

**SPEECH BY HON. BETH MUGO; EGH, M.P; MINISTER FOR PUBLIC  
HEALTH AND SANITATION DURING LAUNCH OF THE ZOO NOTIC  
DISEASE (ONE HEALTH) OFFICE; 3<sup>RD</sup> OCTOBER 2012 AT SAROVA  
PANAFRIC, NAIROBI**

**The Minister of Livestock Development,**

**The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation**

**The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Livestock Development**

**The Director of Public Health and Sanitation**

**The Director of Veterinary Services,**

**The Country Representatives, WHO and FAO**

**The Deputy Ambassador of the Unites States**

**Senior Government Officials invited,**

**Members of the Media,**

**Invited Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this important meeting as we launch the Zoonotic Disease Unit (One Health Unit) and the Strategy for Implementing One Health in Kenya. In creating this unit, Kenya is taking a key step in embracing the one health approach to the prevention and control of zoonoses.

Zoonoses are defined as diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans and vice versa. The one health approach is therefore based on the idea that in order to prevent and control zoonotic diseases, there is a need for human and animal health sectors to work together, along with wildlife and environmental experts.

### **Importance of Zoonoses**

Over the last three decades, over 30 new human pathogens have been detected. These pathogens, 75 per cent of which are of animal origin are likely to continue to emerge in the foreseeable future as well. Microbes, like all other living things, are evolving constantly. It is because of this that we have been witnessing an increasing number of apparently new infectious diseases in both animals and humans like the pandemic influenza of 2009.

The vast majority of zoonoses are, however, not prioritized by the human and animal health sectors and are labelled 'neglected'. These diseases are especially endemic in our country. These neglected zoonoses include rabies, anthrax and brucellosis. For example, rabies is a zoonotic disease of public health concern. Although cost effective tools for elimination of rabies and modalities for use of these tools are available, we are yet to eliminate it. The outbreak of pandemic influenza in 2009 in Kenya within 3 months clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of our country to emerging infectious diseases. Importantly, given the close animal-human interface in our country the threat of zoonotic disease is high.

## **Need for collaboration**

We, as the human and animal health sectors, need to work together to plan and prepare ourselves to deal with outbreaks of all potential zoonotic diseases that may affect our country. Working together will ensure that effective and functioning systems are in place for early detection and response to the diseases. Veterinary public health (VPH) is therefore an essential part of public health and includes various types of cooperation that link the health triad comprising people, animals and the environment, and all of its interactions.

The International Health Regulations provide us with a legal framework for this collaboration. The World Health Organization (WHO) revised the International Health Regulations (IHR) in 2005 to provide a new framework for the coordination of events that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern, and for improving the capacity of countries to assess and manage acute public health risks. The IHR guidelines require that unusual disease events, including zoonoses be addressed by effective national surveillance and the establishment of human-animal coordinated response mechanisms at all levels. The IHR guidelines also require the inclusion of veterinary officers and wildlife experts in the national and sub-national public health emergency management committees.

## **Steps towards One Health Approach in Kenya**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I will now highlight the steps my ministry and the Ministry of Livestock Development have taken towards enhancing the One Health approach.

In 2006, a multi-sectoral group of experts formed the National Influenza Task Force in response to the threat of H5N1 influenza. When a severe epidemic of Rift Valley fever (RVF) was reported in Kenya, Somalia, and Tanzania in 2006-2007, resulting in over 1100 confirmed cases in the three countries, Kenya used the National Influenza Task Force to assist in mounting a coordinated response to the epidemic. This more rapid and better coordinated response appeared to result in more effective management of the epidemic that led to less morbidity and mortality in both humans and animals when compared to a similar Rift Valley Fever (RVF) epidemic in 1997-1998.

Using lessons learned from the RVF outbreak, the Task Force recognized the need for a more focused group dedicated to zoonoses that would effectively link human and animal health professionals. The task force's mission was expanded to form the Zoonotic Technical Working Group (ZTWG) which currently meets on a quarterly basis.

Since the formation of the ZTWG, much progress has been made, and support has increased for the surveillance and control of zoonoses in Kenya. For example, Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) guidelines were revised, with input from the ZWTG, to include zoonotic diseases such as brucellosis anthrax, and rabies

The ZTWG saw the need for the formation of a One Health office as a mechanism for collaboration, harnessing technical expertise and working jointly to strengthen the response capacity in the country. Subsequently, the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation and the Ministry of Livestock Development signed a Memorandum of Understanding to form the Zoonotic Disease Unit (ZDU) within the government. The ZDU is therefore the One Health office for both ministries and will operate under the direct guidance and leadership of the ZTWG

Today, as we launch this One Health Unit, I would like to warmly thank the US Government for the financial support towards the construction of the ZDU office at KNH Grounds. We hope that the US Government will continue supporting the ZDU to complete the input from the government.

### **One Health Strategic Plan**

As I conclude, I would like reiterate that the aim of the OH approach is to diminish the threat of emerging infectious diseases and to minimize the impact of endemic zoonoses. In this regard, my ministry and the Ministry of Livestock Development are today also launching the Strategy for Implementing One Health in Kenya. This strategy builds upon and complements existing disease prevention and control programmes and frameworks. It is based upon recognition of the intimate linkages among the human, animal and ecosystem health domains. It proposes an interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral approach to prevention and control of diseases. Pooling resources will lead to economies of scale and enable common problems across systems to be addressed in a targeted manner without duplication.

This One Health strategic plan will be achieved by pursuing three broad approaches. First, to enhance capacity for zoonotic disease prevention and control, particularly in the animal sector that has traditionally been under-resourced. Second, to enhance collaboration among animal health, human health, and environmental sectors in areas of common interest. Finally, to conduct applied research at the human-animal-ecosystem interface so as to fill gaps in the understanding of the burden and mechanisms of transmission of zoonotic diseases in order to better formulate prevention and control strategies for these diseases.

Finally, the creation of the ZDU reflects my ministry's commitment to enhanced collaboration between animal and human health to reduce the burden of zoonotic diseases. Successful implementation of the strategy will contribute significantly to the overall goal of improving public health, food safety and security, and the livelihoods of many Kenyans. It is in this regard that i call upon all of us; development partners, institutions of higher learning, civil society, private sector and the Kenyan community at large to join us in this noble one health initiative.

Thank You and God Bless you.