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PRESS RELEASE: BEEHEALTH PROJECT

Honeybees are at the heart of the beekeeping industry which has been identified by the Government of Uganda as an enterprise that can yield incomes for households.

In support of the government initiative, the Department of Zoology, Entomology and Fisheries Sciences is implementing a project titled, 'Enhancing production and incomes in the honey value chain by addressing the challenge of pests and parasites of honeybees in Uganda'. The project codenamed 'BeeHealth' is funded by the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). The Principal Investigator of the project is Dr. Anne M. Akol and the co-investigator is Dr. Don Kugonza from the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES).

BeeHealth project which is the first of its kind in Uganda aims at addressing the pest challenges of honeybees. The intended goals of the project are:

1. To identify the main pests afflicting honeybee colonies in Uganda;
2. Develop solutions to the pests and;
3. Improve the capacity of beekeepers to identify and manage these pests.

A rapid diagnostic survey undertaken revealed that extension services are woefully inadequate for beekeepers. Such inadequate extension services means that many beekeepers are not able to attain optimal hive yields and/or product quality can be compromised. Thus, the country's projected potential for hive products, particularly of honey and beeswax will not be realized until major interventions are taken to address production constraints at the apiary level. Pests and diseases are an important constraint in production – honeybee colonies may become debilitated or lost through abscondment while yields of honey and beeswax can drop substantially.

The BeeHealth project has also established that one of the most notorious honeybee parasites is present throughout the country but is not inflicting a heavy toll on our honeybee colonies yet. Reasons for this are under investigation. Two designs for a prototype small hive beetle trap have been developed but will require extensive testing to evaluate their effectiveness in managing this important pest. Ants can be controlled by modifications to how hives are placed or by use of a 'water-barrier'. The project has been able to train a limited number of beekeepers on honeybee pest and parasite identification and how to minimise damage by implementing improved beekeeping practices.

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