

Enhancing the quality of veterinary medical graduates to meet tomorrow's food security challenge

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Universities are entrusted with the duty of training qualified veterinarians to meet the needs of the job market and society in general, thereby preserving our future. To enhance performance, Nairobi, Makerere and Sokoine Universities sought to identify encountered challenges to achieving this goal and provide some initial solutions. With financial support from the European Union, the institutions conducted pre-university, within university and post-university baseline surveys to determine a number of factors that might impact a new veterinary graduate's career readiness. Survey results indicated that a majority of students in over 30 secondary schools (pre-university survey) have no information on veterinary careers. More than 40% of university students are poorly motivated to learn. Over 60% of the lecturers believe their teaching can influence societal change and desire didactic training. According to the more than 50 employers and collaborators surveyed, new veterinary graduates lack adequate requisite skills. With inspiration from the Department of Science Education at the University of Copenhagen, partners at the three universities listed above have jointly developed new approaches to train veterinarians. Sixteen lecturers completed a trainer-of-trainers' course; a training manual for university lecturers on didactics and student mentorship was developed; and 160 lecturers completed training. The researchers are finalizing several publications that will detail these interventions and their impact. Currently, student participants are being recruited to be trained as peer-student mentors. They will participate in design of pre-university promotional messages and materials related to veterinary medicine and development of social media platforms for exchange of information on learning experiences and career opportunities. Linkages to provide experiential learning are being strengthened in collaboration with 15 industry partners. Best practices emanating from this project will be shared with other relevant higher education institutions in the region. Ultimately, the project will enable universities to produce competent, relevant, high-level human resources within veterinary science to address food security as part of the socioeconomic developmental needs in the East African region.

Keywords: veterinary education – education quality – mentorship – experiential learning