

FAO: National Framework on One Health

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Introduction

Importance of “One Health” approach in bringing together various sectors especially human health, animal health and the environment is being recognized increasingly across the world. This is based on the fact that there is an intricate relationship between the aforementioned three sectors. Working together or in tandem using One Health approach can be effectively used for early detection, prevention and launching efficient response to several zoonotic diseases. This approach is also vital for containing antimicrobial resistance which is driven by excessive use of antimicrobial agents in human and animal health sectors and is facilitated by a conducive environment for exchange of genetic material and survival of resistant pathogens and genes.

While the One Health approach looks a great logical concept with far reaching benefits, implementing it at national and subnational levels is complex. Traditionally, three major sectors have worked in silos and have essentially collaborated during public health emergencies, otherwise, there is minimum sustained and productive collaboration. The environment sector in most of the settings has remained aloof from contributing significantly.

Recognizing the need for efficient execution of true One Health approach, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) has published a guidance document “National Framework on One Health”. This has been developed through extensive consultations with leading scientists from human health, animal health, fisheries, environment sectors representing research and academic institutions and international agencies.

The document provides a simple to implement roadmap in consonance with ground realities in the developing countries. It highlights that One Health is not a de novo

concept but is directed towards improved collaboration, coordination and commitment of relevant sectors in working together to minimize the impact of these diseases on human health and nutrition safety. It emphasizes that One Health is essentially a multi-sectoral, interdisciplinary, and collaborative approach towards optimal health of animals, humans and the environment. It calls for strengthening of capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to disease outbreaks; establish efficient national emergency response capacity; and promote cross-sectoral collaboration and partnerships for improving human and animal health.

Two core objectives for implementation of One Health that have been highlighted in this document are: (i) Improve national capacity for zoonotic diseases and AMR for prevention, detection and response; and (ii) Improve joint coordination and collaboration between major stakeholders for control of zoonoses and AMR. Within each of these broad objectives, several outcomes can be defined as well as monitored through a structured monitoring and evaluation framework.

The document explains One Health approach in simple terms, provides technical and financial evidence in its support, enunciates barriers that obstruct its implementation and underscores its importance in achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

The document promotes activities at human-animal-environment/ecosystem interfaces by providing generic guidance for comprehensive national response to prevent, prepare, detect, respond to, and recover from events especially pandemic and AMR, and assure human and animal health security. It provides essential elements in the shape of policy, programme and persons for initiating and executing One Health approach. It provides a step-by-step approach to implement the framework and the possible points of entry. Various objectives that can be met through this framework have

been explained in detail with their predicted outcomes.

It is an extremely valuable document for all public health professionals and their counterparts in other sectors simply because of its ease-of-reading and comprehensiveness for initiating and sustaining the One Health approach.

It must be considered by the policy makers while making decisions and allocating resources.

(Reviewed by Dr Mala Chhabra, Consultant Microbiology ABVIMS & Dr RML Hospital, New Delhi.)