



## Priorities for researching livestock diseases in Africa

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In past years, most livestock research centered on three pillars: Animal health, animal reproduction and genetics, and animal nutrition. Fewer livestock studies were done on socioeconomics (e.g. market studies) and the environment.

In the field of animal health, ILRI and one of its two predecessors, the International Laboratory for Research on Animal Diseases (ILRAD), concentrated its research on two priority diseases—trypanosomosis and East Coast fever—aiming to produce effective vaccines. Although these goals were not fully achieved, ILRAD then ILRI contributed in improving fundamental knowledge and technologies on these topics and trained many young African scientists in different aspects of those two diseases. Much progress was made in the knowledge of bovine immunology and in establishing trypanosome in-vitro cultures.

Later on, these specific scientific themes were overtaken by attention to socioeconomics, in such a manner that research on trypanosomosis and East Coast fever has been reduced to an absolute minimum. But it is noticeable that ILRI has, in the last 10 years, successfully researched parasite resistance to trypanocidal drugs used to control trypanosomosis in the cotton belt of West Africa, generating very interesting tools to minimize the development of drug resistance.

### Research priorities

After the eradication of rinderpest, parasitic diseases like trypanosomosis remain a priority. Another high-priority disease is contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, mainly for the development of an effective vaccine, in which ILRI and its Biosciences eastern and central Africa initiative are expected to play a major role.

In the near future, ILRI will have to find the right balance between the hard and social sciences, as the number of hard scientists there becomes rarer. And ILRI should find a mechanism by which it could capture research priorities of Africa via regional research organizations such as the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research for Development. It is also important to re-deploy more scientists in West Africa and to stop relying on scientists coming for a few days' missions (a phenomenon now being called 'scientific tourism').

ILRI should also attempt to better integrate its programs into country or regional programs such as the Centre international de recherche-développement sur l'élevage en zone subhumide, the International Trypanotolerance Centre, the Pan African Veterinary Vaccine Center, the Pan African Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Campaign and the Africa Union-Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources.

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*On 9 and 10 November 2011, the ILRI Board of Trustees hosted a 2-day 'liveSTOCK Exchange' to discuss and reflect on livestock research for development.*

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