

**BE-TROPLIVE: A BELGIAN PLATFORM ENABLING  
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND CAPACITY  
DEVELOPMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Belgian Platform for Tropical Animal Health and Production (be-troplive) was founded in 2006 and aims to create a multidisciplinary network of Belgian private and academic institutions and individuals acting in this field. The main objective is to exchange information on ongoing research, training and development projects. Knowledge management and its transfer to the target groups are of increasing importance to ensure sustainable livestock production in the tropics. Therefore, one of the primary aims of the platform is to re-enforce the link with the existing alumni networks to stimulate increase in knowledge and joint actions. Several international courses on tropical matters are organised in Belgian universities and institutes. As a consequence of the Bologna agreement, education in the EU has become more flexible and exchange of students more frequent. Therefore, be-troplive can help in linking these different courses, thereby promoting flexibility, sharing of didactic materials, networking, organisation of practical training, and exchange of information on educational methods ... It is expected that the synergies created at a national level will strengthen links with academic institutions in the tropics and other platform initiatives in an open-architecture framework.

**THE BELGIAN PLATFORM FOR TROPICAL ANIMAL  
HEALTH AND PRODUCTION (BE-TROPLIVE)**

Several individuals and Belgian institutions have developed an important expertise in tropical animal health and production. Furthermore, the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation is still supporting programmes in that field, directly, through bilateral projects implemented by the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) or, indirectly,

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through development and research projects implemented by NGO's, universities and specialized institutes. Therefore, several Belgian partners agreed to collaborate within the framework of an informal and multidisciplinary platform, which is open to Belgian private and academic institutions, and individuals involved in tropical animal health and production activities.

After a period of implementation, the activities of be-troplive started effectively in 2006. A website ([www.be-troplive.be](http://www.be-troplive.be)) was launched. An online form allows candidates to register as a member. Currently, there are 83 members and 21 member's associations, among which universities, research institutes, NGO's,... Almost 120 experts attended in November 2006 the first organised Symposium "Strengthening the Livestock services in the tropics".

The objectives of be-troplive are 1° to create a network allowing exchange of information on ongoing research, training and development projects, 2° to stimulate synergy in the field, 3° to increase the national, European and international visibility of the Belgian expertise and 4° to improve the coherence of the Belgian Co-operation in the field of tropical animal health and production. Moreover, it should improve the relations with the agricultural and the medical sector in order to enhance the efficacy of animal health and production activities. In line with the tendencies in international development cooperation, the activities of be-troplive should be in agreement with the different strategies of the target countries and bilateral and international donors, especially with that of the Belgian Development Cooperation.

## **ROLE OF THE PLATFORM IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

### **Knowledge and information**

Knowledge management refers to a range of tools used by organisations to identify, create and distribute knowledge for reuse, awareness, learning and capacity building among organisations. Livestock keepers can gain knowledge by being exposed to information, which may come from various sources, including their own experiences (Garforth *et al.*, 2006).

In Belgium, knowledge on tropical animal health and production is available at different levels and in different disciplines. be-troplive can contribute to put the "body of knowledge" in a specific field together. However, to reach the end-user in the tropics, i.e. the (poor) livestock keeper, this can be done



through projects, extension and alumni. Therefore, a major target group for be-troplive are alumni of postgraduate international courses of Belgian universities or academic institutions. A stronger link with Alumni networks should stimulates increase in knowledge transfer.

### **Alumni networks rationale**

Alumni networks are very common and have both professional and social aims. Alumni are also members of other networks, including professional ones or, obviously, the network of their undergraduate institutions. We can talk about *multiple networking* having a cumulative effect at individual level which extends the value of all networks. Additionally, the involved individuals play a role in connecting institutions, which in turn stimulates multiple collaborations in an *open architecture* framework. The emergence of a worldwide use of internet and the online working of alumni groups boosts this process.

### **ROLE OF THE PLATFORM IN ORGANISATION OF TRAINING**

Three postgraduate international courses organised in Belgian universities and institutes include tropical animal health and/or production matters, each with specific approaches, learning outcomes, teaching language and structure:

- the Master of sciences in Tropical Animal Health at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp (IMTA) alternates English and French and is focusing on disease control and epidemiology. Modules can be attended separately;
- the joint Master "management of vegetable and animal resources in tropical areas" of Gembloux Agricultural University and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Liège is in French and is based on a student-driven-personalised project. In this project a production or a system is developed including agrostology and range management, animal health and reproduction, animal husbandry and genetic improvement, elements of synergy between animal and plant productions and economy;
- the new Master of Rural Development and Nutrition of the Faculty of bioengineering of the University of Ghent is starting in 2007 with a English course offering components of agro-pastoralism and animal production in a broad frame of rural development and food security.

As a consequence of the Bologna agreement, course components are attributed a credit rate using the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).



This eases the comparison and the possibility of creating original learning paths for the students. be-troplive can help in linking these different courses for the benefit of the students from abroad. Several academic members of be-troplive are also participating in more than one of the above mentioned courses, thereby creating an additional asset in sharing of didactic materials and exchange of information on educational methods. This also includes distance learning and the use of internet tools.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

A platform like be-troplive is useful as it helps bringing together knowledge at a national level and enables synergies and collaboration in training. But it will only attain its real dimension if connected to external interveners. So, one of the main activities planned in the next future is the extension of the network with links to Alumni networks of the Belgian universities and institutions. It is also expected that the synergies created at national and international levels will strengthen links with academic institutions in the south and other platform initiatives in an open-architecture framework.

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