

# **Communication with non-academics: Event organised in the Framework of a Doctoral Research on Zoonotic Diseases in Ghana**

## **Summary of my research topic:**

The rate of zoonotic disease<sup>1</sup> emergence has been increasing in the last decades. The view that emerging infections are multi-dimensional problems is highlighted in the literature where zoonosis emergence and transmission are portrayed as combinations of social, politico-economic and environmental processes for which the drivers and responses are still poorly understood. Global health actors at the international level make states accountable for managing infectious and zoonotic diseases for security purposes. Under this framing, the One Health policy narrative was developed jointly by international institutions in charge of animal and human health<sup>1</sup> and promote intensive collaboration between disciplines and governance levels. Unfortunately, our knowledge on how applying One Health to concrete policies to globally coordinate surveillance and research activities is limited to recommendations hardly integrated in national strategies. Vets in tropical developing countries seem to operate across scales and constitute key actors in zoonosis surveillance networks. This study examines the shaping of emerging zoonosis policies as well as practices on the ground in structures at three levels of governance: in Ghana at the local and national level and at the global level to see how vets influence national strategy for emerging zoonoses in the framework of global health. This research attempts to provide evidence to answer the following research question:

How have policy processes and practices around emerging zoonotic diseases been shaped over the last 20 years in Ghana and what roles do veterinarians play in influencing and implementing both national governance strategy and the global health governance framework?

## **Objectives of the event:**

The initial idea came from the expression of a concern from a few participants that researchers from western countries usually come to Ghana but do not share their findings and lose contact with study participants as soon as they leave the country.

The event encompassed two meetings aiming at providing transparency on the research I had been carrying out in the last 7 months in Ghana as well as receiving feedback from study participants (as well as any other interested person). An additional objective was to promote the research beyond the fieldwork so that once the principal investigator (myself) has left Ghana, the communication (conference presentations, articles, thesis paper) around this research can be followed by the participants and benefit the people here in Ghana.

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<sup>1</sup> Infection naturally transmitted between vertebrate animals and humans. Zoonotic agents are bacteria, viruses, fungi or other communicable disease agents (World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/topics/zoonoses/en/> December 2013).



**Figure 1. First meeting at Kumasi Regional Veterinary Office on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2015**

#### **Logistics:**

Two meetings have been organised. The first one took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January at the regional veterinary office of Ashanti in Kumasi and the second one took place at the Veterinary Services Directorate headquarters' office in Accra, the capital city. These were the two main sites of fieldwork.



**Figure 2. Second meeting in Accra, Veterinary Head Office on the 18th February 2015**

For both presentations, I used PowerPoint slides to talk for about 20 minutes and they were followed by around 30 minutes of open discussion with the audience to mention all potential concerns about the research or discuss unclear aspects of the research.

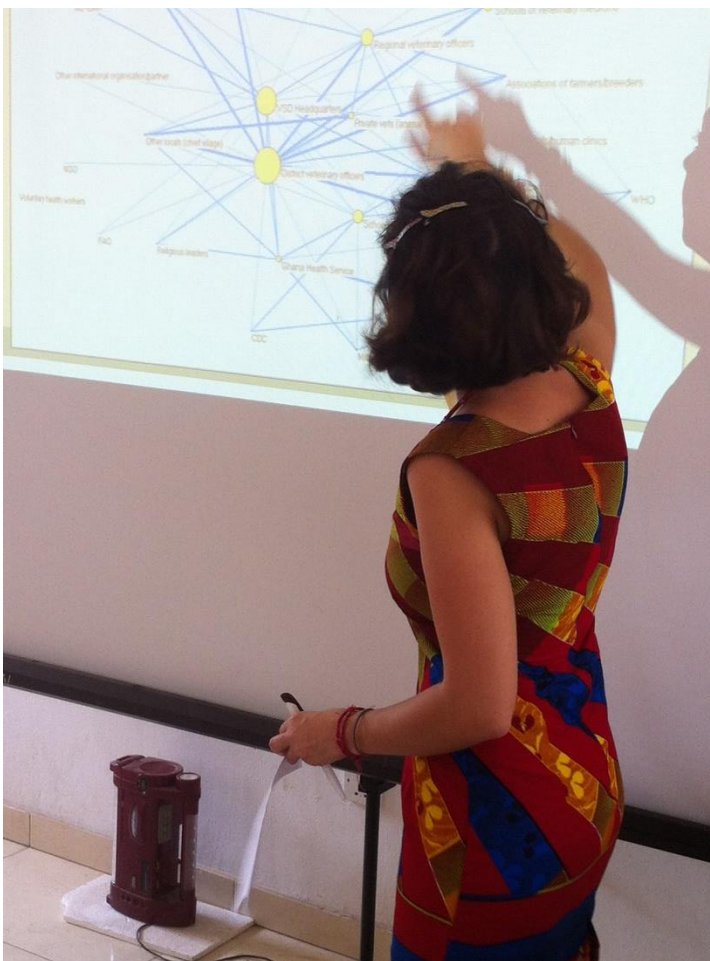
In both meetings, the money provided by the doctoral school was used to provide a lunch to the audience, a very important custom in Ghana at any official meeting. A part of the funding was also used to compensate travel costs for people coming from far away (allowing a satisfactory attendance) and to pay two students to take note of the open discussion after the presentation.

### **Communicating my research to non-academics:**

#### Communicating my approach and methods

The particularity of this research is that it involves a social science approach using ethnographic techniques such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Even though there were a few participants involved in research projects, most people were not familiar with social science approach because of their natural science background (most of them being veterinarians, medical doctors or biologists). Presenting the approach and why the use of such tools for researching issues such as zoonotic diseases was very important for me so the participants and others could be more familiar with this somehow new way of studying health problems and understand the potential impact of such a study. Especially after the first meeting, I realised that I needed to spend more time talking about my approach and methods if I wanted the audience to understand my results, which I did in the second meeting.

#### Communicating on preliminary results



I presented the main ideas for which I collected evidence during my fieldwork from my interview and observation notes as well as the documents I read. A big part of my findings concern local challenges and discussing those represented two different opportunities for me:

- among local actors to triangulate my data and potentially get more information or push the discussion further than I could do during the interviews and observations
- among national actors to carry a message from the local level to the top and get reactions to challenges that might not have been identified at the national level.

**Figure 3. I presented an example of Social Network Analysis to show the importance of district vets in the flow of information on zoonoses among different actors in Ghana.**

### Invite the audience to an open discussion



The study participants took active part in the discussion, from requesting more details concerning my methods to challenging some of the statements made in the presentation of my findings and supporting others. What was really interesting to me was also to observe and take note of the debates generated by my research findings between the participants themselves since I look at how perspectives can differ among people operating at different levels (during the first meeting, district vets would debate with the dean of the veterinary school and the regional director; and during the second meeting, district vets would show different opinions than vets at the headquarters' office).

**Figure 4. One participant (veterinarian at the regional laboratory) reacting to one of my findings.**

### Outcomes of the event

Both meetings were welcomed and successful since about 40 people attended the one in Kumasi and about 25 people attended the one in Accra.

It was also the occasion people who do not usually meet to exchange about common concerns (example of the dean of the veterinary school coming to the regional office and exchanging with district vets) and also for me to meet new key informants (example of Dr Adu with whom I scheduled an interview for the week after the meeting).

Both events created opportunities for other people to communicate information and research findings to the audience. The meeting taking place in Kumasi was also the occasion for the regional vet officers to update the district vets about news coming from the head office, give the vets striking figures concerning rabies cases in the region during the year 2014 and also incite people to be part of veterinary associations which aim at protecting vets' welfare and the promotion of the profession. After my presentation and the discussion on my research at the second meeting in Accra, the vet specialised in wildlife diseases came to present his last research project on Ebola surveillance in bats in Ghana which most of the people in the audience were not aware of. The discussion following was also put in relation to what I presented just before, which was really interesting for me as an observer.

Many people manifested interest in following my research after I leave Ghana and I took note of their contact in order to send them my thesis and potential related publications.

Finally, the media were invited to the first meeting. Journalists from the Ghana news Agency arrived after my presentation unfortunately but the article below comes from the interview of the regional vet director talking mainly about the challenges of the year 2014 (mainly about rabies cases) and the related needs for 2015, which were also discussed in the regard to my research.

## **Veterinary Officers step up anti-rabies campaign**

Kumasi, Feb 3, GNA - Dr. Albert Kofi Kwansah-Filson, Ashanti Regional Director of the Veterinary Services, has called for the intensification of the anti-rabies campaign amidst a surge of reported cases of the disease.

There were 24 rabies cases in the region, last year, compared with the year 2013 figure of 13. At the same time dog bites rose from 400 to 690 during the period.

He described the figures as frightening, and asked that veterinary officers worked with zeal to vaccinate all pets.

He said it was completely unacceptable that anybody should die of rabies related-diseases, because they could be prevented.

Dr Kwansah-Filson was speaking at an end-of-year regional performance review meeting of the service in Kumasi.

He told the officers to show more visibility, and collaborate with the relevant organizations and institutions to promote animal health.

He announced the establishment of 30 district core centres, to run a 24-hour surveillance on disease control cases.

The Regional Director advised that they put their ears on the ground, monitor, evaluate and report emerging cases for support and management.

He also drew attention to the need for them to report unlicensed practitioners to the authorities and the law enforcement agencies for action.

He said the region would embark on a number of training programmes, particularly, basic accounting principles, and other office practices to improve performance.

Dr. Sophie Valeix, a Researcher, University of Sussex, United Kingdom (UK), urged the workers to collaborate and adopt best veterinary practices.

GNA