



Republic of South Africa

DRAFT INTERVENTION POINTS FOR MINISTER THOKO DIDIZA DURING THE GFFA HIGH-LEVEL DISCUSSIONS: 18-22 JANUARY 2021

INTERVENTION 2 – ONE HEALTH

H.E. Ms Julia Klöckner, German Federal Minister of Food and Agriculture;

FAO Director-General Dr QU Dongyu;

Distinguished Delegation;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you once again for an opportunity to take the floor again, this time on the important aspect of the human health-animal health-food safety interface - One Health.

It is a well-known fact that approximately 70% of human pathogens have their origin from animals. This fact calls for good collaboration amongst the medical, veterinary and the environmental health practitioners which is the basic tenets of a “One Health” approach. A number of major recent epidemics and pandemics, such as, Ebola, SARS and MERS including the current SARS Cov-2 pandemic that is afflicting the whole world and adversely affecting the economies and posing a huge threat to human health and food security, are reminders of the damage viruses that spills over from wildlife can cause. It is important therefore to constantly think of and apply innovative approaches to prevent the spill over of pathogens from wild-life to humans and livestock and from animals to human beings. Similarly, some diseases like Rabies, Rift valley fever are perfect examples and often we do forget that these diseases have a wild-life origin.

In the context of the African continent the Specialised Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment had in its African Union - Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023 already identified a few issues of relevance to this topic that require urgent attention, namely (i) the significant lack of attention and support to wildlife issues; (ii) the lack of a functional One Health Platform at the continental, regional and the Member States levels, and; (iii) the need to enhance its advocacy capacity by building on its success in achieving important targets such as animal disease prevention, control and eradication.

South Africa has established a surveillance programme that routinely samples for circulating viruses in wildlife species of interest (e.g. bats). In our case, the Kruger National Park presents a very good interface area as the majority of the wild life is found in the bigger wild life parks. My department has stationed veterinary staff at the park to specifically monitor animal diseases and movements inside the park and be able to detect any possible interaction with other animals including livestock if it happens. The interactions of animals within the park is significant to monitor transmission of diseases between animals including the inter species transmissions. Some diseases like Anthrax and tuberculosis which are bacterial and not viral are of significance and these are well known zoonoses. Data collection and management are extremely critical for epidemiological assessments and surveillance of different ecosystems and interface of wild and domestic animals. The veterinarians have placed special microchips on some selected animals to monitor their behaviour and interactions with other animals, humans and possible livestock. The data on these interactions is transmitted by satellite to a database for capturing. There is as a result an established surveillance system which is used to detect any possible spill overs from the interactions and appropriate actions are taken should it be necessary.

Accompanied by this is a very good laboratory support and these laboratories, the latest technologies must be applied. Sequencing capacity is necessary to determine the genetic makeup of these viruses and any differences they may show with what is have on record. Highly trained staff is significant for the success of these systems. The veterinarians in the park are linked to the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research of the Agricultural Research Council and the Veterinary Faculty at the University of Pretoria.

We have thus also established a repository, record or bank of all isolated viruses in different parts of the country. For ages up to now, we have been using of animal models to research the potential development through mutations and other viral multiplications of the viruses into viruses of zoonotic importance.

We also ensure that the communities living around the parks are not only sensitized that wild life is dangerous, but that interacting with livestock may carry risks of introducing uncommon conditions to the people. Innovative approaches of extension services are being used to disseminate information and manage this interface.

One Health according to my summation, requires of involved to establish sound policy frameworks to allow for rapid transdisciplinary responses to biosecurity risks.