HEALTHY FUTURES at Forefront of Developing Frameworks to Support the Health Decision-Making Processes in Eastern Africa

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The EU FP7-funded HEALTHY FUTURES project aims to improve anticipation of future environmental (including climate) change effects on three water related, vector borne diseases (VBDs) (malaria, Rift Valley fever (RVF) and schistosomiasis) in eastern Africa. Moreover, the project aims to involve stakeholders (representatives of both governmental and non-governmental human and animal health agencies) in developing Decision Support Frameworks (DSFs) that leverage maximum benefits from improved anticipations of the projected health impacts of future projected environmental changes.

Professor David Taylor, Scientific Coordinator of HEALTHY FUTURES, admits that the most challenging aspect of the project has been ensuring that maximum benefits from the research accrue to those most severely impacted by the health effects of environmental changes in eastern Africa.

Prof Taylor said: “Since the project commenced, HEALTHY FUTURES has strived to enable broad access to scientific findings and model output from the research. This has not always been easy. Engaging with the full range of potential stakeholders, who themselves are often very busy and facing many demands on their attention, in developing scientific evidence- and local knowledge-based DSFs has been a steep learning process for many in the project.”

The dedication of the HEALTHY FUTURES researchers seems to be paying off, however, following the successful launch of the HEALTHY FUTURES Atlas, a publically accessible, online resource that enables the visualisation of changes in the risks of the three target VBDs in eastern Africa as a result of projected environmental changes. The Atlas allows output from state-of-the-art environmental change and dynamic disease models to be interpreted in the context of an assessment of vulnerability to infections for the first time. The Atlas can be accessed directly via: http://zgis186.geo.sbg.ac.at/hf_atlas/; or indirectly via the HEALTHY FUTURES website (www.healthyfutures.eu).
Example of information provided by the HEALTHY FUTURES Atlas –

Social Vulnerability Assessment: Identification of contributing factors for hot spots for place-specific intervention options

The Department of Geoinformatics – Z_GIS of the University of Salzburg in Austria played a major role in developing the Atlas. Prof Taylor said: “The Atlas is a fantastic development, which, in addition to helping to inform forward-looking human and animal health-planning in eastern Africa, will hopefully also become an important educational and research resource in the region and beyond. Dr Stefan Kienberger and his team at Z_GIS, together with other HEALTHY FUTURES researchers who have contributed data and ideas to the development of the Atlas, deserve a huge amount of credit for their efforts. I am confident that HEALTHY FUTURES’ stakeholders will look favourably on the Atlas, and incorporate it into their future planning.”

Early signs are promising. Stakeholders and HEALTHY FUTURES researchers have been meeting together over the last two years to ensure that research outputs from the project are translated into action on the ground. At the most recent of these meetings, held in Kenya, the Atlas was very positively received by representatives of health agencies (both governmental and non-governmental) active in eastern Africa.

Commenting on these promising early signs, Prof Taylor said: “The development of DSFs for the three target VBDs is a crucial part of converting scientific findings from HEALTHY FUTURES into practice. Strong support for the Atlas from our partners in the stakeholder community has been very welcome, and certainly augurs well for coming years. Members of the HEALTHY FUTURES consortium are certainly hopeful that the Atlas, and indeed other state-of-the-art outputs from the project, will be enhanced through additional investment after the current grant from the EC has
finished, and therefore will prove of even greater use to health decision-makers in the region in the future.”

The HEALTHY FUTURES project will finish in December 2014. The final project newsletter, detailing the concluding activities of the project, will be available to download via the project’s website: www.healthyfutures.eu

Notes for Editors

Detailed partner profiles are available on request.

Trinity College Dublin is the coordinator of this project, with AquaTT as the project administrator partner. Prof David Taylor, formerly of Trinity College Dublin and now based at the National University of Singapore, is the Scientific Coordinator of this project. The HEALTHY FUTURES project has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 266327.

Trinity College Dublin (TCD), founded in 1592, is the oldest University in Ireland. TCD now has more than 15,700 students, 3,700 staff and 86,000 alumni, while in 2007-2008 its staff secured more than €70m in research income. TCD is widely recognised for the high quality of its graduates, the international standing of its research and scholarship, and the value it places on contributing to Irish society and the wider world. In the most recent (2009) THES survey of universities internationally, TCD was ranked in the top 50 (43rd) and in the top 15 (13th) universities in the world and in Europe, respectively.

National University of Singapore (NUS) is a leading global university centred in Asia. NUS is currently (2012) ranked in the top 25 universities globally according to the QS ranking of top universities in the world. NUS comprises 16 faculties and schools across three campus locations in Singapore – Kent Ridge, Bukit Timah and Outram. The university provides a broad-based curriculum underscored by multi-disciplinary courses and cross-faculty enrichment. Over 37,000 students from 100 countries further enrich the community with their diverse social and cultural perspectives.

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AquaTT is an international foundation which provides project management and training services to support the sustainable development of Europe’s aquatic resources. AquaTT’s mission is to bridge the knowledge gap between the dynamic R&D environments and the progressive commercial sector. AquaTT supports its target audiences through the provision of support services and through participation in, and coordination of EU projects and initiatives in the area of knowledge management including customised dissemination, education, training and technology transfer.

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