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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Community Animal Health Workers: Filling Gaps in Animal Health Services in Remote Global South Communities

MARIA VICTORIA LARRATEGUY¹, ANGELA R. SCHUG¹, MARGHERITA GOMARASCA², CONSTANZE BOENIG¹, ANTONIA BRAUS¹

¹*Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Germany, Germany*

²*Vétérinaires Sans Frontières International, Belgium*

Abstract

Basic animal health services are often insufficient in many rural areas in the global south, such as Eastern Africa, the project region of Vétérinaires sans Frontières Germany (VSFG), leading to certain risks related to poverty, public health and food insecurity and nutrition. Community-Based Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) try to fulfil the previously named gaps. CAHWs are community members who are selected in a participatory way and work in collaboration with private veterinary doctors, veterinary public services and supporting bodies (international programs and NGOs). CAHWs perform a limited range of veterinary health services (such as vaccination, deworming and others), in return of some form of payment (either cash, voucher system or in kind) and disseminate husbandry, farming and natural resources management methods in order to optimise animal production. In 2017, VSFG trained 1345 CAHWs in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan.

However, CAHWs encounter several challenges related to: i) the lack of a common nomenclature on a global level and even in the same country; ii) no standardised training; iii) inadequate supervision; iii) their role and status: has often not been officially recognised in regulatory frameworks^{1,2}. CAHWs operate under the One Health approach, since their positive impacts can be measured in animal health and wellbeing, on the people who depend on them (like agro-pastoral communities to whom livestock means food security, income source, savings and employment), and on the environment, through better use and management of natural resources. They play a vital role in epidemiologic surveillance and overall public health matters such as food safety, prevention and control activities of zoonotic diseases (anthrax, brucellosis, rabies etc.) and other Neglected Tropical Diseases. Therefore, larger efforts need to be made in order to overcome the above mentioned challenges and to allow CAHWs to be internationally and nationally recognised and integrated in the Veterinary Health System Legislation, to facilitate and expand their training and supervision; to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each of the actors involved in the local animal health system, to assure the sustainability; and to promote stronger public-private engagements and frameworks to incentivize investments in the system.

Keywords: Agro-pastoral communities, framework, livestock, One Health