



Comments from the World Federation for Animals (WFA) on the Draft UNEP Medium Term Strategy and Programme of Work

The UNEP draft Medium Term Strategy (MTS) is well analysed and considered. However, it has overlooked or not sufficiently covered some important issues, which are vitally needed for the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDG), and the future wellbeing of humanity, animals and our planet.

Animals/Animal Welfare

Firstly, it only mentions animals twice. Once in “animal pollination” and once in “eight million species of plants and animals” – threatened with extinction. Of course, pollination is of vital importance, and the mass extinction of wildlife is catastrophic. However, animals both large and small are a critical part of our environment and nature, more generally, and should be an important part of UNEP’s strategy and work plan.

Animals and animal issues have been missing from UN policy-making for far too long. Despite the fact that the inclusion of animal health and welfare can contribute to most, if not all, of the SDGs¹. Now COVID-19 has taught us an important lesson – that humans need to fundamentally reorientate our relationship with animals, from a relationship of exploitation to one of mutuality, and this demands the inclusion of animal health and welfare in all policy-making. Fortunately this is well underscored in UNEPs own report on the prevention of future pandemics². And this insight should be integrated in UNEPs work.

Animals are sentient beings, and should not just be included under the “nature” umbrella and/or treated as inanimate objects or “resources”. Such an approach is anthropocentric and outdated, while addressing animal welfare directly can play an important role in preventing the next pandemic and advancing progress on many of the SDGs. A special budget item is required too.

Preventing Future Pandemics

There should be more focus on COVID-19, its enormous impacts on every dimension of the SDGs, and the threat of potential devastation from future pandemics. Also, more stress on the fact that rethinking and reordering our relationship with, and treatment of, nature and animals is vital to the prevention of future pandemics.

¹<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b2543425cfd79f3074bf90c/t/5d23d461aa03990001fbb109/1562629270666/Animal+Protection+and+Sustainable+Development+-+An+Indivisible+Relationship-compressed.pdf>

² <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and>

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The MTS in Para 2 & Para 30 mentions three interconnected crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution – which are putting our economic and social well-being at risk. The risk of future pandemics is a fourth crisis, equally important, and also interlinked.

Para 30 states: “A healthy environment, healthy people and healthy economies are the foundation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals”. But this statement once again omits any reference to animals. Animals must also be healthy for the achievement of the SDGs, and should not be left out of the equation. Furthermore, this should refer to well-being, not just health.

It is vital that the MTS addresses the main drivers of pandemics and include necessary transformational changes. The first three drivers in UNEP’s own report³ are: 1) increasing human demand for animal protein; 2) unsustainable agricultural intensification; 3) increased use and exploitation of wildlife. In this regard, another major concern is how transformational change will be dealt with when the issues involved often cut across the pillars. For such issues, what mechanisms will there be to drive necessary changes proactively? For example, food systems and food waste should be given prominence in terms of transformational change, given that around 30% of all food is wasted, and taking into account the major impact of food systems on all three pillars of the strategy and pandemic risk.

There is a real need for timely work on transformational change to food systems, which should be carried forward to the Food System Summit. Yet there remains a danger that the pillar design could detract from cross-cutting issues such as this.

One Health/One Welfare

There should be much more about why the One Health/One Welfare approach is important, and how this will be used in proactive policy-making and coordinated action across policy bodies.

At present in the MTS, One Health is mentioned three times, but only in passing –

- UNEP will also work with partners to strengthen the capacity of countries to implement the One Health approach
- antimicrobial resistance through the One Health Alliance
- UNEP will also prevent and mitigate environmental and health threats through the use of a “one health” approach.

This [website](#) explains the many links between human welfare and environmental well-being. There should be support expressed for One Health/One Welfare concepts, with our preference being for the broader, umbrella approach of One Welfare (which encompasses One Health). One Health/One Welfare use science and practical experiences as a base, and support coordinated action across policy bodies, and a variety of government ministries, including environmental, agricultural and human health/wellbeing.

³ <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and>

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The UNEP strategy and work programme must include a vision for the operationalisation of these concepts, particularly in the context of work to prevent future pandemics.

Terminology

On a matter of terminology, we would like to add a plea that the phrase “building back better” is replaced by “building forward better”, which has been used by UNEP recently, and is greatly preferable.

Also, this ‘building forward better’ should explicitly include the prevention of future pandemics in its scope – otherwise there is no meaningful forward direction. In this connection, we consider that the promotion of green and just stimulus packages and new deals should be included

Background Notes

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁴ are meant to reflect the aspirations of UN General Assembly resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”⁵, in which the international community envisaged a world in which “humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected”. Whilst not specifically included in a single SDG, animal issues/animal welfare can contribute to the achievement of most, if not all, of the other SDGs⁶.

The 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)⁷ highlighted animal welfare as one of the key issues, which had been identified as missing from the SDGs.

The Human Development Report 2020 entitled “The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene”⁸, adjusted the Human Development Index to reflect the impact on planetary pressures of that development, but also explored the ethical dimensions of human relationships with nature and animals. This included questioning anthropocentric world views which are blinding humanity to the consequences of our actions, and noted that “the future of the planet and its sentient beings is one of the largest ethical issues facing humanity going forward.”

A significant body of animal welfare work has been developed in a separate policy silo, under the aegis of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)⁹, including international animal welfare standards, and guiding principles on animal welfare, agreed by all 182 OIE member states; and global and regional animal welfare strategies. This work now needs to be applied across policy bodies.

⁴ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁵ <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/1>

⁶ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b2543425cfd79f3074bf90c/t/5d23d461aa03990001fbb109/1562629270666/Animal+Protection+and+Sustainable+Development+-+An+Indivisible+Relationship-compressed.pdf>

⁷ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf

⁸ <http://www.hdr.undp.org/>

⁹ <https://www.oie.int/animal-welfare/>



The COVID-19 crisis has also underlined the fact that to reduce the risk of future world-stopping pandemics, we must fundamentally reorient our relationship with animals, from a relationship of exploitation to a relationship of mutuality, including the incorporation of animal health and welfare in all policy-making. As was stated in the report Preventing the Next Pandemic by UN Environment (UNEP) and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)¹⁰: “Pandemics such as the COVID-19 outbreak are a predictable and predicted outcome of how people source and grow food, trade and consume animals, and alter environments.”

There are also vital social and environmental implications flowing from the way in which humans use animals, particularly in the food system. These include major contributions to environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, land and water use and soil balance; and health issues such as the emergence of zoonotic diseases and global pandemics, non-communicable diseases and antibiotic resistance.

These are all solid reasons why animal issues/animal welfare must be included in the UNEP MTS and its Programme of Work.

Furthermore, animals are sentient beings and their welfare is an issue worthy of consideration and respect by all international organisations, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and countries. Indeed, animal sentience is already recognised in the EU’s Lisbon Treaty¹¹, the Animal Welfare Strategy for Africa (under the African Union)¹², and the OIE’s Global Animal Welfare Strategy, which also refers to the “ethical responsibility” to ensure that any animal use is humane¹³.

As regards wildlife, a reassessment of the use of wildlife in post-COVID times is needed – ensuring that the interests of nature, animals (including animal societies and culture - as is being explored by a working group within the Convention on Migratory Species, sentience and prey-predator relationships) and human health and well-being are taken into full account.

For further information on the transformative changes needed in our relationship with animals to prevent future pandemics, please see the [Animals’ Manifesto](#), signed by more than 170 animal protection organisations.

¹⁰ <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and>

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare_en

¹² <https://www.au-ibar.org/home/170-en/media/press-releases/au-ibar/1143-animal-welfare-stakeholders-launch-the-african-platform-for-animal-welfare-apaw-and-endorse-the-animal-welfare-strategy-for-africa-awsa> & <https://www.au-ibar.org/strategy-documents>

¹³ https://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Animal_Welfare/docs/pdf/Others/EN_OIE_AW_Strategy.pdf