

IS AFRICAN SWINE FEVER RETURNING TO AFRICA ? A BACK-OF-THE-ENVELOPE ANALYSIS OF 15 YEARS OF WAHIS DATA

Patrick Bastiaensen

Sub-Regional Representation for Eastern Africa,
World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE),
P.o.box 19687, 00202 Nairobi, Kenya

Introduction

Long regarded as a truly “African” disease, *African Swine Fever* (ASF) embarked on an unprecedented invasion of the (old) world, with a first introduction reported well outside its usual geographical range, in Georgia, in 2007. At the time, the ASF new lineage (genotype) II “Georgia 1/2007” had been traced back to strains encountered in Madagascar, Mozambique and Zambia mostly. Ever since, the new strain has spread throughout Europe, Russia, Eurasia and eventually Asia, with the major impact being felt in China, the world’s premier pork producer.

Materials and methods

The author reviewed both *immediate notifications* (IN) and *six-monthly reports* (SMR) of ASF since the inception of the OIE’s *World Animal Health Information System* (WAHIS) in 2005.

Results

WAHIS-based data since 2005 indicate that “exceptional epidemiological events” related to ASF, i.e. mostly outbreaks, have been reported at a consistent, low rate, until 2017 – 2018, when the number of such IN started to increase. Over the years, 43 outbreaks warranting an immediate notification have been reported to the OIE by 17 African countries. The increase in immediate notifications is not mirrored by a similar increase in outbreaks reported in the SMR, usually where countries deem that ASF is endemic.

Discussion

Whereas an increase in immediate notifications could point to a higher virulence of the circulating viruses and/or higher sensitivity of African suids to the Georgia strain, there is no evidence to support this at this stage. Genotype II, linked to the Georgia strain, in a 2018 Africa review by Penrith *et al.* is still only being reported in the initial countries-of-origin, along with Mauritius (2007 – 2008 outbreaks). Another hypothesis is that the higher number of immediate notifications is simply a reflection of a considerable increase in (smallholder) pig production, as evidenced by WAHIS population data for much of the affected countries on the continent, showing impressive population growth in countries such as Chad, Malawi and Senegal (upward from 500% over a decade).