



INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR TRYPANOSOMIASIS RESEARCH AND CONTROL (ISCTRC)

29th Biennial Meeting

Press Release

Sleeping sickness one of Africa's most serious development constraints

Luanda, 1 Oct 2007. - The International Scientific Council for Trypanosomiasis Research and Control (ISCTRC) conducts its biennial conference for the 29th time. The week-long conference in Angola's capital brings together scientists from Africa and overseas to discuss new research findings and ways to eradicate the tsetse fly and the associated diseases from the continent.

Dr Modibo Traore, director of the African Union's Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU/IBAR) which is hosting the ISCTRC since its establishment, stressed at the opening that sleeping sickness is one of the most serious development constraints the continent faces today. To eradicate the disease, that can infect both humans and animals but is caused by different parasites, IBAR is determined to establish a strategic plan in which a database on disease information will play a central role.

Dr Francis Oloo, the ISCTRC secretary aims to develop the solid database of countries as a baseline from which a five year action plan can be formulated and entry points for donors identified. Oloo says, "It is the commitment that makes the differences, not only money. You need to be determined and hard working for a longer time to find and eliminate all the flies."

As Her Excellency, the AU commissioner for rural economy and agriculture, madam Rosebud Kurwijila pointed out there are a number of countries in Africa that have effective tsetse eradication programmes from which other nations can learn. The African Union recognized the importance to increase awareness on trypanosomiasis and the exchange of knowledge.

The commissioner viewed the attendance of WHO, OIE, FAO, ILRI, ICIPE and other important international health organisations as very encouraging for the endeavours with trypanosomiasis. There was a need to disseminate information on the disease all the way to the end-users who were the stakeholders of the process.

Prof. Raffaele Mattioli, animal health officer in the integrated health management unit of FAO, estimated that animal trypanosomiasis is present in over nine million square kilometres in Africa and accounts for the loss in the livestock and agriculture sector to the value of around USD 4.5 billion per year. For him a comprehensive policy needs to be introduced that

improves the productivity in the livestock sector and that is conducive to the reduction of poverty and food insecurity.

As for human trypanosomiasis, Dr Pere Simarro, chief of the human African trypanosomiasis unit at WHO spoke of three remaining countries with more than 1000 cases per year, namely Angola, DRC and Sudan. Political will expressed at the highest level is needed to overcome the disease as well as cheaper and more efficient diagnostic tools and drugs.

Dr Umar Lawal, livestock specialist of the African Development Bank, which sponsors substantial eradication programmes in six African countries, emphasised the importance of member countries taking ownership of their programmes in order to reach their goals.

Prof. Theophile Josenando was elected executive committee chairperson for the upcoming two years.

About the ISCTRC

The International Scientific Council for Trypanosomiasis Research and Control (ISCTRC) dates back to an international meeting held 1948 in Brazzaville where the fight against tsetse and trypanosomiasis were discussed and the Commission for Technical Cooperation in Africa South of the Sahara (Commission de Coopération Technique en Afrique au Sud du Sahara – CCTA) established. Since then a permanent bureau as well as an international scientific committee meets regularly to examine research and new developments in the control of African sleeping sickness.

Both humans and domestic livestock can be infected by trypanosomiasis and its spreading is not slowed down by existing boundaries. Therefore to effectively control the disease, cooperative measures at international level had to be taken into consideration. These circumstances had first been recognized at the beginning of the 20th century when the great human sleeping sickness epidemic ravaged not only Africa and many international scientists worked together to exchange information through the coordination of the Sleeping Sickness Commission.

The early finding of the trans-boundary nature of tsetse-transmitted trypanosomiasis led to the establishment of the West African Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (WAITR) at Kaduna in 1947 and the East African Trypanosomiasis Research Organization (EATRO) at Tororo in 1948.

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