

# COVID-19: How should the Animal Resources Sector in Africa Respond to its Impact?

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic whose causative agent is SARS-COV-2, with its origin in animals is causing social and economic disruption of unprecedented proportions. Currently, the disease has been reported in 52 out of 54 African Union Member States (MSs) with over 11,400 cases and 574 fatalities. From imposing travel bans to prohibiting mass gatherings and lockdowns, governments across Africa, like elsewhere are increasingly adopting sweeping measures in a bid to curb the spread of the new coronavirus.

Animal resources provide economic values for Africa's population, often serving as a major contributor to food and economic security. Livestock can serve as insurance against risks and as an economic buffer (of income and/or food supply) in African economies (e.g., during droughts). However, their use as a buffer may be impacted by COVID-19. The economic consequences of the pandemic in Africa may well be as significant as its epidemiological impact. This write up identifies some of the impacts of COVID-19 on animal production and animal health and proposes some priority/strategic actions that the African Union Commission (AUC), Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and AU Member States (MSs) need to take into account in the short and medium terms to mitigate the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic in the animal resources sector.

## I. The likely impacts of COVID-19 on animal production and animal health

### ***Effects on animal feed availability, veterinary and veterinary public health services, other production inputs and market access***

- Restricted movement will affect the management of animal enterprises that need daily access to basic inputs such as grazing, feed, water, veterinary and other production supplies. Pastoralists, transhumant livestock keepers and fisher-folk dependent on natural resources are particularly vulnerable to movement restrictions. This will result in negative impacts on production and productivity, increased spoilage, wastage, and post-harvest losses along the animal resources value chains;
- Movement restrictions due to COVID-19 will affect access to and the availability of animal health and welfare, and production services, regulatory/enforcement and surveillance services with concomitant negative impacts on the control of diseases and vermin;
- Policy responses of social distancing, movement restrictions and in some cases total lock down will affect the youth who are key in fishing activities (marine or farmed) and could drastically reduce fishing activities. This would have concomitant effects on fish production and hence regular fish supplies or availability in the markets;
- The covid-19 pandemic comes amidst the impact of other environmental threats such as recurrent climate disasters, diseases epidemics and Desert locust invasions which will further compound vulnerabilities and lead to food insecurity and erosion of animal sector livelihoods;

### ***Effects on animal based livelihoods and employment***

- Disruptions of economic activities in the animal resources value chains from production, marketing and consumptions will lead to layoffs affecting livelihoods for many who depend on animal value chains for a living;
- In the fisheries sector the policy responses to COVID-19 will lead to reduced fishing activity as boat owners (the employers) would inevitably lay off the workers (the fishermen, mainly youth, who go out fishing);
- Fish farm owners would also unavoidably be obliged to lay off workers on the fish farms resulting in massive unemployment and loss of much needed revenue;

### ***Effects on marketing and trade of livestock and livestock products***

- Movement restrictions will also reduce access to markets resulting in losses to animal value chain actors with attendant disincentives for further production, processing and marketing of animals and animal products;
- Huge dependence on imported foods of animal origin will affect availability of the products on African markets due to slow down of industries in developed countries and cut backs on air freight and shipping;

### ***Reduced funding to the animal resources sector***

- In the short-term, reduced funding (public, private sectors) for animal health and production activities is envisaged as more resources will be diverted to cater for COVID-19 prevention and containment and human health needs. Depending on the aftermath of COVID-19, long-term funding for animal health and production may be reduced
- Reduced donor aid and support as the major donor countries are facing possible economic challenges;
- The wide spread economic impact will increase competition for limited public and private sector investment which will further affect the animal resources sector that is already suffering from inadequate funding;

## **2. What AU Member States should do to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the animal sector (Animal production and animal health)**

### ***Awareness on COVID-19 among animal sector stakeholders and consumers***

- Targeted messaging and awareness creation on the prevention and containment of COVID 19 among animal resources sector actors and communities;
- Need for protection of animal health and welfare during and after COVID-19;
- Awareness building of producers, processors and consumers on standards and handling of animal source foods;
- Greater promotion of the food security, nutritive and health values of animal source foods;

### ***Maintain public and private Veterinary, Veterinary Public Health and key animal production services as essential services during the evolving COVID-19 Pandemic***

- Public and private veterinary and key animal production services should remain available in the wake of total or partial lock downs. The service providers should be provided with necessary Personal Protective Equipment;
- Given the regional dimensions of the COVID-19 countries should adopt a regional/continental approach to mitigate the effects of the diseases on the animal source food systems;
- Specific interventions and protocols to facilitate safe movement of animals, animal products and animal feeds and other veterinary inputs such as drugs and vaccines locally and across borders should be put in place;

## ***Safety nets, Stimulus packages for animal resources sector growth and Building Resilience of Livestock Systems***

- Provide social safety nets for animal sector value chain actors to cushion them against the negative impacts of COVID-19 to encourage continued production, care of animals and the processing of animal products;
- A stimulus package for growth of the animal resources value chains and industries to competitively capture domestic, regional and continental market shares previously met through importation;

## ***Urgent call for AUC, RECS and MSs to adopt policies, strategies and legislations on One Health (OH)***

- The COVID-19 has again demonstrated that human and animal health i.e. human health and animal source food systems are intimately linked. The occurrence of COVID-19 should catalyse the institutionalization and implementation of the one-health approach in Africa with greater funding for one-health interventions. An integrated approach towards research, dissemination of knowledge and practice involving animal and public health practitioners should be adopted within the shortest time possible. Countries should also explore the possibility of mobilizing veterinary infrastructure such as veterinary diagnostic laboratories and equipment and personnel to address the shortfall being experienced during the current pandemic and for possible similar scenarios in future;
- Raise greater awareness and appreciation of zoonotic diseases and the need to contain the disease agents within the host animal populations to avoid spill-over to humans.
- Need for urgent development and implementation of regional and national policies, strategies and legislations on One Health/Zoonosis to avert/mitigate future epidemic/pandemics.

### **For more information, contact:**

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