

ASF-RESIST RESEARCH ACTION LAUNCHED

Early this year, the African Union, supported by the European Union awarded a research grant of USD 1,249,988 to a consortium of scientists led by the College of Natural Sciences (CoNAS) to implement a research action aimed at ‘Developing innovative and sustainable approaches to prevent the spread of African Swine Fever (ASF) in Africa (ASF-RESIST)’. The research was launched on 26th June 2018 by Prof. Mukadasi Buyinza, Director Research and Graduate Training, who represented the Vice Chancellor, Makerere University at the inception meeting held at Metropole Hotel in Kampala, Uganda.

The function was attended by scientists from partner institutions together with stakeholders from government ministries, local governments, Pig farmers, veterinarians, graduate students, academia, researchers and traders in the pork and pig industry in Uganda.

In his welcome remarks to the participants, Associate Professor Charles Masembe from the Department of Zoology, Entomology and Fisheries Sciences as Principal Investigator said, ‘the implementation period is 3 years (2018-2021) in Uganda, Nigeria, and United Kingdom’. He gave the genesis of the action, and how it fits into the UN’s SDGs (hunger, poverty, collaboration and others), Agenda 2063, STISA2024, CAADP, NEPAD and the African Union objectives. He highlighted the research action objectives as: to determine the phenotypic and genotypic features of pigs that survive ASF outbreaks; to develop a community-based participatory biosecurity approach to control ASF outbreaks; to evaluate ASF rapid diagnostics for use in resource constrained settings; and to determine the full genome characteristics of circulating ASFV strains. CoNAS will work in partnership with the MRC - University of Glasgow, Centre for Virus Research – Scotland, UK; the National Veterinary Research Institute, Nigeria; BecA-ILRI Hub – Kenya; National Veterinary Institute – Sweden and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). Charles emphasized that the aforementioned UN and Africa goals stress the importance of using evidence-based research & innovations to help our populations in solving their challenges like poverty, hunger, health; and all can be achieved through global partnerships. Indeed scientists are key players as professionals to support nations and Africa as a continent to realize its aspirations as defined in the various policy and strategy documents.

Prof. Buyinza in his speech to launch the research action welcomed the scientists from the partner institutions and congratulated the team for winning the highly competitive research grant to tackle ASF which is a major threat to the pig industry. He noted that the trans-boundary nature of the disease denotes it as a major challenge to global food security and household incomes. Prof Buyinza said, ‘it is exciting to see that scientists are realizing the need to take research to the real players (farmers, communities and policy makers)’. Interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary partnerships are major drivers to take this forward as has been shown by the planned initiatives of the ASF-RESIST action, humanities and sciences working together gives me great pleasure he said. He encouraged the team to disseminate the results of this research, otherwise it will remain a ‘no work accomplished’ situation.

Following the launch by Prof. Buyinza, the meeting went on to plan for implementation. Details of the inception meeting will be shared.