

East African Community Headquarters, Arusha, Tanzania, 1 July 2009: The East African Community Secretariat and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), an international research institute with its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya have signed and exchanged a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that aims to establish a long-term relationship for purposes of exploiting their complementarities in research knowledge generation and its application to further their respective missions.

The MoU, signed by the Secretary General of the East African Community, Ambassador Juma Volter Mwapachu on behalf of the East African Community, and Mr. Carlos Sere, the Regional Representative, on behalf of the International Livestock Research Institute, spells out clearly areas of cooperation between the EAC Secretariat and ILRI.

In particular, ILRI and EAC are to explore possibilities of collaborating in research and its application based on the following ILRI's research competence areas; Targeting and Innovation; People, Livestock and Environment; Expanding Market Opportunities; Biotechnology; and lastly Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System.

According to the MoU, each Party shall provide such staff support, institutional services and materials as may be deemed necessary for the implementation and achievement of the Main Objective of the MoU. The MoU carries no financial commitment on either Party.

The signing of the MoU comes at a time when the Partner States are putting in place several initiatives to harmonize their policies and programmes on livestock and fisheries resources within the region.

According to the EAC Senior Livestock and Fisheries officer, Mr. Timothy Wesonga, the EAC Livestock Division has initiated a number of activities aimed at enhancing livestock production, productivity, marketing and trade for increased incomes.

In addition to the bid to harmonize regional livestock policies, the EAC is working on utilization and conservation of farm animal genetic resources, livestock marketing and trade issues, pastoralism and drylands development amongst others.

To ensure smooth livestock trading, the EAC has already developed Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) measures and procedures for animals, fish and fisheries.

Further, the EAC Secretariat has put in place various structures to advise and guide the prevention and control of transboundary animal diseases. These include the EAC Regional Steering and Technical committees on transboundary animal diseases. “It is due to the importance of livestock trade, human and animal welfare that the EAC has given a lot of emphasis to the control and prevention of transboundary animal diseases”, asserted Mr. Wesonga.

The Livestock sector at the EAC works closely with the human health sector and other stakeholders in the control of transboundary animal diseases. The EAC has an ongoing project funded by the European Union to prepare the EAC region to respond to avian influenza in the event of an outbreak. The project objective is to contribute to the socio-economic welfare and public health in the EAC by minimizing the impact of Avian Influenza (AI).

In addition, EAC Secretariat is making initiatives to harmonize the regional fisheries policies in liaison with LVFO and LVBC which are EAC institutions. Proposals have been prepared under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) on development and management of marine fish and fisheries and promotion of aquaculture.

This is meant to reduce fishing pressure on the inland water bodies especially the Lake Victoria. Of late the inland water bodies have come under intense fishing pressure, resulting into reduced catches and fishing of juveniles. This is not sustainable and hence the EAC initiatives to reduce fishing pressure on the inland water bodies by promoting aquaculture and utilizing coastal marine fish and fisheries resources.

Closer collaboration and partnering of EAC and ILRI is going to assist the region make informed decisions for the faster development of the EAC livestock industry.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR EDITORS ON ILRI's AREAS OF RESEARCH COMPETENCE

1. Targeting and Innovation. This theme focuses on how investments in livestock research and development can have major impacts on poverty reduction and economic growth in ways that are socially equitable and ecologically sound. This area addresses questions of where and by what means livestock can make a major contribution to alleviating poverty. Key outputs from this research area include:

(i) Driving forces of livestock system evolution and alternative scenarios of livestock systems development identified, consequences determined, and results documented and made available to development partners;

(ii) Improved understanding of poverty processes and livelihood strategies, strengthened research-policy linkages, information sharing and dissemination of knowledge to development partners; and

(iii) Better information and knowledge made available to development partners on interventions and investment opportunities and their impacts on the livelihoods and assets of poor livestock keepers and the environment

2. People Livestock and Environment: Livestock provide an important entry point into protecting or improving agriculture, environmental sustainability and human health and nutrition. This research project focuses on enhancing the role of livestock in contributing to the sustainable livelihoods of poor households, in particular the natural resource and human health assets.

The approach hones in on five major areas of opportunity and, recognizing that livestock are always part of a system within each of these areas, concentrates on major hotspots in terms of agricultural system and geographic region. This is intended to facilitate the development and use of integrated, holistic options germane to the needs of end users and the wider range of stakeholders in these existing and emerging systems across the world.

Research activities are organized in five operating projects. Two of the operating projects have a systems approach addressing areas of integrated natural resource management. Key outputs from this research area include:

(i) Livestock-related options such as feed sourcing, watering practices, grazing and animal waste management strategies for improved use and conservation of water and soil are available for adoption by institutions and livestock keepers

(ii) Policy makers, national and community organizations and household members use improved information, strategies, and processes to develop better policies, innovate new solutions, and strengthen their capacity to improve livelihoods and land management in smallholder livestock systems

(iii) Strategies to reduce health risks and improve nutritional benefits associated with livestock keeping designed and applied to improve human health and well-being

(iv) Fodder constraints facing resource poor crop-livestock farmers are alleviated to improve livelihoods

(v) Forage diversity saved, studied and used to contribute to agricultural sustainability of smallholder farming systems

3. The Market Opportunities: This theme works to improve opportunities for poor livestock keepers to access markets for their livestock products. Research in this theme is implemented under a joint program on Livestock Market Opportunities with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Marketing of livestock and livestock products has long been an essential pathway for income generation for the poor.

Livestock markets in the developing world are growing rapidly as consumer demand for livestock products increases due to population, income and urban growth and changing patterns of food consumption in urban areas.

These trends provide real opportunities—but also significant challenges—for participation of the poor, who often face barriers such as inappropriate policies, lack of access to appropriate technologies and low capacity to comply with international quality and safety standards required by the integration of national and world markets and evolving regulatory environments.

Smallholder livestock farmers also need to remain competitive with large-scale enterprises. The theme's research spans the entire supply chain from production, procurement, distribution, processing to sale in national, regional and world export markets. We seek to provide appropriate technical, policy and institutional options that will enable the poor—especially women and other marginalized groups—to participate more effectively in remunerative livestock markets. Expected outputs of this theme are:

(i) Improved technologies, institutions and policies that increase the ability of smallholder livestock producers to sustain and expand viable livestock enterprises.

(ii) Improved policies and market institutions that serve small-scale, poor and disadvantaged producers, market agents and consumers in the context of rising demand for reliable quality, food safety and increased convenience.

(iii) Better strategies and policies for animal disease control to improve access to national and international markets by poor livestock producers and their countries.

4. Biotechnology. This research theme builds on ILRI's collaborative advantage in the field of biosciences to engage with a wide range of partners to develop new products and tools specifically aimed to mitigate threats to the assets of the poor that other suppliers are unlikely to consider.

The products of such research may also frequently improve livestock productivity. In selecting this focus ILRI recognizes that securing assets, and the related goals of achieving food and nutritional security, are of particular concern to women and their children, and this therefore is likely to be an effective route to reducing family poverty. In the field of animal health, research seeks to develop appropriate diagnostics to help identify disease threats and develop specific vaccines.

For genetics and genomics, this research theme will include identifying and using genetic adaptations such as disease resistance and developing appropriate marker technologies to facilitate delivery of genetic improvement into farmers' herds/flocks. In the field of animal feeds research, genetic adaptations will be used to increase the quality of feeds. ILRI will ensure protection of intellectual property rights and compliance to the best of international standards.

Outputs of this theme include:

- (i) New/improved vaccines and diagnostic tools developed for priority diseases

- (ii) Phenotypic and genetic (neutral and functional) diversity in Animal Genetic Resources characterized, quantified and mapped to inform livestock conservation and utilization

- (iii) Breeding and conservation programmes established to enhance productivity and adaptation of livestock suitable for resource poor farmers in the tropical developing world

- (iv) Expertise and capacity of NARS and other strategic partners to undertake research and development utilizing traditional and advanced biotechnologies in animal health and genetics enhanced through biotech research and training

5. Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS): This is an information and knowledge management initiative to promote and support effective and sustainable agricultural and rural development strategies across Africa. ReSAKSS-ECA, based at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Nairobi, Kenya has a main goal of empowering policy makers, researchers, civil society, private sector, development partners and beneficiary communities with information and knowledge to support the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and impact assessment of agricultural and rural development strategies. ReSAKSS-ECA intends to achieve this overall goal by developing a wide range of collaborative networks within COMESA of both users and suppliers of knowledge and research products. The focus is to work with partners towards the following objectives:

- (i) identifying growth and investment options aimed at achieving national, CAADP and MDG development targets

- (ii) supporting COMESA in the implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) by providing analytical support and monitoring of key development indicators in the region

(iii) supporting COMESA member countries in CAADP roundtable discussions and in the formation of SAKSS nodes at country level to support the implementation of national agricultural and rural development programs.