A Call to Action for Animal Health - Executive Summary (advanced draft)

Today, more than 75% of all new human infectious diseases emerge from animals.

We call on governments and international agencies to prioritise strong animal health systems as part of operationalising One Health and to support the attainment of SDG 3.

We propose five pillars of action:

1.   Support community engagement and equitable access to animal health services

2.   Increase the numbers and improve the skills of the animal health workforce

3.   Close the veterinary medicines and vaccines gap

4.   Improve animal disease surveillance

5.   Enhance collaboration for One Health

The devastating health, social and economic consequences of COVID-19 have focussed the world's attention on the growing threat from zoonoses (infectious diseases that are transmitted from animals to humans). COVID-19 is the starkest example to date of why we must invest in animal health to prevent another pandemic. We are only strong as our weakest health system.

COVID-19 joins a long list of zoonotic diseases including rabies, Ebola, SARS, and avian influenza that have killed millions of people.

It is imperative to recognise the complex relationships we have with the companion, production, working and wild animals that we depend on for our food, livelihoods, companionship and well-being. Ensuring that animals are healthy and in good welfare is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Failure to acknowledge the critical role and value of animal health has led to under-resourced national veterinary services with inadequate staff, infrastructure and critical shortages in veterinary medicines and vaccines. Animal-owning communities across the world have insufficient access to veterinary medicines, knowledge and services which makes it less likely that zoonotic diseases will be caught at an early stage. Inadequate or

non-existent disease surveillance at critical points like farms, border crossings and wet markets fails to protect animals and people from diseases. This leaves ample gaps for new diseases to emerge on a scale comparable to COVID-19.

By investing in animal health systems the overall burden of zoonotic diseases and pandemic threat will decline, avoiding millions of preventable deaths. The 1.3 billion people dependent on livestock will have a more secure future and food security will be assured for billions more.

Find out more and support the Call to Action: https://actionforanimalhealth.org/

A Call to Action for Animal Health – Full Version (advanced draft)

Today, more than <u>75%</u> of all new human infectious diseases emerge from animals.

We call for a unified global effort to strengthen animal health systems, delivered through a Global Action Plan on Animal Health to:

1.   Support community engagement and equitable access to animal health services

2.   Increase the numbers and improve the skills of the animal health workforce

3.   Close the veterinary medicines and vaccines gap

4.   Improve animal disease surveillance

5.   Enhance collaboration for One Health

We call on governments and international agencies to prioritise strong animal health systems as part of operationalising One Health and to support the attainment of SDG 3 - ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all.

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.

COVID-19 has since spread to every corner of the world killing over 2.5 million people (WHO) within a year. The social and economic consequences of the pandemic crystalise the growing threat from zoonoses – infectious diseases that jump from animals to humans.

COVID-19 joins a long list of zoonotic diseases including rabies, Ebola, SARS, and avian influenza that have killed millions of people.

It is imperative to recognise the complex relationships we have with the companion, production, working and wild animals that we depend on for our food, livelihoods, companionship and well-being. Now there is an opportunity to build back better.

Ensuring that animals are healthy and in good welfare will help attain the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) by 2030.

[SDG 1](#): No poverty - 1.3 billion people (one in five of the world's population) depend on livestock ([World Bank](#)) for their livelihoods. 20% of livestock production losses worldwide can be attributed to animal diseases ([OIE](#)) and stronger animal health systems can increase the efficiency of livestock production. Animals contribute to communities' resilience in face of natural or man-made disasters ([FAO)](#).

[SDG 2](#): Zero hunger - Livestock provide 14% ([SAN](#)) of the total calories (kcal) and 33% of the protein in people's diets at the global level (FAOSTAT, 2016). Animals and their products are a source of nutritious, protein-rich food ([FAO](#)). Working livestock also play a key role in agricultural production and food value chains ([FAO](#)).

[SDG 3](#): Good health and wellbeing - Zoonotic diseases cause more than 2.5 billion cases of human illness and 2.7 million deaths a year, based on pre-Covid data (ILRI). The livestock sector is a major contributor to global Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) – a rapidly emerging threat to human health ([FAO](#)).

Failure to acknowledge the critical role and value of animal health has led to [under-resourced](#) national veterinary services with inadequate staff, infrastructure and critical shortages in veterinary medicines and vaccines. Animal-owning communities across the world have insufficient access to veterinary medicines, knowledge and services which makes it less likely that zoonotic diseases will be caught at an early stage. Inadequate or non-existent disease surveillance at critical points like farms, border crossings and wet markets fails to protect animals and people from diseases. This leaves ample gaps for new diseases to emerge on a scale comparable to COVID-19.

This has serious implications for the lives and wellbeing of millions of people and animals and leaves the door wide open for another deadly pandemic. We are only as strong as our weakest health system. We must invest in animals to prevent another pandemic.

By investing in animal health systems the overall burden of zoonotic diseases and pandemic threat will decline, avoiding millions of preventable deaths. The 1.3 billion people dependent on livestock will have a more secure future and food security will be assured for billions more.

We propose five pillars of action.

1. Support community engagement and equitable access to animal health services

1.3 billion people depend on healthy animals for their livelihoods and yet access to animal health services is poor or non-existent in many areas. These services often fail to reach 'the last mile' (communities that rely on animals for their subsistence). To millions of smallholders and pastoralists the loss of a donkey, cow or chickens is devastating, a crisis that destroys their livelihoods and shatters resilience.

The 'leave no one behind' principle is central to achieving the SDGs. Inclusion and knowledge sharing to support communities to demand better access to and quality of animal health services is therefore essential.

Helping communities hold decision makers to account allows them to contribute their lived experience and knowledge to solution generation, policy-making and service delivery. There is evidence from many low and middle income countries, especially with indigenous peoples, that community engagement leads to better and more sustainable solutions (IFAD).

Despite the proven benefits (as exemplified by WHO) of engaging communities and civil society, many barriers limit this potential, including lack of resources or challenging legal, social, and policy environments, particularly for marginalised communities like pastoralists (FAO).

As a result opportunities to generate better solutions to animal health challenges at all levels are missed, and already marginalised communities are further excluded.

Progress requires a commitment to and expansion of inclusive, multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral cooperation and improved participatory governance that includes the grassroots level.

We call on the international community to ensure more support to communities and civil society at the local, national, regional and international levels, and to:

- engage with communities to understand which diseases are impacting them and their animals most and what animal health services are needed and support group agency to share this learning to inform decision making in One Health;
- strengthen national and sub-national community and civil society coalitions in support of common and cross-cutting animal health issues;
- engage with high level forums through established civil society groups e.g. the FAO civil society mechanism or the Major Group system at the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), to hold Member States to account on animal health issues and;
- encourage better representation of underserved communities in veterinary and veterinary paraprofessional training, which will improve last mile service delivery.

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2. Increase the numbers and improve the skills of the animal health workforce

The health and welfare of animals and the communities that depend on them relies on animal health workers that are well trained and skilled, easy to access, and accepted by the people they serve.

However, countries at all levels of socioeconomic development face, to varying degrees, difficulties in the education, deployment, retention, and performance of their animal health workforce. There are simply not enough qualified vets and veterinary paraprofessionals to protect animal and human health.

Many of the development priorities set out in the SDGs cannot be met unless accompanied by strategies to increase and improve the animal health workforce.

The animal health workforce plays a vital role in the resilience of communities and health systems to respond to environmental and biological hazards, including the prevention, detection and treatment of zoonotic diseases.

Veterinarians, and in particular veterinary paraprofessionals, work at the frontline of animal health systems providing last mile access to professional advice and services - a vital resource for communities in remote rural areas. Where these resources are inaccessible there are high levels of animal disease and death which impacts livelihoods and food security, limiting the attainment of SDGs 1 and 2.

Persistent animal health workforce challenges require the international community to boost political will and improve plans to educate, deploy, manage and reward veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals.

We call on the international community to develop a Global Strategy on Workforce for Animal Health.

The strategy will support international agencies, governments, the private sector and civil society to:

- support the effort of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and national governments to build and increase the capacity of the animal health workforce;
- invest in the animal health workforce to fill global shortages and strengthen animal health services at the community level;
- understand and prepare for future needs of health systems, harnessing the rising demand for skilled animal health practitioners to maximise job creation and economic growth;
- build the institutional capacity at the national level to implement recommendations on workforce training to meet OIE veterinary and veterinary paraprofessional competency standards which includes animal welfare training; and
- strengthen data on the animal health workforce through the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) and the Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) Pathway for better monitoring and accountability of implementation of national strategies.

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3. Close the veterinary medicines and vaccines gap

Veterinary medicines and vaccines play a vital role in the preservation of animal health and welfare standards across the globe. Medicines that keep animals healthy are also essential in the supply of safe, nutritious animal-source food and the protection of public health. Access to good quality veterinary medicines and vaccines has substantial impact on animal health and helps reduce the risk of antimicrobial resistance. This is critical to the attainment of SDG 3.

However, access to a reliable supply of safe and effective medicines to treat animals is an ongoing challenge in many countries. Regulatory issues affect how medicines are brought to market, create lag times and cause the supply of medicines in some areas of the world to be delayed long after they are available elsewhere. High prices, misuse, and poor or unreliable medicine quality exacerbate the issue.

Vaccines provide essential protection against illness in livestock and companion animals. Stopping disease through vaccination ensures infections do not spread to other animals. This is of huge importance to the lives of the 1.3 billion people around the world in which livestock play a central role. One in five of these animals is lost due to disease each year which has a devastating effect on the world's poorest communities.

Vaccines also prevent zoonotic diseases, such as rabies, from infecting humans. Despite the fact that we have the vaccines, tools and technologies to prevent people from contracting dog-mediated rabies, one person dies every nine minutes - 40% of whom are children living in Asia and Africa, which makes the attainment of target 3.3 of SDG 3 look distant.

Closing the veterinary medicines and vaccines gap will require sustained political commitment to ensure that people can access veterinary medicines of certified quality and that substandard or counterfeit products are removed from and prevented from entering the market.

Medicines and vaccines used effectively also play a central role in the global response to antimicrobial resistance. By proactively preventing disease with vaccines and by treating diseases with the right medicines in appropriate doses, animal owners working with veterinarians can reduce the need for antibiotic treatment and help ensure that antimicrobials remain effective.

We call on the international community to close the veterinary medicines and vaccines gap, including:

- establish an accountability framework for access to essential veterinary medicines and vaccines as a component of operationalising One Health (support the World Veterinary Association/Brooke global essential veterinary medicines for livestock and World Small Animal Veterinary Association essential medicine initiative);
- support the international harmonisation of regulatory approaches to veterinary medicines to eliminate counterfeit or substandard medicines;
- reinforce action to deliver the Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, in particular supporting the FAO/OIE/WHO tripartite;
- increase access to animal vaccines, including by expanding the OIE vaccine bank; and
- support the United Against Rabies coalition and financing facility to ensure that increased access to dog rabies vaccines ends human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030 (supporting indicator 3.3.5 of the SDGs).

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4.   Improve animal disease surveillance

A global veterinary surveillance network is vital to identifying and managing threats from animal diseases to public health (PREZODE), trade, animal welfare and other aspects of society. A lack of or a weak surveillance system can dramatically impede disease control,

prevention and recovery efforts. In addition, a systematic process to [determine the burden of animal disease on the health and wellbeing of people](#) is not available. Consequently, decision makers lack the information to apportion the investment required for animal health and welfare.

The cross-border movement of animals and animal products gives rise to a constant threat of geographical leaps in disease particularly from new, emerging and re-emerging diseases. The success of a global surveillance network and animal disease monitoring systems relies on all governments, veterinarians, veterinary paraprofessionals and animal owners working together. It requires knowledge of reporting mechanisms as well as effective infrastructure to detect the trends and causes of disease.

However, a number of recent transboundary animal disease outbreaks, the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance and the Covid-19 crisis have exposed current surveillance strategies as inadequate. Strengthening them is necessary to ensure that there is a global risk-based, early warning, passive and active surveillance system that works, proactively identifying risk rather than slowly reacting or not detecting it until it is too late.

"There has been a steady and growing realisation that targeting "*risk at source*" in animal populations is a vital strategy in safeguarding the planet from risks from emerging zoonoses, neglected zoonoses and antimicrobial resistance." [(OIE)](#).

We support the [UK Prime Minister in his call](#) for a worldwide network of zoonotic research hubs as well as delivery of a global pandemic early warning system as part of a five point plan to prevent future pandemics. Strengthening animal disease surveillance from the community level upwards is a vital component of operationalising One Health.

We call on the international community to optimise existing animal health surveillance systems so they can identify potential threats to animal and human health:

- support transformative change at a global level to fulfil the capacity requirements for surveillance in accordance with OIE standards for Animal Health Surveillance;
- support the Global Burden of Animal Diseases (GBADs) programme to 'measure to improve' animal health at a local, national and global level;
- support FAO's Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD) work through partnerships with government and civil society;
- incentivise member countries to immediately report threats through the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS);
- expand access to the Global Laboratory Leadership Programme (GLLP) with a focus on growing the participation of animal health laboratories, in addition to ongoing funding of the OIE laboratory twinning programme;
- strengthen the foundations of animal disease surveillance at the level of animal health practitioners and regional laboratories;
- establish processes and technology for communities to participate in surveillance as an early warning of disease or animal welfare hazards to national veterinary services; and
- improve the use of electronic reporting systems to enable real-time analysis and response to disease outbreaks.

5. Enhance collaboration for One Health

One Health recognises that human, animal and environmental health are all inextricably linked and advocates for policy and programmes to reflect this. With zoonotic disease and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as global priorities, the need to embrace One Health has never been more urgent. In order to participate effectively in One Health initiatives animal health systems require significant strengthening as the missing piece to improving global health, as articulated in SDG 3.

Some governments, including Senegal, Rwanda, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, are ahead of the curve, developing and implementing National One Health plans. Kenya and Tanzania have established zoonotic disease units. Regional intergovernmental organisations must follow through on political and funding commitments for preparedness and response, routinely monitoring progress, and critically, putting One Health into practice on the ground.

We call on governments and international agencies to prioritise strong animal health systems as part of operationalising One Health and in the attainment of SDG 3:

- include explicit One Health wording under target 3.3 of SDG 3 and recognise that this goal will only be met through collaborative approaches;
- support the development and implementation of national One Health plans which feed into regional plans, using the experience of countries that have already been using One Health in their planning;
- establish a substantial One Health Fund so that low and middle income countries have resources to put plans into practice, which includes building effective animal health systems;
- support One Health initiatives that enhance collaboration between sectors (such as the Joint External Evaluation, National Bridging Workshops and AMR Multi-partner Trust Fund); and
- encourage the pooling of resources, Ministerial budgets and intelligence to ensure One Health action plans are realistic and resourced.

This Call to Action has been developed by Action for Animal Health, a new initiative to advocate for more investment in strong and resilient animal health systems that protect people, animals and the planet.

Action for Animal Health is a coalition of partners – multilateral organisations, research institutes, NGOs and others, with expertise in animal health and related fields.

Coalition members:

The African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR)

Brooke - Action for Working Horses and Donkeys

Compassion in World Farming International

Dogs Trust Worldwide

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)

Send a Cow

Soi Dog Foundation

Supporting Evidence-Based Interventions (SEBI) – Livestock

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (VSF) International

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