

## Profile: EU-Africa collaboration

David Taylor, the coordinator of the Healthy Futures project, with two graduate research students from the Department of Biology, Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda, sampling a short core of sediment from Lake Victoria. Sediments are used to determine how environments and climates have changed over a period of time. This information can then be related to previous disease outbreaks. For further information on the Healthy Futures project, David Taylor can be contacted at [taylor@tcd.ie](mailto:taylor@tcd.ie).



## Healthy Futures: an example of international teamwork

Deborah-Fay Ndhlovu

A new project due to be launched next year could make it easier for East African countries to predict and prevent the outbreak of water and vector borne diseases.

The 3.4 million Euro project, which is named Healthy Futures, will be launched by 15 African and European scientists who hope to develop a disease risk map that will highlight the areas which are expected to have outbreaks of water borne diseases in the future.

“Outbreaks of water related, vector borne diseases such as malaria and rift valley fever have complex relationships with environmental conditions. As environmental conditions change, such as through climate change and land use changes then the incidence of disease outbreaks is likely to change.”

“Generally the most marginalised members of society will be at greatest risk of any changes. The project aims to minimise these risks by improving our ability to predict the extent and severity of future outbreaks under different environmental change scenarios,” explained David Taylor, the coordinator of the Healthy Futures project.

Taylor said the information would be useful to prevent the outbreaks of malaria and rift yellow fever.

“Understanding the spatiality of future outbreaks can facilitate a more effective response-by helping to concentrate efforts in the most at risk locations and support preventative measures including disease surveillance,” Taylor, who is a professor of geography at the School of Natural Sciences at the University of Dublin in Ireland, said.

Taylor said the partners hope to work with the East African Community (EAC) to implement the project, which is among the 26 winners of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) Africa Call that is meant to find solutions to Africa’s developmental challenges such as the water and food shortage.

The EAC is the regional intergovernmental organisation for Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

The project has drawn a wide participation from African partners who include Winnie Mitullah, an associate research professor at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Mitullah has a PhD in political sciences and public administration from the University of York in the United Kingdom.

Felicia Akinyemi, the director of the Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing Centre at the National University of Rwanda; Sammy Njenga, a senior research officer for the Centre of Microbiology Research at the Kenya Medical Research Institute; and Noella Umulisa who works for the

ministry of health in Rwanda are among the other African partners who are involved in the project.

Taylor hopes the project will also give each partner an opportunity to develop their skills.

“Healthy Futures seeks to enhance knowledge and skills, and the ability to apply these successfully to research on the environmental change impacts on water related diseases” he said, adding that ownership of the project among its partners is crucial for its success.

“A consortium is at its strongest when all members feel that they have some shared ownership of the research proposed. Consortium members have to give up some of their valuable time to contribute to the proposal writing and working out and agreeing to budgets. They are unlikely to do so if they do not feel ownership of both the process and the outcome,” the geographer said.

He adds his consortium used an “online proposal management system” that each partner used to contribute to the development of the project proposal.

Taylor also offered some advice to scientists who wish to submit applications for the FP7 Europe’s chief funding instrument for research for the period covering 2007 to 2013.

“I would urge scientists to think about the balance of a consortium, not just in terms of its expertise but also the geographic location of consortium partners and be prepared to consult actively with consortium members,” he said.

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