activities and to the Country members.

5 – Conclusions

EUFMD Commission should continue to play in the future an important role as a regional organization and due to the worrying situation, particularly in the developing countries, EUFMD should become a real “observatory” on the global situation of FMD. EUFMD will continue to work in close collaboration between the European countries, FAO, OIE and EC. Focus remains on the protection of the European countries and on the region bordering Europe but there is also a need to follow the situation in the developing world where the disease is still present and where there is clear evidence of risk. There is also a need to prepare a mid-term strategic plan and to revisit the functioning rules of EUFMD.