

Transmission Dynamics of African Swine Fever Project Inception Meeting

The Inception Meeting for the 'Transmission Dynamics of African Swine Fever in an endemic setting at the livestock-wildlife Interface' project took place on Thursday, 26th March 2015 in Gulu town at The Doves Nest Hotel (Senior Quarters). The inception meeting brought together District Veterinary Officers from Masindi, Hoima, Buliisa, Nwoya, Apac, Kiryandongo, Gulu, Oyam and Nebbi districts. Farmers will be selected from the sub-counties bordering the Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP) in districts for the project studies. Project staff and those from the College of Natural Sciences (CoNAS) also attended the meeting.

In his remarks opening remarks, Prof. J.Y.T Mugisha, Principal-College of Natural Sciences welcomed all participants on behalf of Makerere University. He noted that the presence of many veterinary professionals was an opportunity to bring many stakeholders together to devise solutions to a common problem. He thanked all the participants for accepting to be part of the project which aims at improving livelihoods and income improvements of households that rear pigs. He said, 'we all are aware of how the war affected the Northern part of Uganda and this project should be seen as work to help rebuild the area and better income as we recover from the war'. He thanked the Wellcome Trust for accepting to fund the research for such an important issue that affects 'walking banks' as pigs are commonly referred to in Uganda. He also thanked the scientists at Centre for Virus Research, University of Glasgow for the support and working with Dr. Masembe, CoNAS looks forward to a fruitful collaboration over the duration of the project.

The Production Officer, Dr. Okidi Ochora of Gulu District as representative of district administration spoke at the meeting and noted that he was privileged to attend this workshop. He reflected over his service in the veterinary services since 1979 and he said that, "the escalating situations of the African Swine Fever (ASF) trends from 1960s to date is worrying." He reiterated that possibly studies like these will be useful in understanding why trends in ASF epidemic are as we see. He appreciated the meeting as very useful and timely. He welcomed participants to Gulu District once again.

The Principal Investigator of the Project, Assoc. Prof. Charles Masembe took the meeting through the work that had been done for ASF over the years. He said, 'We

have been working on ASF for a long time but we have got Wellcome trust support to do more in-depth work in this research and possibly get a solution'. He explained the history of the disease which was first discovered in Kenya in 1921. He noted that if ASF is not controlled and possibly a vaccine not discovered, the pork industry is in danger. Uganda is 3rd pig rearing country in Africa and 1st in E. Africa. Pig rearing is an important income generating industry of many households. He further noted that, 'the Interface between ticks/bush pigs/warhogs/domestic pigs is not clear at present; there may be no direct interaction between all these because no information is available. But we ask ourselves what are the dynamics? Possibly, after 5 years which is the duration of this research project we could be able to explain the dynamics. Our hope is to provide information to farmers, Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries and other researchers. Ms. Esther Kukielka, a PhD student from the University of California, Davis in the United States also attended the meeting. She is undertaking a pilot study on ASF in Nwoya, Oyam and Gulu districts which will feed into Assoc. Prof. Masembe's research project.

After discussions at the inception meeting, several farmers were visited as field excursion and sample collection to start off the research project. The farmers visited are stakeholders and in the study areas for the research project. Each of the groups were tasked with identifying the following in their corresponding districts:

- Sub-counties in each district in the group that are bordering MFNP.
- Animal Health Officers in-charge of those sub-counties
- At least two villages in each of the identified sub-counties.
- Farmer groups in the identified sub-counties involved in pig rearing.

All the given tasks were successfully done except for the DVOs who could not recall the right responses to the questions (DVOs of Masindi and Oyam) promised to send the required information to the project Principal Investigator through e-mail. The above mentioned project is funded by the Wellcome Trust, UK for which Dr. Charles Masembe (Assoc. Professor in the College of National Sciences) as a Principal Investigator together with scientists at the Centre for Virus Research, University of

Glasgow in United Kingdom, worn the prestigious Intermediate Fellowship in Public Health and Tropical Medicine.