

## AN OUTSTANDING COOPERATION

The GIZ Global Programme Pandemic Prevention and Response, One Health (GP PPOH) in the East African Community (EAC) region cooperates with the GIZ "Support to Pandemic Preparedness (PanPrep) Programme". One of its most important partners for the last years was the EAC Secretariat. For several years, the EAC has followed a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach in the prevention and response to infectious disease outbreaks. Against this background, the collaboration between the GP PPOH and the EAC Secretariat has focused on the establishment of an EAC One Health Coordination Unit, capacity development among an interdisciplinary workforce including operationalizing a regional, rapidly deployable expert pool, strengthening food safety, and the prevention and control of transboundary animal diseases and zoonoses.

ABOUT DR DAVID BALIKOWA

Dr David Balikowa is the Senior Livestock Officer at the East African Community Secretariat based in Arusha, Tanzania since 2017. He is responsible for a diverse portfolio relevant to One Health, including animal health, agriculture and food safety. As the EAC One Health focal point for the agriculture sector, he was among the main contact persons guiding the collaboration with the GIZ programme. Here David Balikowa talks about why transboundary animal and zoonotic diseases are still a high risk, which fruits were born out of the partnership and what kind of challenges he is expecting for the future.

**Dr David Balikowa:** The East African region faces a heightened risk of transmission of transboundary animal diseases (TADs) and zoonoses. While most of the diseases are endemic to the region, the threat of emerging and re-emerging infections may be elevated by the growing cross-border trade among countries that form the East African Community (EAC), referred to as Partner States.

To facilitate free movement of goods, services and people within the region, EAC Partner States signed a Protocol on establishment of the EAC Common Market. While this has tremendous economic benefits owing to the increasing trade among the Partner States, the increase in cross-border trade in livestock and livestock products poses a higher risk of transmission of TADs and zoonoses. In addition, the seasonal migration of wildlife within the transboundary conservation areas, and the frequent cross-border movement of large herds of cattle, sheep and goats by pastoralists in search of water and pastures for their animals also contributes to the heightened risk of transmission of 16 TADs and zoonoses in the region.

With support from our partners, particularly the GIZ Global Programme on Pandemic Prevention and Response, One Health (GP PPOH) and USAID (Kenya and East Africa), the EAC Secretariat has mobilized the Partner States to draft and sign memoranda of understanding to cooperate in tackling this unique challenge as provided for in the treaty for the establishment of the East African Community. Through this support we mainstreamed the One Health approach in the prevention and control of TADs and zoonoses. For instance, we have facilitated the drafting and signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Republic of Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania to collaborate on TADs and zoonoses along the common border.

**i** **Peste des Petits ruminants or Plague of small ruminants (PPR)** is one of the most damaging animal diseases worldwide. It affects small ruminants in almost 70 countries in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia. The highly contagious disease causes annual losses of USD 1.5 to 2 billion and affects more than 330 million of the world's poorest people. Since the global eradication of rinderpest in 2011 was successful, the PPR Global Control and Eradication Strategy (GCES) was launched for the period 2015 - 2030. It is being implemented by the Global Eradication Programme (GEP) in cooperation with regional and sub-regional implementation partners. Since women guard mainly small ruminants, they are the main important ambassadors for One Health measures to address the disease.

**The concerned stakeholders at national level and the border zones appreciate this approach and the support greatly.**

The main challenge is that the priority TADs and zoonoses identified by stakeholders for joint action are many, including for example Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Rift Valley Fever, Ebola



or Rabies, and the local governments in the border districts of Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania do not have enough resources to implement the agreed joint actions. The EAC Secretariat is not able to play an active coordination role owing to budget constraints. Going forward, we plan to mobilize more resources to support the Partner States to continue with the cross-border consultation, planning activities and implementation.

While FMD, PPR and RVF are still a major threat to animal and public health in all the EAC Partner States, a number of hemorrhagic fevers such as Marburg, Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever, and even Ebola Virus Disease constitute a serious threat to public health.

An increased risk of Rift Valley Fever outbreaks in most of the EAC countries is always associated with increased precipitation. Targeted vaccination campaigns against FMD, PPR and RVF have proved to be very beneficial in preventing widespread transmission of the diseases. Surveillance programmes for the hemorrhagic fevers and interventions to reduce the risk of introduction or spread of infection proved to be useful in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Tanzania where outbreaks were reported. The highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in the poultry industry remains a high risk as



**Rift Valley Fever (RVF)** is a viral zoonosis that primarily affects sheep, goats, cattle, camels and antelopes. It is transmitted by mosquitoes and blood feeding flies. The virus was first identified in 1931 in a sheep epidemic on a farm in the Rift Valley of Kenya. In humans, the disease ranges from a mild flu-like illness to severe haemorrhagic fever that can be lethal. When livestock is infected, the disease can cause significant economic losses due to high mortality rates in young animals and waves of abortions in pregnant females. While some human infections have resulted from the bite of infected mosquitoes, most human infections result from contact with uncooked meat or milk of infected animals.

the region continues to attract migratory birds from the northern hemisphere.

The EAC Department of Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development greatly benefitted from the collaboration with the GIZ.

**Call protocol by Wiebke Kobel and Liva Haensel.**

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Several activities, including the EAC strategy for transboundary animal disease control and guidelines for regional coordination, were completed with strong support from GIZ. Our collaboration helped overcome operational challenges that limited access to resources for implementing the department's planned activities.

**Dr. David Balikowa**

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