

HEALTHY FUTURES



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Health, environmental change and adaptive capacity; mapping, examining & anticipating future risks of water-related vector-borne diseases in eastern Africa

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Meeting report



**Fourth Meeting of Expert Review Panel,
ILRI,
Nairobi, Kenya,
February 28th 2014**

**Report on Fourth Expert Review
Panel Meeting**

Introduction

HEALTHY FUTURES (Health, environmental change and adaptive capacity: mapping, examining and anticipating future risks of water-related vector-borne diseases in Eastern Africa) aims to improve the anticipation of environmental change-driven variations in future outbreaks and transmission behaviour of three water-related, high-impact vector-borne diseases (VBDs). The main focus of the project, which is currently in its fourth and final year of implementation, is on the construction of disease risk mapping system for three the three VBDs, malaria, Rift Valley Fever and schistosomiasis, in Eastern Africa, taking into account environmental/climatic trends and changes in socio-economic conditions to predict future risk.

The Fourth Expert Review Panel (ERP) meeting was originally scheduled to take place in month 39 (March 2014). However, as was the case with previous ERP meetings held in Arusha and Trieste respectively, the meeting was rescheduled in order to facilitate interaction with participants in attendance at the coinciding partners' meeting. Therefore the fourth ERP meeting took place on 28th February, proceeding the partners' meeting which took place on the 26th and 27th February 2014. Both the Partners and ERP meetings took place at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Nairobi, Kenya with external reviewers participating in both meetings.

The overall aim of the ERP meetings has been to strengthen relationships with relevant stakeholders through promoting synergies, networking, coordinating and collaborating with other climate and healthy-related projects - be they EU FP7 funded projects or not – and with researchers internationally and regionally. The ERP also provides oversight, evaluates and reviews results, assures quality control, and provides guidance on next steps and use of best practices including highest compliance with ethical guidelines. During the final ERP meeting held in Nairobi, the primary goal was to review the results achieved from a scientific perspective, to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the research approaches, experiences and findings and to make recommendations for future research involving Africa-Europe collaboration on environment and health related matters. More specifically the ERP review each work package and provide advice and guidance to the work package leaders and management team. Observations and recommendation formulated during the meeting are presented below.

Meeting report:

The list of attendees to the meeting is as follows.

Attendees:

David Taylor, Professor, National University of Singapore, Singapore (NUS)
Laragh Larsen, Doctor, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland (TCD)
Theophile Niyonzima, Doctor, National University of Rwanda, Rwanda (NUR)
Mark Booth, Doctor, University of Durham, United Kingdom (UDUR)
Madeleine Thomson, Senior Research Scientist (Climate Information for Public Health), Africa Program, International Research Institute for Climate and Society, Columbia Earth Institute
Stefan Kienberger, Doctor, Paris-Lodron-Universität Salzburg, Austria (PLUS)
John Malone, Professor, School of Veterinary Medicine, Baton Rouge, LA, USA
Brian Otiende, Climate Change Coordinator, East African Community (EAC)
Ciara Egan, Project Officer, AquaTT, Ireland

The following is the list of recommendations and requirements per work package proposed by the Expert Review Panel (ERP) members as outcomes of the 4th ERP meeting.

WP3: Environment-disease transmission relationships & modelling

The ERP expressed a high level of concern regarding TRAC-Plus' involvement in HEALTHY FUTURES, in particular how the work being carried out by TRAC-Plus fitted with the aims and deliverables of WP3 and TRAC-Plus's reporting of this work, including financial reporting.

Recommended action

The ERP recommend that TRAC-Plus, as the Kigali-based partner in HEALTHY FUTURES, become much more involved in helping to organise the conference supported by HEALTHY FUTURES, entitled "Climate change and Vector Borne Diseases: Past, Present and Futures", which will be held in Kigali from the 18 - 20 November 2014. The ERP also recommends that a proportion of the funds already allocated to TRAC-Plus be used to pay for the conference, in terms of paying for the venue in Kigali and covering the travel and accommodation costs of some invited speakers. This will ensure funds previously allocated to TRAC Plus will be used to benefit HEALTHY FUTURES.

Scientific Coordinator, David Taylor (NUS), will contact the EC Desk Officer, Sofie Nørager, to investigate the feasibility of this recommendation. Following this, David Taylor will contact Corine Karema (TRAC Plus) and inform her of the requirement for TRAC Plus to redirect funds to the conference organisation.

WP4: Disease risk and vulnerability mapping

The main concerns of the ERP in relation to WP4 were the delays associated with the registration process of WP4 PhD student, Jean-Pierre Bizimana at National University of Rwanda (NUR). The ERP questioned whether the necessary requirements to complete a PhD at NUR are clearly stated to ensure Jean-Pierre can adequately submit his PhD under the required timeframe.

Recommended action

It is recommended by the ERP that the PhD registration process at NUR is clarified in order to prevent such delays for future PhD students. It is also recommended by the ERP that the regulations and requirements necessary to complete a PhD at NUR are clearly identified and listed in order to allow Jean-Pierre to adequately submit his PhD before the end of the project.

Theophile Niyonzima (NUR) is required to obtain information on the PhD registration process, regulations and the final requirements necessary to complete a PhD at NUR, by Friday, 7th March, 2014.

WP5: Adaptation and support tools: Development of decision support tools

The ERP expressed concern that the ADx decision support tool (DST) being developed and assessed within WP5 was unlikely to meet the needs of HEALTHY FUTURES in the near future. The ERP also was disappointed with the outcomes of the first engagement stakeholder meeting.

Recommended action

The ERP recommends that HEALTHY FUTURES disengages with ADx at least for the remainder of the project. Possibly at a later stage - i.e. post current funding period of HEALTHY FUTURES, ADx could be investigated again as an appropriate tool, though here the drive (e.g. in the form of initiating an application for funds etc.) is probably best coming from SEI Oxford to ensure full engagement with the information upon which future decisions regarding adaptation might be made.

WP5 leader, Stacey Noel, is required to work with the HEALTHY FUTURES management team to investigate whether funds that might have been allocated to further development/implementation of ADx could be reallocated to enable Dr. Jeff Mariner to be more actively involved in HEALTHY FUTURES over the last few months of the project and to ensure a more successful second engagement workshop. The latter should include input from those responsible for generating spatial data in the project (e.g. one of those working on disease modelling). Given the shortage of time this needs to be done with some urgency to enable a successful outcome to WP5 and the project more broadly and certainly well in advance of the second engagement workshop.

The ERP also recommended investigating the possibility of further developing the 'Risk and Vulnerability Atlas' produced by PLUS, as a means to disseminate and present different modelling outputs to stakeholders. The atlas would be used in addition to the ten page decision support document that will be developed for each disease. Stefan Kienberger (PLUS) is required to investigate the feasibility of further developing the atlas with regards to the availability of human and financial resources. The deadline to investigate available resources: 28th March, 2014.

WP6: Stakeholder engagement and empowerment through sharing of knowledge and training

The ERP expressed concern over the organisation of the international conference "Climate change and Vector Borne Diseases: Past, Present and Futures" supported by HEALTHY FUTURES. Currently the promotion and organisation of the conference has taken quite a passive approach. The effectiveness of the local organising committee was questioned by the ERP.

Recommended action

The ERP recommended that NUR take a more proactive role in the organisation, planning and promoting of the conference in order to ensure its success. Therefore, Theophile Niyonzima (NUR) is required to liaise with the local organising committee to ensure the conference is promoted effectively through updating the conference website, targeting relevant list serves and contacting organisation that may sponsor the conference. Close communication is required between the local organisers, sub-theme champions and other project partners. Theophile Niyonzima must also identify the proportion of conference registration fees that will be allocated to cover the costs of the local organising team and ensure the team are working effectively to organise and promote the conference. The deadline for updating the website: Friday 7th March, 2014.

The ERP also suggested investigating the feasibility of creating a HEALTHY FUTURES 'Research Gate' account whereby a list of publications generated from the project could be displayed. Laragh Larsen (TCD) is required to investigate the possibility of creating such an account for the project and Ciara Egan (AquaTT) is required to add the list of publications to the official HEALTHY FUTURES project website.

Conclusion

Increased synergy between the East African Community (EAC) and HEALTHY FUTURES was evident during this ERP meeting which included the attendance and participation of Mr Brian Otiende, Climate Change Coordinator for the East African Community (EAC). Mr Otiende contributed during the meeting by providing valuable suggestions regarding the challenges facing HEALTHY FUTURES and was impressed with the work that has been completed to date. The meeting was also strengthened with the participation of HEALTHY FUTURES members Dr Mark Booth, University of Durham, United Kingdom (UDUR), Dr Laragh Larsen, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland (TCD) and Dr Stefan Kienberger, Paris-Lodron-Universität Salzburg (PLUS), Austria. As with previous ERP meetings, these partners participated on a voluntarily basis as they are not members of the Expert Review Panel but are members of the Scientific Committee for the project. The ERP benefited from their participation and input during the discussions as they are involved in number of work packages and tasks within the project.

During the meeting, participants scrutinised how the recommendations formulated in Trieste were addressed and reviewed the overall progress and results achieved within the project since the last ERP meeting. Despite on running concerns regarding the involvement of TRAC Plus in WP3 and the implementation of the ADx DST in WP5, the overall observation was that the majority of previous recommendations were adequately incorporated since the last meeting. Through discussions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the research approaches, experiences and findings, the ERP have provided another series of useful recommendations, which if implemented effectively should ensure the smooth running and successful completion of HEALTHY FUTURES as the project nears its end. Recommendations for future research were discussed in relation to the opportunity to further develop and refine the ADx DST under the framework of other funding opportunities beyond the remit of the HEALTHY FUTURES project.

More in depth information of the meeting discussions can be found in the minutes which are available on the project website, <http://www.healthyfutures.eu/>, along with further project information.



4th ERP meeting, Nairobi, Kenya, 28 February 2014 (Picture courtesy of David Taylor).