The role of the veterinary sector in the COVID-19 pandemic responses

**Why did we start?**
- Soon after the emergence of COVID-19, news arose about various contributions of the veterinary sector to the pandemic responses.
- This led us to investigate the full scale of veterinary sector’s contributions during pandemic responses.

**What did we do?**
- We prepared a survey in Microsoft Forms and pre-tested it (n = 5).
- The survey was translated into 10 languages.
- Responses were collected from May to July 2020.
- We asked respondents to:
  - Name three activities in which the veterinary sector contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic responses;
  - Identify ways in which the collaboration between the animal and public health sectors could be improved.
- Data management and descriptive statistics was done in R.
- We used MaxQDA to produce a content analysis of the answers obtained.
- We developed a categorization system a priori.
- This categorization evolved during the analysis and was validated by the authors and three experts at the end of the process.

**How did the veterinary sector help in the pandemic responses?**
- Maintaining animal health and assuring food safety and security during the pandemic; conducting animal health surveillance, outbreak investigations and animal health policy related to COVID-19.
- Testing animals and humans; participating in sampling procedures; development of diagnostics; assessing and validating available tests.
- Raising public awareness; conducting workforce training, and producing professional and scientific communications.
- Dispensing and lending materials (e.g. PPE, surgical equipment), pharmaceuticals, laboratory reagents and facilities.
- Providing expertise and contributing to research in many areas (e.g. epidemiology, virology, modelling, risk assessment, surveillance).
- Providing workforce support (e.g. in clinical or laboratory settings); working in call-centers; contributing to contact tracing and outbreak investigations; helping in risk assessment, surveillance and enforcing control measures.

**Who answered the survey?**
- We obtained answers from 113 countries (n = 1488).
- The majority (71%) of respondents worked in the animal health field.
- Participants from governmental institutions (34%), private industry (32%) and academia (20%) accounted for most responses.

**What were our goals?**
- Document the role of the veterinary sector in COVID-19 responses worldwide.
- Explore the roles and relationships that were formed during the pandemic.
- Identify ways to sustain these relationships and build new ones to deal with future human, animal or One Health crises.

**How can collaboration be strengthened between health sectors?**
- Cross-sectoral contacts must be fostered in «peace-time», namely by developing official structures and joint working groups.
- Communication between sectors must be strengthened, including creating official mechanisms for sharing information.
- Awareness about the competencies of various health disciplines should be raised. One Health should be taught in multiple health fields.
- Funding opportunities for collaborative research should be increased. One Health was suggested as the basis for a common approach to health.

To be better prepared for future threats, there is a need to actively engage the veterinary sector in emergency preparedness plans and training during «peace-time».

**What should you take home from this poster?**
- The veterinary sector played an active role on many fronts during pandemic responses, with collaborations emerging at various levels.
- Participants highlighted the need to strengthen collaborations between the animal and public health sectors during “peace time”.
- The One Health concept was widely advocated, but a common understanding of what such an approach entails should be sought.