

Draft Resolution on Biodiversity and Health

Sponsored by the Africa Group

Background

Human health ultimately depends on ecosystems for elements essential to human health and well-being (for instance, food and freshwater). Biodiversity underpins the ecological functions and processes that give rise to the benefits provided by ecosystems (“ecosystem services”), including purification of water and air, pest and disease control, pollination, soil fertility, and resilience to climate change. Thus the interactions between people and biodiversity can strongly influence population health, livelihoods, and the sustainability of public health interventions.

Despite the potential and great opportunities biodiversity provides for development, the world is experiencing an unprecedented decline due to population growth, agricultural practices that aggravate degradation, rapid urbanization, infrastructure development, and illicit trafficking, among others. However, while evidence of the contributions of nature to human health is rapidly building, research into how biodiversity relates to human health remains limited in important respects.

It is also important to take into account the complex relationship between biodiversity and our mental and physical health, including non-communicable diseases as well as infectious diseases. Unsustainable utilization of natural resources accelerated by urbanization, land use change and extractive industries often provides favourable grounds for the emergence of infectious diseases, including zoonoses.

About 60 per cent of human infections are estimated to have an animal origin. Of all new and emerging human infectious diseases, some 75 per cent “jump species” from other animals to people. The frequency of pathogenic microorganisms jumping from other animals to people is increasing due to unsustainable human activities. Rapid action is necessary to fill the science gap and fast-track the development of knowledge and tools to help national governments, businesses, the health sector, local communities and other stakeholders – especially those with limited resources – to reduce the risk of future pandemics.

Emerging zoonotic diseases threaten human and animal health, economic development and the environment. In recent decades, emerging diseases of zoonotic origin have had direct costs of more than USD100 billion; it was earlier estimated that if these outbreaks had become human pandemics, the losses would have amounted to several trillion dollars. And this is likely to be the case for the current COVID-19 pandemic. Given that a single zoonotic outbreak can incur trillions of US dollars in costs across the globe, prevention is significantly more cost-effective than response.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of public health across the globe in response to unsustainable biodiversity management. Yet, understanding of the specific aspects of biodiversity that are most relevant to human health and wellbeing remains limited in important respects.

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Despite the massive real and potential socio-economic impacts of emerging zoonotic diseases, and despite the general consensus that prevention is better than cure, investments and political will to control them at their source have been insufficient to date. Our present crisis of Covid-19 provides us with an opportunity to “build back better.” Collectively, we need to shift from short-term political responses to long-term political commitments to secure human, animal and environmental health.

What is needed from UNEP

The African Group suggests that, in this era of COVID-19, UNEP should (i) raise greater international awareness on the linkages between biodiversity loss and the increase in zoonotic diseases, and (ii) support member states to mitigate the risks posed to human, animal and environmental health, (iii) carry out a global assessment of the linkages between biodiversity and health drawing on the relevant evidence and best available science-based knowledge.

Lead contacts from the Africa Group

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Main elements of the draft resolution

- PP 1. *Recalling* the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, 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,
- PP 2. *Recalling* also decision XIII/6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity on biodiversity and human health,
- PP 3. *Affirming* resolution 3/4 of the United Nations Environment Assembly on environment and health and the interconnectedness between human, animal and ecosystem health,
- PP 4. *Recalling* the Addis Ababa Action agenda,
- PP 5. Welcoming the Kunming Declaration and the anticipated Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework,
- PP 6. *Also welcoming* the recent UNEP report on ‘Preventing the Next Pandemic-Zoonotic Diseases and how to break the chain of transmission’ that demonstrates the causal relationship and linkages between habitat loss, the trade and use of wildlife, and the emergence of novel zoonoses including COVID19.
- PP 7. *Aware* that effective biodiversity action can result in dramatic improvements in health outcomes and benefits, provide an economic case for action, as well as, promote a healthier, fairer, and more sustainable world,

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- PP 8. *Recognizing* that the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are causing devastation and strain on health systems including through negative phenomena, such as, zoonotic diseases, with the window to avoid greater ecological destabilisation rapidly closing,
- PP 9. *Recognizing* that biodiversity loss is a health risk multiplier, including by aggravating environmental challenges, and further underlining the benefits for health and well-being in protecting and restoring biodiversity, ecosystems and their services;
- PP 10. *Noting* that increased number of extreme climate events, such as heat waves, droughts, and flooding, also threaten human health and well-being, both directly and indirectly, through impaired ecosystem functioning and reduced ecosystem services,
- PP 11. *Further* noting the latest scientific reports related to the impact of climate change on health, including reports by the WHO indicating that between the years 2030 and 2050 climate change is expected to cause approximately 250 thousand additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress alone, and that the direct damage costs to health is estimated to be between USD 2-4 billion per year by 2030, further noting that areas with weak health infrastructure – mostly in developing countries – will be the least able to cope without assistance to prepare and respond to such challenges.
- PP 12. *Aware* that antimicrobial resistance is a global health and development threat that requires urgent multisectoral action in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- PP 13. *Supporting* efforts towards maximizing synergies between public health, climate change adaptation and nature conservation, whilst acknowledging the Egyptian initiative for a “coherent approach to addressing biodiversity loss, climate change, and land and ecosystem degradation” launched at the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological diversity,
- PP 14. *Also noting* that loss of biodiversity comes with further risks to global health security, including the fight against infectious diseases such as the COVID-19 pandemic that was caused by the infectious agent SARS CoV-2, which demonstrates the close interconnection between biodiversity and health,
- PP 15. *Bearing in mind* that the health of the population rests firmly on the well-being of the planet and its ecosystems and in maintaining sustainable planetary boundaries,
- PP 16. *Affirming* that global health governance should be designed to prevent, as well as respond, to crises while addressing the inequities in global health and health systems in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, particularly in Africa, that need to be strengthened, including through North-South, South-South and Triangular cooperation,

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- PP 17. *Acknowledging* that there will be no economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic without a recovery of public health and equitable health systems, including equity in access to vaccinations
- OP 1. *Request* the Executive Director to further assist Member States in taking measures to:
- a) foster cooperation in addressing the environmental dimensions of global health and response measures thereof especially those based on genetic resources, such as the development of vaccines,
 - b) institute actions on preparedness in data availability, capacity for health surveillance and prompt responses, including in national action plans, in accordance with national circumstances and priorities
- OP 2. *Encourages* member States to mainstream the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to enhance ecosystem resilience, including by taking actions to halt biodiversity loss, and to promote coordination between policies and actions aimed at improving biodiversity conservation, food safety and security and human health as an important safeguard against current and future health pandemics,
- OP 3. *Also encourages* member States and the Executive Director, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, to raise awareness on the linkages between biodiversity loss and the increase in the prevalence of zoonotic diseases,
- Op. 4: Encourages members states to foster cooperation to prevent future zoonotic pandemic and diseases in order to prevent transmission and break the sequence of contamination
- OP. 5 *Invites* Member States to mainstream and integrate the concept of One Health in their sectoral policies and implement it, as appropriate and in accordance with national circumstances and priorities, as a method for preventing as well as responding to zoonotic disease outbreaks and pandemics, in a manner which combines medical, veterinary and environmental expertise, in order to preserve human and ecosystems health.;
- O.P. 6: *Calls* on member states to strive in order to reduce risks for public health which are associated with the selling of living wild mammals which are captured for the purposes of feeding or spawning, and to suspend their commerce including the closing of sections in food markets which are selling living wild mammals;

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OP.7 Urges member States to strengthen the “biodiversity-health policy agenda” through the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity frame-work, the forthcoming IPBES nexus assessment and other relevant platforms and encourages the integration of human health and well-being into biodiversity conservation policies and the integration of biodiversity conservation policies in public health, and spatial and urban planning policies, in accordance with national circumstances and priorities;

OP.8 *Invites* Member States and others, in a position to do so, to provide extra-budgetary financial resources to support the implementation of the present resolution

OP.9 *Requests* the Executive Director, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and other relevant UN entities, to carry out a global assessment of the linkages between biodiversity and health drawing on the relevant evidence and best available science-based knowledge and also on the principle of transfer and use of technology especially with the view to expanding scientific inquiry into the environmental dimensions of zoonotic diseases;

OP.10 *Further Requests* Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and OIE to support countries, upon their request, in assessing the environmental dimensions of health challenges and the health dimensions of environmental challenges.

OP.11 Urges developed countries and other countries in a position to do so and international financial institutions to enhance provisions of support – including innovative financing – to developing countries, in particular countries in Africa, to assist in their national efforts to address the environmental dimensions of global health, including issues related to biodiversity loss and climate change impacts. and towards building more resilient health systems and pandemic preparedness.

OP.12 *Invites* all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector, to contribute to raising awareness and understanding of the environmental dimensions of health, develop measures and actions for waste management including in the areas of antimicrobial resistance.