

# PLANNING, EXECUTING AND EVALUATING VETCAPS: LESSONS LEARNED IN KARAMOJA, UGANDA

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U.S. Army Civil Affairs units conduct veterinary civic-action projects in order to influence civilians in an area of operations. During a VETCAP, CA units team with military veterinarians to provide or supervise the provision of basic care to herds, farm animals and pets. The Army has incorporated VETCAPS and other civic-action programs, such as medical civic-action and dental civic-action programs into its civil-military relations efforts as far back as the Vietnam conflict.<sup>1</sup> They continue to be a part of military operations in conflict and peacetime.

Conceptually, VETCAPS are simple, but in practice they vary greatly in scale, duration and complexity. For example, in Afghanistan, a CA unit organized VETCAPS in which hundreds of animals were

vaccinated and de-wormed in a single day. By contrast, the VETCAPS supported in Karamoja, Uganda in 2009-2010 by Civil Affairs Team-3 under Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa focused on training local community members to provide basic animal healthcare over the course of several weeks. The Karamoja VETCAP earned praise from its chain of command, U.S. government officials and Ugandan partners for focusing on long-term effects rather than on immediate results. This article examines lessons learned from CAT-3's planning, execution and evaluation of the VETCAP in Karamoja. Since VETCAP doctrine is still being formalized,<sup>2</sup> the experience may provide useful guidelines for units performing similar missions in the future.



**LIFELINE** Local villagers secure a large bull, allowing a Civil Affairs veterinarian, and a local veterinarian (left) to examine the sick animal. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Dawn M. Price

## Considerations for coordinating a VETCAP

The overarching objective of a VETCAP is never solely to treat animals, but rather to influence the civilian population as part of a broader mission. It is critical to keep this in mind from the outset. For example, the mission in Karamoja was to assist the Ugandan People's Defense Force with improving community relations in order to facilitate a small-arms disarmament campaign in the region. If the team had taken the lead role on the VETCAP, the mission would have failed. Rather, the VETCAP had to feature the UPDF leading a project to benefit local communities. In the planning phase, therefore, the UPDF<sup>3</sup> took the lead at as many meetings and planning sessions as possible. While this

approach was sometimes inefficient, seemingly easier ways would not have served mission accomplishment.

Achieving VETCAP objectives can take time; it may take months or years for CA teams to win the trust of the local population or to promote better animal healthcare practices in their area of operations. VETCAPS contribute to long-term goal achievement when their effects are sustainable. For example, a VETCAP may contribute knowledge, training, equipment or some other asset so that the target population will continue to benefit after project completion. In Karamoja, we supplied local civilians with the training and equipment required to establish basic veterinary services in their villages. In addition, the project can help build relationships and develop best practices that will facilitate future CA activities in the area.

Besides thinking long-term, VETCAP planners must also think locally. In Uganda, CA teams in the field and traveling functional specialty teams (consisting of CA and veterinary Soldiers) have executed successful, but markedly different VETCAPS. In 2009, in the volatile Gulu region of northern Uganda, CA Soldiers and Army veterinarians carried out a VETCAP to assist civilians who had been displaced by the conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army. They treated and vaccinated most of the animals in the Internally Displaced Person camps, which gave the VETCAP beneficiaries confidence in their ability to survive with their herds outside of the camps. By early 2010, most people had returned home and the post-war economy was flourishing. Despite the success of this VETCAP, CAT-3 could not replicate this model in Karamoja because conditions were different. A greater number of people raise livestock in Karamoja than in Gulu, so the number of animals was too large for a mass vaccination. Moreover, cattle-raiding is pervasive in Karamoja, so the team had to develop detailed security plans for each treatment site. In short, CAT-3 had to learn what it could from the Gulu VETCAP and make the appropriate changes for the mission in Karamoja.

The only way to learn such variations is to consult with local residents, leaders and relevant organizations and experts. Through consultation, the CA team gathers information that the functional specialty teams will need upon arrival, such as the prevalence of animal diseases, the availability of certain medicines and the preferences and priorities of area residents. By meeting with the district veterinary officer in Moroto, Karamoja, for example, the team learned of a risk that the project could fuel animal theft by creating a pool of animals that had recently received healthcare and were therefore more valuable. As a result, the team developed strategies to mitigate this risk, such as branding animals and treating only animals whose owners kept them in kraals — systems of fences guarded around the clock by the UPDF.

Finally, VETCAP planners must employ effective management practices. This means 1) ensuring an efficient division of labor among all of the military and civilian elements involved, and 2) providing the structure necessary for these elements to communicate and work with one another. When labor is efficiently divided, each task will be executed by the most appropriate person or team, which often requires forward thinking. For example, several days prior to the start of the VETCAP, the veterinary equipment and medicines ordered arrived at the CTA-3 team house. The team did not have sufficient technical knowledge to check and catalogue these supplies, and had it not arranged for a veterinary technician to arrive early to assist with the cataloguing, they would have been unable to accomplish this task.

## Planning phase

A CA team preparing for a VETCAP will need to research local conditions, acquire technical information and solicit expert opinions.



During this phase, the team must:

- Discover outcomes of past VETCAPS in the area
- Learn the views and attitudes of local populace
- Record the composition, population and health conditions of domestic, herd or farm animals
- Identify local veterinary resources and experts
- Consult with experts who can advise on ways to link VETCAP objectives with other important outcomes such as economic development and conflict resolution
- Create a budget and plan for allocating U.S. Government funds
- Search for potential partners
- Survey and plan to incorporate local resources

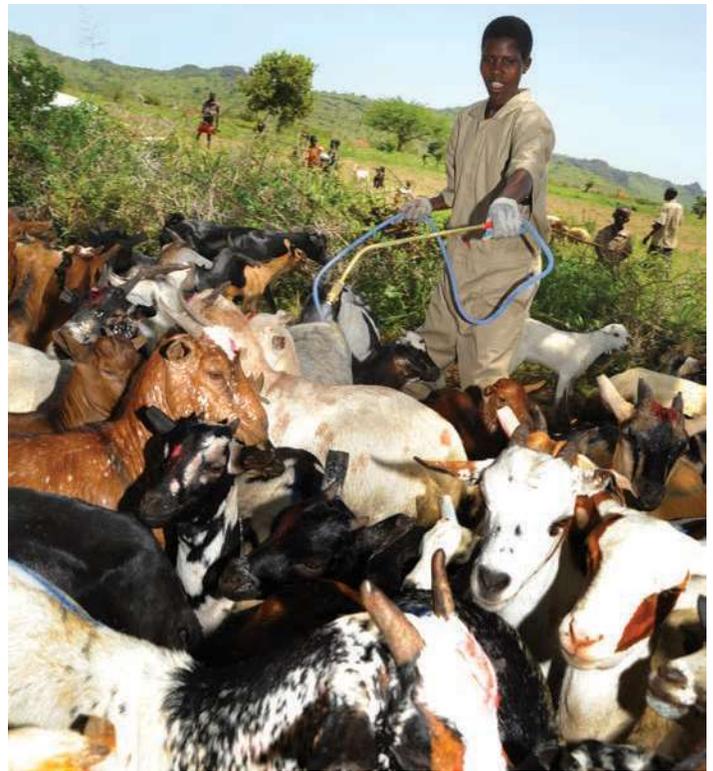
In Karamoja, the team began gathering information by meeting with partners in the local government and the UPDF. Some of these sessions were formalities to gain official approval, but meetings with the DVO proved to be the real start of project planning. The DVO told the team about local animal diseases, gaps in animal healthcare and the non-government organizations and UN agencies working in the area. By starting the consultation process months ahead of time, the team was able to form working relationships with these groups well before the execution stage.

Whenever possible, the UPDF took the lead in meetings. This gave them ownership of the project and experience working with local groups. Potential NGO partners, who sometimes were reluctant to work with military organizations, were on notice from the outset that this was a UPDF project, which helped to establish trust early in the process. It also gave the UPDF a vested interest in providing security guards, organizers and assistants. This visible presence was essential, since the main goal of the VETCAP was to improve civil-military relations by demonstrating UPDF concern for local communities.

CAT-3 also coordinated extensively with the Government of Uganda and the U.S. country team, a process that was complicated by distance — Karamoja is an eight-hour drive from Kampala, the capital city. This differed significantly from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom where interagency coordination occurred within provincial reconstruction teams, which included the interagency and the respective national governments. In Africa, CA teams typically have to go to the capital city to engage the host-nation government and U.S. agencies.

Integrating the country team's area-specific knowledge and project-management experience can make the difference between merely executing projects and achieving desired effects. CAT-3 initially decided to hold the VETCAP in the Kotido District of Karamoja, a remote area where it had yet to plan a project. The regional security officer argued in favor of Moroto District, where the road network, facilities and security situation were better. Although the team had already planned a water project in Moroto, the RSO convinced argued that the factors outweighed the team's preference for distributing projects equally. In retrospect, executing Karamoja's first VETCAP in Kotido would have been a major challenge. In another situation, a U.S. Agency for International Development representative who specialized in working with the private sector recommended that the team survey the available animal healthcare products and services in Karamoja and incorporate them in project execution in order to build demand for veterinary products and services.

The team also benefited from close coordination with Ugandan agencies and institutions in Kampala. The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries oversaw the project at the national level and made sure that it conformed to national-training standards and complemented other government programs. MAAIF special-ordered branding irons to be used during the VETCAP so that cows



**LONG-TERM EFFECTS** The VETCAP focused on training local community members to provide basic animal healthcare over the course of several weeks. Photos by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Dawn M. Price

could be marked as they received treatment. By helping the national government achieve its own goals for animal healthcare and management, the team reinforced U.S. commitment to Uganda in a tangible way. It also leveraged its relationship with Makerere University, which provided four veterinary students to serve as VETCAP trainers and assistants. Since Karamoja is a remote region of the country, the students also enjoyed the opportunity to conduct unique research there.

The team's lack of veterinary knowledge sometimes limited its ability to ask the right questions or to fully comprehend the answers. For this reason, the team arranged a pre-deployment site survey for the functional specialty teams supporting the VETCAP. The PDSS gave supporting military specialists the opportunity to coordinate and discuss technical issues with veterinary store owners, MAAIF officials, the DVO in Karamoja and NGO partners. The PDSS familiarized the functional specialty teams with the situation on the ground and the goals of the VETCAP.

The pivotal event during the PDSS was a VETCAP stakeholders conference. Jointly organized by the CA team and the UPD, the conference brought the key players together in one forum and proved indispensable in reaching consensus on VETCAP design and execution. Moreover, the transparent and consultative manner in which planning occurred encouraged most of the group present to commit its long-term support to the project. In order to continue this cohesive coordination process, CAT-3 established a working group that met twice a month for the three months prior to the start of the VETCAP. The team continued its coordination with the functional specialty teams following the PDSS through weekly conference calls and the maintenance of a synch matrix, which laid out duties and responsibilities, timelines, budgets and generally tracked progress.

The final piece of the planning process involved coordination with leaders in the villages and communities in the Moroto District. After considering timing, traditions and formalities, the project was introduced to local politicians and tribal elders. This gave leaders ownership of the project and the opportunity to contribute to its success. As a result of these efforts, local leaders ensured people did not leave early in the morning during the VETCAP to graze their animals. They also constructed temporary holding pens, called "cattle crushes," that facilitated the vaccination of cows. During these engagements, the team addressed lingering concerns just prior to execution and kept expectation management in mind.

These meetings offered an ideal opportunity to collect baseline information about the community's views, attitudes and living conditions — the things the team hoped to influence through the project. By comparing data from before and after the VETCAP, a CA team can get a sense of whether, and to what degree, the project has accomplished its greater purpose. Ideally, social scientists will be available to help design and implement this kind of survey, but even a rudimentary attempt at measuring the effects (rather than just the outputs) of a project can provide the supported commander with a better idea of what has been accomplished.

## Execution phase

For a CA team, the execution phase of a VETCAP involves facilitating, monitoring and publicizing the project. Facilitation means that the CA team responds to changing needs and new challenges in order to keep the project on track and to ensure mission accomplishment. It may require a hands-on approach or behind the scenes work with other partners. The team provided support by keeping training events on time and by assisting with the delivery of food, water and supplies to the training sites. An efficient division of labor is crucial here and all the players need



**COLLABORATION** Civil Affairs teams provide the resources to facilitate a comprehensive animal health care program in Uganda. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Dawn M. Price

to understand and accept their roles and responsibilities. Thorough and effective planning and coordination empowered individual actors to take the initiative to resolve unanticipated problems (when trainees in the Karamoja requested flashlights and insect repellent to use overnight, the designated pay agent on the functional specialty teams immediately purchased those items without lengthy coordination).

In order to respond effectively to unforeseen challenges, the CA team should proactively monitor the VETCAP, as opposed to waiting for issues to emerge. Nightly meetings were conducted with all the key players, which made it easier to share information, learn and make adjustments. Monitoring the progress of a VETCAP should include such items as keeping track of the number and type of animals receiving treatment. VETCAP objectives should dictate what information to track. The CA team's goal was to highlight the involvement of the UPDF, so it monitored and discussed the publicly visible roles of its military partners.

Publicity can be critical to mission success in a VETCAP. Prior coordination with the host nation, the public affairs officer at the embassy and military PAOs will ensure that a coherent message is communicated through multiple channels. In support of the VETCAP, the PAO at the embassy in Kampala issued a press release to the Ugandan media that provided details on the project. The team also engaged local journalists in Karamoja, providing them with information sheets. Since most people in Uganda get their news from the radio, the team gave interviews on local radio shows during the execution phase that allowed community members to ask questions and voice their opinions.

The team also took photographs and video footage of VETCAP activities, beginning with the stakeholders' conference. These images were helpful for telling the story in U.S. military publications, such as the CJTF-HOA Civil Affairs newsletter and the CJTF-HOA website. In addition, public affairs Soldiers from Djibouti provided professional coverage in military outlets.

## Evaluation Phase

The Evaluation Phase of a VETCAP involves reviewing the project and transferring the lessons learned to the next project or to follow-on teams. Conducting an internal review among CA Soldiers, while necessary, is not sufficient to measure the success of a VETCAP. The other partners in the project will also have valuable insights, feedback and suggestions for future improvements. Holding a final stakeholder's conference is a good way to get everyone involved. It signals to part-

ners that the CA team values their opinions and advice, which can strengthen working relationships.

A critical but often overlooked component of the review process is soliciting the opinions of the project beneficiaries. CA teams should, to the extent possible, conduct baseline surveys of public opinion, collect atmospherics and otherwise make note of local conditions and attitudes throughout the project as an evaluative tool for mission effectiveness. Gaining reliable information about public opinion can be a difficult task that requires sophisticated surveying techniques, however. A CA team should seek the assistance of social-science professionals, such as socio-cultural research and support teams or human-terrain teams, in designing and implementing public-opinion surveys. In the absence of such support, the CA team can learn a lot by simply talking with community members several weeks or months after the VETCAP. Asking local residents whether they remember the VETCAP, what they think about it and what they think about the organizations that carried it out will provide insight into VETCAP effects. Comparing the answers to these questions with data recorded during the planning phase will help assess how a project impacted local attitudes.<sup>4</sup>

After conducting a thorough evaluation, the final task is to disseminate what has been learned to other teams and organizations. Compiling a list of lessons learned is one way to capture this knowledge and make it accessible to others. Another way is to develop briefings for the supported commander, the U.S. Embassy, host nation counterparts and other partners. For other CA teams in theater and follow-on teams, it will be important to provide a robust set of details such as the names and contact information of project partners. For the team's replacements in Karamoja, it prepared a detailed briefing, introduced them to project partners and walked them through the planning and coordination processes and architecture (e.g., stakeholder conferences, synch matrix, etc). Ultimately, it is the responsibility of each team to ensure its peer teams and replacements can build upon and improve what has been accomplished through a VETCAP.

## Conclusion

U.S. Army Civil Affairs Soldiers have been conducting VETCAPS for decades in order to influence civilians in an area of operations. This article has explored some of the lessons learned from CAT-3's experience in Karamoja, Uganda from 2009-2010 and suggested best practices for future VETCAP planners. Whether conducted as part of combat, stability or humanitarian operations, VETCAPS and other civil military action projects will continue to be a core competency of Civil Affairs Soldiers. **SW**

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**comment here**

## Notes

1. Spurgeon, Neal. "The Medical Role in Army Stability Operations." *Military Medicine*, August 1967.
2. "Military veterinarians refocus on stability operations." American Veterinary Medical Association. <http://www.avma.org/onlnews/javma/dec10/101215w.asp> (accessed January 20, 2012).
3. The UPDF calls its Civil Affairs soldiers "CMCC soldiers" because they staff Civil-Military Coordination Centres. CAT-3 partnered with these soldiers.
4. Bradbury, Mark, and Michael Kleinman. *Winning hearts and minds? examining the relationship between aid and security in Kenya*. Medford, Mass.: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2010. (Discussing the difficulty of understanding how attitudes and opinions change as the result of a project when an initial baseline assessment is not made).