

Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee Meeting
Thursday 22 March 2021
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. (GMT+3)
Online Meeting

Agenda Item 2: Update on UNEP’s engagement in the One Health collaboration

The note serves as background document for Agenda item 2: Update on UNEP’s engagement in the One Health collaboration, led by the Tripartite Alliance on One Health consisting of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and the World Health Organization (WHO). It also outlines UNEP’s involvement in the process to create a High-Level Expert Panel on One Health to integrate environmental considerations, and plans to initiate a new programme of work dedicated to strengthen the environmental dimension of One Health approaches under the framework of the newly approved UNEP Mid Term Strategy for the period 2022-2025.

Member States are invited to reflect on UNEP’s contribution to this initiative provide further guidance and feedback to the Secretariat.

Update on UNEP engagement in One Health collaboration

One Health is broadly understood as a holistic and interdisciplinary approach that work with the human-animal-environment interface¹. Specifically, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines One Health as “an approach to designing and implementing programmes, policies, legislation and research in which multiple sectors communicate and work together to achieve better public health outcomes²”.

The interdependence of human, animal, plant and ecosystem health is recognized by the Third United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-3) in its resolution 3/4 on environment and health³, particularly in sections III on biodiversity and IV on antimicrobial resistance. One Health is also part of the proposed Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2025 and Programme of Work, under the sections related to nature and chemical and pollution actions⁴.

Globally, One Health approaches have gained some traction and various initiatives and stakeholders play an active role in their implementation locally, nationally, regionally. However, the environmental dimension of One Health initiative is acknowledged as the weakest and need to be strengthened. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) is specifically engaged in the areas of zoonotic diseases⁵, antimicrobial resistance⁶, food systems⁷, and biosafety⁸. There are opportunities for UNEP to expand its role in supporting integrated health outcomes through existing and new initiatives.

UNEP Membership in the Tripartite Alliance on One Health

In November of 2020, UNEP was invited to join the existing tripartite cooperation between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and WHO on One Health⁹. The process for formally joining has not yet been completed. The Tripartite Alliance on One Health was formally created in 2010 to prevent and control the health risks at the human–

¹ Lerner, H., & Berg, C. (2017). A Comparison of Three Holistic Approaches to Health: One Health, EcoHealth, and Planetary Health. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 4(Sep), 163. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2017.00163>

² WHO. (2017, September 21). One Health. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/one-health>

³ United Nations Environment Assembly Resolution 3/4, Environment and Health, UNEP/EA.3/Res.4. (30 January 2018). Retrieved from <https://undocs.org/UNEP/EA.3/Res.4>

⁴ United Nations Environment Assembly, Agenda Item 4: Consideration of a draft UNEP Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2025 and Programme of Work, UNEP/ASC.7/2 (12-16 October 2020). Retrieved from <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34053/Agenda%20Item%204%20MTS%20Draft%20%28To%20Annual%20CPR%29%20final%201009.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁵ See the report “[Preventing the Next Pandemic: Zoonotic Diseases and How to Break the Chain of Transmission](#)”, published in 2020.

⁶ See more at <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/emerging-issues/antimicrobial-resistance-global-threat>

⁷ Batini, N., Lomax, J., & Mehra, D. (2020, July 14). Why sustainable food systems are needed in a post-COVID world. UNEP. Retrieved from <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/why-sustainable-food-systems-are-needed-post-covid-world>

⁸ See more at <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/biosafety>

⁹ UNEP. (2020, November 12). UNEP joins three international organizations in expert panel to improve One Health. UN Environment Programme. Retrieved from <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/unep-joins-three-international-organizations-expert-panel-improve-one-health>

animal–ecosystems interface^{10, 11}. Since then, the workplan of the Tripartite Alliance has focused on antimicrobial resistance, rabies and zoonotic influenza¹⁰. In 2018, the alliance expanded its priority areas to include integrated food safety and security, early warning and surveillance systems, emerging, re-emerging and neglected infectious diseases, high-priority zoonotic diseases, and international standards on responsible and prudent use of antimicrobials¹². UNEP will add to the work of the alliance by bring the expertise of its internal scientific, legal and policy expertise, including from regional offices and multilateral environmental agreements as well as its external partners, such as national environment and wildlife ministries, non-governmental organizations, research institutions and private sector partners.

High-Level Expert Panel on One Health

UNEP has been collaborating with FAO, OIE and WHO to create a High-Level Expert Panel on One Health to collect, distribute and publicize reliable scientific information on the links between human, animal and environmental health as a basis for sound advise. A joint call for experts and associated [Terms of Reference](#) was launched on March 29th. The initial focus will be reducing risks of zoonotic pandemics. UNEP aims to ensure that the expert panel is effective and integrates the environment with sufficient weight.

Development of a New Programme of Work

The triple planetary crisis – climate, biodiversity and nature, and waste and pollution¹³ - and the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with limited integration of the environmental dimension in the One Health initiative has prompted UNEP to take action towards a new initiative in line with the newly approved UNEP Mid-Term Strategy (MTS) for the period 2022-2025. To shape this initiative, the Secretariat has conducted a series of consultations with internal and external stakeholders. As a result, the Secretariat has identified four underlying challenges in One Health approaches:

- 1) Poor understanding of the role of the environment with respect to human and animal health;
- 2) Institutional barriers and silos between disciplines, forms of knowledge and perspectives impede effective system collaboration;
- 3) Existing processes and systems to facilitate integrated approaches to environmental, wildlife, livestock and human health are inadequate;

¹⁰ FAO, OIE, & WHO. (2010). The FAO-OIE-WHO Collaboration: Sharing responsibilities and coordinating global activities to address health risks at the animal-human-ecosystems interfaces. A Tripartite Concept Note. Retrieved from https://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Current_Scientific_Issues/docs/pdf/FINAL_CONCEPT_NOTE_Hanoi.pdf

¹¹ FAO, OIE, & WHO. (2017). The Tripartite's Commitment Providing multi-sectoral, collaborative leadership in addressing health challenges. Retrieved from https://www.oie.int/fileadmin/home/eng/Media_Center/docs/pdf/onehealthportal/Tripartite_2017.pdf

¹² FAO, OIE, & WHO. (2018). Memorandum of Understanding between FAO, OIE, and WHO regarding cooperation to combat health risks at the animal-human-ecosystems interface in the context of the "One Health" approach and including antimicrobial resistance. Retrieved from https://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Media_Center/docs/pdf/onehealthportal/MoU_Tripartite_Signature_May_30_2018.pdf

¹³ UNEP. (2021, February 24). UNEA-5 ends with clear message: act now to tackle planetary crises. UNEP. Retrieved from <https://www.unep.org/fr/node/28983>

- 4) Vast inequities among stakeholders with respect to representation, influence, capacity, and infrastructure prevent some stakeholders from contributing to and benefiting from One Health approaches.

To address these challenges, the UNEP is developing a concept for a new dedicated programme of work to strengthen the environmental dimensions of One Health approaches. This new programme will contribute to the subprogrammes proposed in the new MTS⁴ on Nature and Chemical and Pollution Actions. Specifically, under these subprogrammes UNEP will collaborate with relevant partners to support Member States to strengthen biodiversity, climate and health linkages to implement One Health approaches, and prevent and mitigate environmental and health threats from chemicals and waste using a One Health approach.

* * *