

SUA lecturer wins prestigious fellowship in public health

By Guardian Reporter

SOKOINE University of Agriculture (SUA) Senior Lecturer Dr. Christopher Kasanga has won the highly competitive and prestigious 'Welcome Trust Intermediate Fellowship' in public health and tropical medicine.

Dr Kasanga, a lecturer of Virology, Molecular Biology and Biotechnology is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Southern African Centre for Infectious Disease Surveillance (SACIDS).

A press statement issued yesterday by the university detailed that, in the next five years, Dr. Kasanga will undertake basic and discovery research on the evolutionary characteristics of foot-and-mouth disease virus (FMDV) strains in Africa that could possibly spark future epidemics in Africa and beyond.

Dr. Kasanga describes the unique significance of the new research as the identification of early genomic changes that are likely to lead to broader antigenic and virulence characteristics, the knowledge

of which could be crucial in defining early interventions, including vaccine strain selection before such changes result in wide-scale epidemics of FMD.

He stresses that the traditional approaches that have been employed to control FMD have proved to be too expensive for poor countries like Tanzania and emphasised the need to depend on scientific innovation to design highly focused and targeted strategies for the control and risk management of FMD.

FMDV is a disease that affects livestock such as cattle, swine, sheep and goats as well as a variety of cloven hoofed wild animals.

Countries like Tanzania and most of the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa where this disease occurs frequently are barred from exporting animals and animal products, such as beef, to the industrialised countries where this disease has been eliminated.

It is explained that, livestock dependent communities, such as Tanzania, are trapped in poverty because despite having the highest number of cattle in the

Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East Africa Community (EAC), the country is unable to export livestock commodities to the lucrative markets of the industrialised countries.

By contrast, a few African countries like Botswana who have managed to keep foot-and-mouth disease under control are able to sell beef to these lucrative markets.

Hence research work by Dr. Kasanga could be the key to opening the shut export doors and significantly boosting trade and economic growth of the country and region.

Commenting, SUA Vice Chancellor Professor Gerald Monela said that Dr. Kasanga is one of the first SUA staff to register as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at this university and went on to encourage faculties to include Postdoctoral Research Fellows in their programmes to boost their research outputs.

"The university will accord him every encouragement and support, including protected time for research and research supervision and we encourage others to follow suit," he said.