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**FIRST PROGRESS REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF PANVAC ON
LIVESTOCK AND CONTROL OF ANIMAL DISEASES**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report is submitted as a follow-up to the pledges I made during the Joint African Union (AU) Commission – Permanent Representatives' Committee (PRC) Retreat, held in Cairo, Egypt, from 10 to 11 December 2017, and the interaction I had with the PRC on 7 March 2018. The report highlights the efforts of the Commission to increase livestock production and facilitate control of animal diseases across the continent.

II. BACKGROUND

2. Livestock production in Africa is affected by several factors. Animal diseases constitute the major constraint of efficient production of livestock, as they threaten the livelihoods of livestock producers and food security. They result in increased mortality and morbidity in livestock populations. They may also affect performance through reduced fertility, delays in reaching maturity for reproduction or sale, decreased production of milk, eggs and wool, decreased draught power, and decreased weight of fattening or cull animals.

3. Several methods are used for the treatment, prevention and control of livestock disease. While the stamping out method, vaccination and the therapeutic or prophylactic use of drugs all play important roles in animal disease control, in the African context, vaccination is considered as the most appropriate choice because it is less costly and less likely to result in disease resistance in the field. It is, therefore, very important that the vaccines given to animals for the control of disease are of very good quality.

4. The concept of independent quality control of veterinary vaccines used in Africa started in the early 80s as a prerequisite to fund the Pan-African Rinderpest Campaign (PARC). The audit conducted on the quality of Rinderpest vaccines produced in Africa by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 1983 indicated serious deficits in quality, as only 20% of the vaccines produced by African laboratories were of good quality.

5. As a recommendation from this survey, the FAO Expert Consultation on Rinderpest held in Rome, in October 1984, urged all vaccine producing laboratories to participate in the implementation of an international and independent vaccine quality control scheme. In 1986, FAO, through its Technical Cooperation Programmes, established two Regional Vaccine Quality Control and Training Centres in Debre-Zeit (Ethiopia) and Dakar (Senegal), which are dedicated to improving the quality of Rinderpest vaccines produced in Africa to support the PARC. This was followed, from 1988 to 1993, by an initiative funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which resulted in the merger of the two Centres into a single structure, which became the Pan-African Veterinary Vaccine Centre (PANVAC) to reflect its Pan-African nature.

6. In recognition of the important role played by PANVAC to certify the quality of vaccines for the control and eradication of Rinderpest in Africa, PANVAC was elevated to a Specialized Agency of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) by the OAU Council of Ministers during the 67th Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa, from 23 to 27 February 1998. PANVAC was officially launched as an AU Regional Centre, with its headquarters based at Debre Zeit, in 2004. The mandate entrusted to the new Centre, hereto called AU-PANVAC, was extended to quality control of all veterinary vaccines, as well as to the production of diagnostic tests for surveillance and control of animal diseases.

7. Following the major role it played during the eradication programme of Rinderpest, PANVAC mandate was reviewed as follows:

- i. international independent quality control of veterinary vaccines produced in Africa and imported for use in Africa;
- ii. production and distribution of essential biological reagents for diagnosis and surveillance of animal disease;
- iii. standardization and harmonization of veterinary vaccines production and their quality control techniques in Africa;
- iv. promotion of transfer of appropriate vaccine production technologies in Africa; and
- v. provision of training and technical support services to veterinary vaccines and quality control laboratories.

8. From the mandate stated above, two major activities are currently conducted by PANVAC, with the aim of providing appropriate tools to Member States for the surveillance, control and prevention of animal diseases:

- i. quality control of all veterinary vaccines produced and imported for use in Africa; and
- ii. production and distribution of essential diagnostic reagents for surveillance of animal diseases.

9. PANVAC has also been given the following specific tasks:

- i. maintaining Africa free from Rinderpest, through the sequestration of all Rinderpest material from African laboratories, and maintaining an emergency vaccine stock; and
- ii. harmonization of veterinary vaccine registration on the continent.

III. PANVAC'S MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Promote the use of good quality vaccine in Africa for control and prevention of animal diseases

10. During its previous phases, PANVAC's principal objective has been to promote improvements in the quality of veterinary vaccines, with the intention of achieving uniformly high standards of production and quality control of essential veterinary vaccines.

11. PANVAC's achievements in the Rinderpest control and eradication programme have been well appreciated and recognized by various evaluation and review teams, consultants, beneficiary laboratories and Governments. The final evaluation report of PARC and PACE stated that: *"The success of the Pan-African Rinderpest Campaign and the Pan-African Programme for the Control of Epizootics clearly demonstrated that no amount of vehicles, syringes, trained personnel, communication materials would have eliminated Rinderpest if the vaccine batches used were of poor quality. The secondary and independent level of quality control assessment assured by PANVAC played a major role for this success and led, at the same time, to a sustained improvement in the quality of vaccines against Rinderpest and Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia produced in Africa"*.

12. The impact of PANVAC activities in control of vaccine quality can be measured by the following:

- i. PANVAC annually tests more than 1 billion vaccine doses (1,000,000,000) for the protection of 1 billion animals (all species). It is estimated that 90% of all meat consumed in Africa is likely to be from livestock treated with vaccines certified by PANVAC; and
- ii. the pass rate of vaccines tested by PANVAC has increased from 20% in the eighties to around 90% presently.

13. In recognition of the role of PANVAC in the certification of veterinary vaccines, it was designated as a World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Collaborating Centre and FAO Reference Centre for Quality Control of Vaccines.

Strengthen the capacities of African laboratories

14. PANVAC has trained over 1,000 Veterinarians and Technicians from National Vaccine Production Laboratories in Africa. PANVAC is also providing technical expertise to vaccine producing and diagnostic laboratories.

15. Technical support is also provided to AU Members States for diagnosis and surveillance of animal diseases. PANVAC recently assisted Liberia and Burundi to diagnose the Peste des Petits Ruminants disease, which killed more than 4,000 animals (sheep and goat) in each of these two countries.

Maintaining an Africa free from Rinderpest

16. Following the recommendations from the 8th Conference of the Ministers responsible for Animal Resources held in 2011, in Entebbe (Uganda), for AU Member States to destroy Rinderpest virus strains stored in African laboratories and the handing over of the material deemed necessary to PANVAC for safe storage, PANVAC acquired a Bio-Safety Laboratory Level 3 (BSL3), which was inaugurated in 2011.

17. An inspection of PANVAC facilities was conducted in 2015 by international experts designated by OIE and FAO. Following their recommendations, PANVAC was designated as one of the four Rinderpest holding facilities in the world by FAO and the IOE (the three other Centres are located in Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America). PANVAC is the only Centre in the world certified to hold Rinderpest field and vaccine strains in the same facility.

18. PANVAC has set up a continental vaccine bank that aims at ensuring emergency preparedness to respond to any possible outbreak of Rinderpest and other animal diseases in Africa. This facility has the capacity to store 15 million doses of vaccine. I officially inaugurated the Bank on 31 January 2018, in the presence of the Commissioner in charge of Rural Economy and Agriculture, the Ethiopian Minister of State for Livestock and Fisheries, members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of African vaccine producing laboratories and Directors of Veterinary Services, as well as the Head of FAO Liaison Office to the AU. I also took the opportunity to unveil the Memorial for Rinderpest Eradication.

Development and production of diagnostic reagents

19. A framework for the production and distribution of diagnostic reagents to support surveillance of priority animal diseases in Africa was developed with the participation of Member States. In line with this document, PANVAC has developed various biological reagents and diagnostic tests for distribution to Member States, namely:

- i. diagnostic tests for the Peste des Petits Ruminants disease, which is the one of the most devastating diseases of small ruminants (sheep and goats). This test was validated according to international standard and will contribute to reduce, by 75%, the cost of the diagnosis and surveillance activities of this disease in AU Member States; and
- ii. other diagnostic tests to support the surveillance and control of other diseases in small ruminants (sheep and goat).

Certification of PANVAC in Quality Management System (ISO 9001: 2015)

20. PANVAC has successfully implemented quality management system (ISO 9001:2015) which has been certified by a German quality audit and certification company (DQS) based in Ethiopia. This certification enables PANVAC to continually improve the quality of vaccine quality control services and biological reagent production provided to AU Member States.

IV. CHALLENGES

21. While remarkable gains have been made, PANVAC faces a number of challenges. These need to be addressed in earnest.

Inadequate staff

22. Currently, PANVAC only has 5 regular technical staff and 5 short-term staff supported by partners. Due to the overload of activities, it is necessary to recruit at least 10 additional technical staff to support the activities of PANVAC.

Upgrade Infrastructure

23. The current facilities of PANVAC should be improved in terms of biosafety/biosecurity. There is need to establish a New Standard and Befitting Laboratory Facility. Its total cost is estimated at 10 million dollars.

Need to increase the stock of Continental vaccine bank

24. The current Rinderpest emergency vaccine stock of 1.5 million doses should be increased. Resources need to be mobilized to procure an additional 10 million doses to meet continental demand.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

25. Livestock plays a crucial role in Africa's development and the wellbeing of its people. Against this backdrop, I would like to underline the Commission's commitment to deepen its efforts towards the control of animal diseases on the continent. I commend PANVAC, as well as the Nairobi-based Inter-African Bureau of Animal Resources (IBAR), for their contributions.

26. We can take legitimate pride in the achievements of PANVAC in the discharge of its mandate to provide international independent quality control for all veterinary vaccines produced or imported in Africa. It is one of the four Rinderpest holding facilities certified in the world by FAO and OIE. PANVAC is the only Centre in the world authorized to hold, in the same facility, Rinderpest wild strain and vaccine strains. 90 per cent of meat consumed in Africa is likely to be from livestock treated with vaccines certified by PANVAC. I witnessed by myself the outstanding work of PANVAC when I visited its Headquarters to inaugurate the Continental Veterinary Vaccine Bank and unveil the Memorial for Rinderpest Eradication. Taking PANVAC as a model, FAO and Asian countries are planning to establish a similar vaccine quality control centre to support their programme for the eradication Peste des Petits Ruminants disease.

27. No effort should be spared to provide PANVAC with the resources it needs for the implementation of its mandate. While efforts to reach out to partners to seek further assistance will continue, it is essential that Member States also contribute in whatever way possible to the efforts being spearheaded by PANVAC.

28. I express gratitude to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for its unwavering support to PANVAC and for the close collaboration with Ethiopia's National Veterinary Institute. I also commend international partners providing support to PANVAC, in particular FAO, OIE, the EU, the Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development and the Global Alliance for Veterinary Medicines (GALVmed), as well as France, Japan and Spain.