

Integrated Control of Neglected Zoonotic Diseases in Africa



Applying the “One Health” Concept

Report of a Joint
WHO/EU/ILRI/DBL/FAO/OIE/AU Meeting

ILRI Headquarters, Nairobi, 13–15 November 2007

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Zoonoses and Veterinary Public Health
Department of Food Safety, Zoonoses, and Foodborne Diseases
Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments

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Preface

Endemic zoonotic diseases such as anthrax, bovine tuberculosis, brucellosis, cysticercosis, echinococcosis (hydatid disease), rabies and zoonotic trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) occur throughout the African continent where conditions for their maintenance and spread exist. These diseases perpetuate poverty by attacking not only people's health but also their livelihoods. Unfortunately, these persistent zoonoses remain neglected in most of the African countries where they are endemic because of lack of information and awareness about the extent of the problem, lack of suitable diagnostic and managerial capacity, and lack of appropriate and sustainable strategies for prevention and control. The result is a false perception that the burden of these diseases and their impact on society are low, such that they neither attract the health resources nor the research needed for their control – effectively putting them in the category of neglected zoonotic diseases (NZDs).

Control of NZDs, by simultaneously saving lives and securing livelihoods, offers a very real and highly cost-effective opportunity for alleviating poverty, especially in remote rural areas and marginalized periurban communities. In many African countries, the veterinary public health infrastructure is poor or nonexistent, generating indecision as to which sector(s) should take responsibility for investigating and controlling NZDs (the veterinary or agricultural sector versus the health sector). This situation has led to control of NZDs falling into the gap between veterinary responsibilities and medical needs. Because NZDs affect both humans and animals, especially where they involve livestock, interventions to control NZDs require concerted action between veterinary, livestock and human health sectors. A comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach is therefore needed to address the major obstacles to control NZDs.

This joint meeting brought together researchers, those working on the control of NZDs and policy-makers from across the African continent to discuss and plan the specific actions needed to implement a regional programme for understanding and controlling NZDs. These actions are detailed in the proceedings of the meeting contained in this report. The results of such a programme will benefit the many communities affected by these diseases.

Successful control of NZDs entails effective leadership and concerted effort as well as technical, financial and political support. The NZD initiative is focusing first on Africa as the continent most affected by these diseases. Together, we should seize the opportunity afforded to make a genuine difference.

The representatives of WHO, EU, ILRI, DBL, FAO, OIE and AU



Acknowledgements

The organizers of the meeting would like to express their sincere thanks to all those who contributed to its success – especially to the participants for their valuable inputs during the plenary and working group sessions.

Particular gratitude is due to Dr Malika Kachani and Dr Sayoki Mfinanga for chairing and co-chairing the meeting, respectively, and to Dr Eric Fèvre and Professor James Mlangwa for serving as rapporteurs. These individuals also provided invaluable assistance by leading and reporting on the discussions and recommendations of the working groups.

The meeting would not have been possible without the excellent day-to-day organization provided by Marion Reverdin at WHO headquarters, by Albert Minyangadou Ngokobi and other staff at the WHO Kenya Country Office in Nairobi, and by Gertrude Ngeleshi, Veyrl Adell, Vivian Awuor and the many other support staff at ILRI. Special thanks go to Dr Alexandra Shaw for suggesting a timely follow-up to the first NZD meeting.

Dr François Meslin, WHO headquarters, convenor of the meeting was assisted by Dr Arve Lee Willingham of the WHO/FAO Collaborating Center for Parasitic Zoonoses at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark with regards to the overall coordination and reporting of the meeting on behalf of the organizing agencies.



Summary

Control of neglected zoonotic diseases (NZDs), by simultaneously saving lives and securing livelihoods, offers an important opportunity for alleviating poverty in remote rural areas and among marginalized periurban communities of poor livestock keepers in Africa and other less developed areas of the world.

The meeting held at the headquarters of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Nairobi, Kenya during 13–15 November 2007 was supported jointly by the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Commission (EU), ILRI, the DBL-Centre for Health Research and Development (DBL), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the African Union (AU). It focused on the need to and opportunities for combating NZDs in Africa as the most affected continent where all of the NZDs occur; and where their burden on society hinders development and has a serious impact on health and agriculture.

The objective of the meeting was to formulate a strategic framework for implementing the action points for combating NZDs that arose from an initial meeting held at WHO in 2005.¹ These actions were to promote a “one health” integrated approach to control of NZDs, to develop plans for advocacy and information, to improve diagnosis and surveillance, to foster research, to build capacity and to strengthen prevention and control activities. A multidisciplinary group of researchers, programme managers and policy-makers from across the African continent was brought together with international experts and representatives of regional and international technical support agencies and organizations to address practical, institutional, political and resource-related issues associated with integrated surveillance, prevention and control of NZDs in Africa.

The meeting appreciated that controlling, preventing and eventually eliminating NZDs would be highly cost effective from a societal point of view, taking into account both the health and agricultural aspects. A plan of action for implementing integrated control of NZDs in Africa is recommended as follows.

- To provide global and regional leadership to promote and coordinate the “one health” integrated approach to control of NZDs through the establishment of an International Scientific Advisory Committee (ISAC) for NZDs.

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