



PRESS RELEASE

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Prevention is better than cure: a new approach to controlling sleeping sickness in Uganda

Millions of Ugandans will experience a reduced threat from the deadly tsetse-transmitted disease sleeping sickness and their cattle are set to be healthier and more productive - thanks to a series of scientific advances and an innovative partnership approach.

A cluster of research projects, undertaken over a period of 15 years by a team of researchers from Uganda, Zimbabwe and the UK, has provided a series of breakthroughs which have led to a new approach to the control of sleeping sickness in south-eastern Uganda. Now, rather than waiting for human cases to develop and then treating them, the emphasis is on prevention.

Life saving breakthroughs...

The researchers demonstrated that most cases of the acute form of sleeping sickness in people occur when the parasite that causes the disease is transferred from cattle to people by blood-sucking tsetse flies. Cattle carry the parasites in their blood without any ill-effects. In people, however, if left untreated the disease is fatal and the treatment itself is unpleasant and dangerous.

The research team also observed that the vast majority of tsetse took their blood meals from the front legs of cattle. They proved that applying insecticide only to the front legs was almost as effective in controlling tsetse as spraying the whole animal and allowed a huge saving on insecticide use.

These findings led to the development of a new approach to the control of the disease focused on cattle. First, cattle are treated with drugs to eliminate the parasites from their bloodstreams and then the cattle are regularly sprayed with insecticide to control tsetse.

Regularly spraying of cattle's legs and parts of the body where ticks are found, such as the ears and under the tail, was also shown to make cattle healthier and more productive, which is much appreciated by their owners. As a result, a new service industry has emerged in Uganda with teams of private vets providing this service to local cattle owners for a small fee.

Putting research into use...

Rather than simply publishing their findings in a series of articles in the most prestigious scientific journals, the researchers succeeded in putting this new approach to the control of sleeping sickness into widespread use. To achieve this they formed a public-private partnership – Stamp Out Sleeping

Sickness - bringing together the relevant authorities in Uganda, CEVA a veterinary pharmaceutical company, a private philanthropic organization, students and researchers from Edinburgh, Zimbabwe and Uganda, and the local communities. Further scaling-up of the sleeping sickness programme is now possible as a result of support from the Research into Use Programme (RIU), which is funded by the UK's Department for International Development (see editors note).

Editors note

The Stamp Out Sleeping Sickness (SOS) (www.sleepingsickness.org) public-private partnership has been selected by the Research into Use Programme (RIU) as a model for how agricultural research can bring practical benefits to the poor.

RIU (www.researchintouse.com) aims to develop and share lessons on how to enable innovation in the agriculture sector in Africa and South Asia. It was established in 2006 in response to dissatisfaction at the impact achieved by past investments in agricultural research in developing countries.

SOS is part of the RIU *Best Bets* initiative – a £5 million experiment to exploit high-potential research products through investment in partnerships in which the private sector plays a prominent role. Lessons learned from the SOS public-private partnership are expected to help to get more research out of the lab and onto the frontline to reduce poverty and increase food security.

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