MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES, SENZENI ZOKWANA (MP)

OIE AVTA GALVMED: REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ROLE OF PARA-VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS IN AFRICA

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Representatives of intergovernmental and NGO across the world;
Executives of Veterinary Statutory Organisations present here today;
Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning, Bonjour, Buenos Dias, Goeie more, Dumelang, Sanibonani!

Today is a happy day for South Africa and the African Continent at large as we are privileged to host the first regional conference on the role of veterinary-Para-professionals (VPP’s) in Africa.

We are indeed privileged to host this event at which we aim to improve the field operation of Veterinary Services by strengthening the linkages and collaborations between Veterinarians and veterinary-para-professionals.

It is the framework of OIE component of the “Strengthening of Veterinary governance in Africa” (VETGOV) project, in agreement with the two other implementation partners, i.e. the African Union’s Inter-african Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) and the FAO’s Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (FAO-ECTAD).

Ladies and Gentlemen, food insecurity remains an everyday challenge for almost many people worldwide. Across the developing world, the majority of the poor and most of the hungry live in rural areas, hence, hunger eradication should remain a key commitment of decision-makers at all levels. This eradication should be done hand in hand with attempts to grow the economy and alleviating poverty.

The growing of the economy should inherently also promote equitable access to food and other resources to particularly under privileged communities.
The South African government, as a developmental state, is doing its best to link its activities with outcomes that will address socio-economic issues such as food security. We understand that job creation can address poverty significantly and in the long run may lead to economic growth. The livestock framer in particular needs the outmost support from a point of view of production and animal diseases control.

Until 1987, in this country there was hardly any black veterinarian to serve mainly rural communities. The first veterinarian of colour started in rural communities in 1988. During those times, stock inspectors played a significant role in the control of animal diseases and in some cases eradication of those diseases...

Animal Health is one issue that is rated very highly by livestock owners. With the emergence of commercial and semi commercial farmers amongst those who used to farm for subsistence, the need for more focused veterinary service has emerged. Global trade in animals and their products has led to increased possibilities of rapid spread of diseases. This rapid spread of diseases is increased by improved transportation world-wide.

Worldwide veterinarians are not evenly distributed. There is a tendency of clustering of veterinarians in big cities because of the “better opportunities” perceived to exist in those cities.

Failure of the veterinary profession to detect animal diseases and control them early could be detrimental. These diseases are not only limited to livestock but includes the whole spectrum of diseases in wild life, fish, bees and other terrestrial animals. Majority of the infectious diseases that afflict human beings have their origin in
animals. Just think of the devastating effect Infection with Ebola virus has had in the world.

Early detection of animal diseases could also take place at the abattoirs where traditional meat inspectors play a significant role. Meat inspection is similarly a significant step to prevent the spread of pathogens to humans.

In South Africa, even in the most advanced veterinary clinics, veterinarians cannot make it on their own. They need the services of highly trained efficient nurses. Their duties include post-operative care of patients and administration of prescribed medicines according to scheduled times. These profession is however a significant for the general management of patients and clinics.

Veterinary technologists play a significant role in the management of the laboratories and ensure that proper tests are conducted to make an accurate diagnosis. Similarly laboratory technicians help ensure that ethical research is being conducted. These are also relevant for research to consider aspects related to human health.

Currently the number of registered veterinarians, animal health technicians, laboratory technicians, technologists and nurses in South Africa stands at 3176, 1049, 18, 286, 612. A significant additional number is overseas. We do have an additional category that we call animal welfare workers that we authorize and the number stands at 311.

It is clear therefore that collaboration is significant between the various professions. More significant for the success of the farmer and to ensure food security globally, veterinary extension and preventative actions are the most cost effective
solutions. It is common knowledge that curative interventions are very expensive. For long term maintenance of risk management extensive vaccination of animals for diseases of economic importance is significant.

I wish to inform you that, I am unwilling to fund an army veterinarians and Para professionals who are there only to fight animal disease outbreaks. These professionals also need to educate the public in preventative measures.

In Africa, there are 5 economic development zones or areas. The strategy for Africa is to ensure that Africa develops with the intention to enhance economic collaboration. With the number of countries in Africa and the population it has, if intra trade was to take place, there will be tremendous benefits to its people. Sanitary issues will pose a significant barrier unless we move towards harmonizing these sanitary matters. Veterinary professionals play a significant role in the reassurances needed to ensure that trade in animals and animal products take place

I welcome you to South Africa, and urge you to share your experience in order to enhance one another’s efforts in addressing challenges faced by your respective countries

I am informed that at the end of this conference, there will be conference resolutions. Resolutions are there to be implemented.

I wish you successful deliberations

THANK YOU!