Background to the international action planning workshop on *Taenia solium* cysticercosis/taeniosis with special focus on Eastern and Southern Africa

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Improving the quality of life in rural smallholder communities of developing countries to facilitate poverty alleviation has been a major aim of the Danish Bilateral Programme for Enhancement of Research Capacity in Developing Countries (ENRECA) which was established by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) in 1990. The goals of the ENRECA Programme are to further research of significance for social and economic development, improve capacity for utilising the research findings, and improve the conditions for maintaining and improving the quality of training offered at universities and institutes in the participating developing countries. The Livestock Helminths Research Project in Eastern and Southern Africa (LHRP), initiated in 1991 by the late Professor Peter Nansen and colleagues at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in Denmark, was established with the main objective of strengthening individual and institutional research capacity in helminthology at the veterinary faculties in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The LHRP initially targeted parasitic diseases of large and small ruminants (i.e. cattle, sheep and goats) but as the project has progressed, research on helminthoses affecting the health and production of poultry, pigs and donkeys has also been supported. These livestock species were found to play an increasingly important role in the livelihoods of rural smallholder communities. Surveys conducted in the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region on pig husbandry and management established that pig keeping and pork consumption have increased significantly during the past decade.

A high and increasing prevalence of epilepsy in ESA, without a clear aetiology, and the appearance and increase in cases of porcine cysticercosis...
have been noted in the region. An international workshop on taeniasis and cysticercosis, held in South Africa in 1997, provided the first indication of an emerging problem with *Taenia solium* cysticercosis in the ESA region. The issue was subsequently discussed in 2000 at a Lusaka, Zambia meeting on *Human Helminthoses: Future Research Foci* organized by the University of Zambia and the Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory. Again, the issue of parasitic zoonoses was identified as an emerging and neglected problem in the region. During the Lusaka meeting researchers from LHRP groups and from other institutes in the region presented research results indicating that substantiated *T. solium* cysticercosis is present throughout the region and is increasing as an important constraint to the nutritional and economic well-being of smallholder farming communities as well as a serious public health risk.

Recognising this problem, the scientists conducting research on cysticercosis formed the Cysticercosis Working Group in Eastern and Southern Africa (CWGESAs) in order to facilitate increased awareness of the problem and help promote a coordinated regional approach for research and control of *T. solium*, while making more effective and efficient use of scarce resources. The CWGESAs was established with founding members from the University of Nairobi in Kenya, Makerere University in Uganda, Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania, the University of Zambia, the University of Zimbabwe, Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, the University of Pretoria in South Africa and the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute in South Africa. The establishment of the CWGESAs was done in anticipation that various organizations/disciplines and other countries in the region (e.g. Madagascar, Malawi, Angola, Lesotho, Swaziland) will eventually be represented in the working group as others in the in the health, agriculture, environment, etc. sectors become aware of the problem and involved in activities.

In 2001 the CWGESAs concluded that the evidence concerning the cysticercosis situation in the region urgently needed to be shared with relevant persons at the regional and international levels to instigate interest, will and support for further baseline studies on the situation in both pigs and humans as well as establishing surveillance, prevention and control efforts in ESA. In cooperation with colleagues at the WHO/FAO Collaborating Centre for Parasitic Zoonoses in Denmark, the Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory, and the Danida-funded LHRP in ESA, the CWGESAs organized an international action planning workshop on cysticercosis/taeniosis caused by *T. solium*. Scientists, government authorities, health and veterinary officials as well as community leaders and delegates from international and regional support agencies were brought together in Arusha, Tanzania from 19–22 August 2002 for the 4-day international workshop. The workshop was inaugurated by the Honorable Mr Edward Lowasa, Minister of Water and Livestock Development, United Republic of Tanzania. The Director of the Danish Center for Experimental Parasitology, Dr Darwin Murrell, served as meeting rapporteur and Guest Editor for the publication of the Workshop papers in Acta Tropica.

Over 90 participants from 30 countries representing 6 continents participated in the workshop. Workshop discussions included a review of the status of cysticercosis/taeniosis caused by *T. solium* in different regions of the world with special emphasis on the emerging situation in ESA. Tools available for diagnosis, treatment, prevention and control were presented as well as strategies for mobilising and managing resources needed for research, surveillance, prevention and control of the parasitic disease. Potential linkages and partnerships with ongoing related activities at the local, regional and international level were also discussed and strategies for communicating the problem and its control to different target groups highlighted. An *Action Plan* for a regional programme for research, surveillance and a sustainable control of cysticercosis/taeniosis caused by *T. solium* in ESA was drafted as well as a workshop declaration on the situation and needs. Delegates from endemic African countries decided to form a regional network on the issue utilising the CWGESAs as a coordinating body. Furthermore, delegates from all endemic countries agreed on the need to form a global network to increase aware-
ness and advocacy, and to promote scientific exchange and cooperation in research and control.

The Action Plan arising from the workshop will be very helpful for guiding regional activities to combat *T. solium* cysticercosis/taeniosis in ESA. The approach presented in the workshop proceedings published in this special issue of *Acta Tropica* clearly portrays the increasing global importance of this disease and the need for multidisciplinary, intersectoral initiatives to effectively confront the problem. The CWGESQA is grateful to the following institutes, agencies and organizations that provided the essential funding for holding the workshop:

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