First regional flu symposium held

The first regional influenza symposium was held on October 31, 2013 at the Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala was organized by the National Influenza Centre (NIC) at Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) in close cooperation with Makerere University Walter Reed Project (MUWRP). The objectives of the symposium were:

- To expand awareness of the activities of the influenza surveillance programme
- To share the data that has been generated by the program over a period of seven years
- To discuss how the data generated will be used for the benefit of good health for all Ugandans

UVRI and MUWRP in Uganda and the National Influenza Centre of Kenya Medical Research Institute presented updates on: the burden, occurrence and characterization of viral influenza; salient features and activities of their surveillance programmes and the need for introducing seasonal influenza vaccines. Several poster presentations on influenza were also displayed at the symposium.

Strategic plan revised & released

Led by the Ministry of Health and Uganda National Health Research Organisation (UNHRO), the UVRI reviewed its Strategic Plan of 2009/2014. This process was done with moral and financial support of the International Association of National Public Health Institutions (IANPHI); Public Health England (PHE) and local and global partners. This Plan was realigned to the National Development Plan 2010/11-2014/15, the second National Health Policy (NHP II, 2010), Health Sector Strategic Investment Plan 2010/11-2014/15, UNHRO Strategic Plan 2010/11-2014/15 and functions of public health institutions. The review and development process was highly consultative, participatory and transparent.

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Message from the Director

I welcome you to UVRI’s newsletter.

This issue of UVRI News reflects the continual evolution of UVRI as it aligns its research and services with health needs of the country and the rest of the global research community. In this issue, we look at some of the achievements we made in 2013. For several decades, the Uganda Virus Research Institute has built a reputation as a regional leading research organization on viral and other tropical diseases of public health importance. With great pride, we showcase selected achievements from last year with UVRI consolidating this role over that period—across our landmark developments in the health, science and education sectors.

Our Makerere University/UVRI Infection and Immunology Training Programme (MUII) continues to encourage and support Uganda’s young researchers, giving them hands-on experience through every stage of the investigation process. It’s exciting to note that during the last Open Day organized by MUII, about 70 research groups presented their work to more than 2000 secondary school students, postgraduates, postdoc, undergraduate and all walks of life from the community. MUII continues to train interns to promote exposure to research for undergraduates. Approximately, 300 applications are received annually, of whom unfortunately we take 100.

We are excited to remind our staff about the presence of a communications fellow, Ms. Jennifer Bakyawa. Help her fulfill the primary roles of streamlining communications activities across UVRI and its partners. Streamlining communications through the communications office will directly help to improve UVRI’s visibility in the public. Targeted communications allows us attain our vision of: being a world class centre of excellence in health research. I invite you to peruse this newsletter’s updates to get a sense of the strides UVRI is making in health, capacity building and research activities. We hope that you enjoy this update on UVRI’s progress made last year and throughout the research community in Uganda in collaboration with our on campus partners. Your feedback on this newsletter will be most appreciated as improvement is born out of constructive criticism.

Dr. Edward Katongole-Mbidde
Director, Uganda Virus Research Institute

In Brief …

The UVRI EPI lab was successfully accredited by the World Health Organization team.

- A THRiVE team was at the UVRI Campus to review what UVRI has done and to cement our relationship.

- The Minister of Health for General Duties, Ms. Sarah Kataike Ndoboli visited UVRI to acquaint herself with what the Institute does.

- A team from Public Health England was at UVRI Entebbe Campus to assess community immunity against polio.

- World Bank sent its team to UVRI to assess the progress on site of the extended influenza laboratory.

- British Broadcasting Corporation journalists interviewed scientists on the impact of Medical Research Council science on Africa.

- Dr. Christine Ondoa, State Minister for Health visited UVRI for laboratory and supervision inspection.

- A WHO team visited UVRI to designate nodes of excellence in research.
Linking UVRI’s scientists & media workshop held

A joint training workshop on communicating science was held for scientists and journalists from September 25 to 27, 2013. The workshop is in line with UVRI’s key result area which involves the Institute contributing to the timely translation of research findings into policy formulation. It is also in line with the Communications Fellow’s work plan.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

• To strengthen capacity of journalists and UVRI research scientists to ably and timely communicate health research issues to the public, hence increase UVRI’s visibility

• To promote the regular and timely exchange of relevant research information between UVRI scientists and journalists

• To promote dissemination of information on new research findings to the public health in general and journalists

UVRI’s senior researchers and health reporters from various media houses were able to acquaint with each other but also share perceptions about the other’s work.

The journalists conducted mock media talk shows with scientists, which were played back for the whole team to review the next day. Journalists were required to analyze a research paper and find different story angles from all the parts of the research paper.

Ms. Jennifer Bakyawa in June 2013 started work as a communications fellow at UVRI. Ms. Bakyawa was recruited to operationalise a developed communications strategy. The Fellow is expected to help improve the coordination and harmonisation of communication across all UVRI’s divisions, units and on-campus programs/projects through the central administration of UVRI to the relevant external stakeholders (such as funders, UNHRO, MoH and media).

It is anticipated that the Fellow will contribute to better repackaging its salient research findings and enhance its contribution to knowledge translation for evidence-based health policies and interventions towards socio-economic development.

Ms. Bakyawa is a communications specialist with several years of experience in health research communication. With her background in journalism and science communication, Ms. Bakyawa brings significant skills to support the development of communication at UVRI.
Clients Charter for UVRI launched

The Institute launched on June 28, 2013 its Client Charter. The function was presided over by Dr. Isaac Ezati, Director of Planning and Development, Ministry of Health, who represented the Minister of Health. The Charter spells out UVRI’s clients and stakeholders and its promise to provide feedback to these clients. It brings out UVRI’s commitment to becoming a world class centre of excellence in health research; and proving quality service standards at all levels based on principles of:

- Client focus
- Impartiality
- Team work
- Loyalty
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Creativity and Innovativeness
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Social responsibility
- Professionalism
- Integrity
- Responsiveness
- Selfishness
- Partnership
- Bio security & bio safety.
- It can be accessed at our website www.uvri.go.ug

IAVI– fisherfolk meeting held at Africana Hotel

The UVRI International AIDS Vaccine Initiative convened a key stakeholders’ for a think-tank meeting focusing on the provision of HIV combination prevention to Ugandan fishing communities.

The meeting was held at the beginning of December 2013 at Hotel Africana in Kampala with support from the Uganda AIDS Commission, the Ministry of Health and the Fisheries Department in the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Industry.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- To explore mechanisms of strengthening collaboration, linkages and information sharing between public and private sector organizations and disciplines at all levels
- To agree on key elements in a roadmap towards ensuring increased provision of services to fishing communities in Uganda and
- To agree on key elements in a roadmap towards ensuring increased provision of services to fishing communities in Uganda.

Topics discussed at the meeting included: current knowledge on HIV in Ugandan fishing communities and providing HIV services to fishing communities.
More than 2000 secondary school and university students participated in a science fair organized by the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) in partnership with Makerere University on July 18, 2013.

It aimed to popularise science in Ugandan education institutions and ignite students’ commitment to science for the development of Uganda. The theme of the Open Day is “Science and You”.

“I am most pleased to see so many brilliant young scientists from Uganda at this open day science exhibition. This should inspire many more scientists and motivate them more to further their pursuit of scientific knowledge,” said Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, Guest of Honour at the Open Day on Science.

An intern from the UVRI Clinic had this to say: “I am so privileged to be part of this Clinic team which has been ranked in the second best position from exhibitions displayed. I am now more motivated to pursue a promising career in social sciences…”

The UVRI Training Committee and the School of Graduate Studies provided career guidance and information through presentations and demonstrations. This is the second fair that UVRI organized for the students. The first fair was held on 5 March, 2009 and over 2000 students from 30 schools and two universities attended the event.
Public Health England team visits UVRI

At the invitation of UVRI, a four persons’ team from Public Health England visited the Institute in June 2013 to work with it on its communications plans. The team was invited to contribute to the development of UVRI’s communications plans. During the visit, the team with UVRI’s communications and editorial committee was able to assess opportunities and needs for enhanced and coordinated communications and dissemination of information at UVRI; and guide and advice on a step by step process for establishing an effective communications function.

The PHE team and communications and editorial subcommittee worked with a UVRI recruited communications fellow, Ms. Jennifer Bakyawa to conduct an in depth communications needs assessment.

Strategic plan revised and released

Stakeholders drawn from the Ministry of Health, UNHRO, the seven Heads of Divisions of UVRI and Heads of On-Campus Programmes.

The 2012/2015 Strategic Plan aims to optimally contribute to the attainment of both the health sector goals and the national goals as directed by the UNHRO Act of 2009 and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2010/11-2014/15.

It also arises from the National Health Policy on Health Research 2010/2020 and the National Health Research Strategic Plan 2010/2015. More than a hundred bound copies have been provided to various institutions but the demand is more.

Soft copies can be accessed on our website www.uvri.go.ug
two days mentorship workshop in scientific writing was held in April with aims of: evaluating progress in scientific writing and publication among mentor-mentee pairs; identifying emerging challenges in the past year and together discuss practical solutions; and encouraging mentor-mentee pairs presenting their work plans in the next 12 months. As part of the training, participants completed a self-assessment form.

Below are a few articles of the 102 published during 2013:


MRC UK celebrates 100 years

In December the Medical Research Council-UK celebrated 100 years of its existence. The MRC/UVRI Research Unit on AIDS organized a function both at Entebbe and at its field office in Kyamulibwa in early December 2013 to mark this important event.

The function at Entebbe was attended by Ms Pauline Mullin, the Head of Corporate Communications at MRC-UK, the Director General UNHRO Dr. Sam Okware and the UVRI Director Dr Katongole Mbidde. During the function the Director of the MRC/UVRI Prof. Pontiano Kaleebu announced that the Unit had been recently awarded a grant of about 3 million pounds to host a Medical Bioinformatics Centre. The centre will be located at UVRI campus, Entebbe. Some MRC/UVRI current and former staff members like Dr Jane Kengeya Kayondo who have excelled in their careers also gave their testimonies.

The MRC/UVRI Unit will 2014 also celebrate 25 years of its existence, with several achievements to look back on during this period. The MRC focuses on high-impact research and has provided the financial support and scientific expertise behind a number of medical breakthroughs, including the development of penicillin and the discovery of the structure of DNA. Research funded by the MRC has produced 29 Nobel Prize winners to date.

The MRC has 27 Units and three institutes in the UK and one Unit in The Gambia and Uganda. In the past year many units have been integrated into Universities. The MRC-UK was established in 1913 as a Department Committee on TB and later as the Medical Research Committee in June 1913. The committee was formally established as the Medical Research Council in 1920.

The MRC is a publicly funded government agency responsible for coordinating and funding medical research in the United Kingdom under the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The MRC Uganda Director Prof. Pontiano Kaleebu and Ms. Pauline Mullin, the Head of Corporate Communications congratulate Ms. Jackie Kyosimire upon her academic achievements.

Senior staff of MRC Uganda join hands to cut the ceremonial cake.