



Strengthening animal health systems to accelerate progress towards the SDGs: A High Level Political Forum Side Event

SUMMARY

Joseph Nhan-O'Reilly from Brooke opened the event by highlighting how COVID-19 has shone a light on the growing threat from zoonoses, with 75% of all new infections emerging from animals. Now more than ever, the health of our planet requires us to recognise the complex, interdependent relationships we have with the companion, production, and wild animals that we depend on for our food, livelihoods, and well-being. Ensuring animals are healthy is critical to sustainable development, especially for the world's rural poor. However, historic under investment in animal health systems, inadequately staffed and organised veterinary services and critical shortages in veterinary medicines, vaccines and laboratories put the lives and wellbeing of millions of people and animals at risk.

In his keynote address, **Dr. Jean-Philippe Dop, Deputy Director General of the OIE**, reminded everyone that the OIE has strengthening animal health systems at the core of its mission. Among other interventions, in 2007 the OIE developed the Performance of Veterinary Services Pathway a capacity building programme for strengthening national veterinary services. To address the deficiencies in veterinary education, OIE has developed guidelines which include competencies and training needs for veterinary paraprofessionals. The newest development at OIE is the establishment of the OIE Platform for the Training of Veterinary Services this year. OIE is also launching a new Programme in Veterinary Workforce Development to encourage OIE member states to systematically assess and address their veterinary workforce needs.

The speaker recognised the importance of animals, in particular livestock, for sustainable development. 18% of the world's population works in animal husbandry or in the processing and marketing of animal-based foods. OIE has as one of its objectives contributing to global goals through improved sustainability of animal production. Efforts to eradicate Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR) is an example of concrete action, and also an example of where there is a current shortfall in funding.

This interrelationship of humans, wild animals and domestic animals demands the implementation of a One Health approach for effective disease control. However, prevention is key. As illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is far more effective to reduce or eliminate the risk of transmission from animals to humans rather than manage a global pandemic disease outbreak.

The speaker called for investment in research, developing appropriate standards and guidelines, and providing support for capacity building for animal health services. Partnerships are crucial to make this happen, since drivers of disease emergence are multiple and cut across sectors. In conclusion, Dop called on policymakers to make a firm commitment to delivering the One Health agenda and ensuring that it is appropriately resourced.

The second keynote speech was delivered by **Prof. Sarah Cleaveland of University of Glasgow**, who started by saying that One Health provides an interdisciplinary framework that allows us to achieve cross-cutting benefits across multiple SDGs and targets. Access to quality, affordable health care is a basic human right stipulated in the SDGs. However, for 400 million of the world's poorest people dependent on livestock, access to quality, affordable animal health care is also an essential need.

So far the focus has been on market-led models of animal health care delivery, but these risk leaving the poorest livestock-keepers behind. Rabies is a good example. Around 60,000 people die every year, and the disease costs around \$8.6 billion every year. The vast majority of human cases are caused by domestic dogs and occur in poor, rural communities in Asia and Africa.

This happens despite the fact that we know exactly how to tackle this disease. We have effective vaccines for preventing rabies in people bitten by rabid animals (PEP) and vaccines for controlling disease in the animal reservoir – primarily the domestic dog.



Poor access to human vaccine is now being addressed through investment commitments from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. This represents an enormous opportunity and challenge for us in the animal health sector - because the Gavi commitment is contingent upon the scaling up of mass dog vaccination.

The speaker noted considerable challenges in scaling – one of these relates to funding – we know that funds available for animal health are dwarfed by those for human health – and this is true even for rabies where the funding is targeting exactly the same outcome – preventing human rabies deaths.

While the theoretical relevance of One Health is clear, and very much on the radar at the moment in relation to covid-19, there are considerable challenges in operationalizing One Health. Where we have strong existing platforms, we should use the opportunity to build on these.

We need to be creative – embracing opportunities and partnerships where they exist – and we should not be afraid to draw on the expertise from human health systems strengthening.

After the keynote addresses, a panel discussion followed. **Dr Raymond Briscoe, Executive Director of the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan (DCA)**, talked about his work in rebuilding the animal health system in this conflict affected fragile state. Animal health is a priority in Afghanistan because 75% of the population live in rural areas and depend on livestock for food and transport. Following the devastating impact of conflict DCA began training veterinary paraprofessionals, there are now 650 graduates of this programme that have returned to their communities to provide a self-sustaining animal health service. Dr Raymond Briscoe emphasised the need to coordinate donors, to place emphasis on rural livestock and also the empowerment of women in livestock.

Dr Papa Seck, Technical Advisor to the President of Senegal on Animal Health, talked about how livestock is one of the priority sectors for Senegal, however investment is weak compared to other sectors and there needs to be increased budget allocation. Through national vaccination campaigns the government of Senegal has acted to control diseases of animal health and one health importance. The role of private veterinarians was highlighted as the key to success in these initiatives. If investment in animal health does not mirror increases in production there is risk of animal health epidemics.

Laura Kavata from Brooke East Africa, outlined the importance of working with livestock-owning communities in ensuring animal health and welfare. Brooke works in community engagement, building livelihoods and resilience, as well as strengthening existing animal health provision. Gaps that are identified are integrated into curricula at veterinary training institutions. Laura Kavata called upon all stakeholders to implement livestock related policies and allocate resources for animal health. She said we need to recognise the critical role of livestock owning communities in preventing disease and ensuring health for all.

Antonio Rota from IFAD commented on contributions that healthy animals make to reducing poverty and hunger. Empowering women helps in achieving SDGS 2 and 1 by facilitating access to resources and services as animal health. An example was given of vaccination against Newcastle disease in backyard poultry in Senegal, mortality was reduced by 50-80% leading to a 50% increase in household egg consumption. Antonio Rota reiterated the need to put smallholder farmers and their livestock at the centre of policies.

Concluding the event, **Joseph Nhan-O'Reilly** announced a new initiative by Brooke on [Action for Animal Health](#), a multi-stakeholder partnership calls for action and investment in animal health systems.

The event was closed by His Excellency Ambassador **Abdoulaye Barro, Deputy Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations**.