The case for investment in animal health towards One Health

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Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased political attention to the One Health concept, as a way of combating some of the critical issues we face – increasing zoonotic disease, AMR, sustainable production and climate change. However, weaknesses in animal health systems will hinder the operationalisation of One Health.

Current levels of underinvestment in animal health systems have led to:
• critical shortages in animal health workforces, medicines and vaccines,
• barriers to service access,
• poor disease surveillance,
• animal welfare issues.

Example: estimates around numbers of vets who are on the frontline of spotting zoonotic disease threats and ensuring food security:

In the Netherlands 1,000 vets are registered to work in farms (1) to support over 100 million farm animals; while in Ghana just over 60 veterinarians support the same number (2) (3). This does not take into account the working animals, cats, dogs and wildlife that frequently do not receive the preventative care and treatment required.

Action for Animal Health is a coalition of 12 non-governmental organisations and multilateral organisations who are advocating for investment in five areas of animal health systems (see Figure 1) to operationalise and progress One Health. This study is intended to inform our advocacy efforts in areas such as the Pandemic Treaty negotiations, the work of the One Health Quadrilateral, and the development of a World Bank Financial Intermediary Fund on pandemics.

Methods

A mixed methods approach was used to explore the current state of AA4AH’s five pillars of animal health systems and what resources are needed to support operationalisation of One Health.

Data was collected from open sources and during interviews. Primary data collection consisted of 22 semi-structured key informant interviews (KII) with multilevel and multi-sectoral stakeholders, including donors, United Nations agencies and programmes, and international and national non-governmental organisations (INGOs and NGOs) across Eastern Africa, Europe, South Asia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Ethiopia and Pakistan are included as case studies in the final report because of their high dependence on animal livelihoods, and as areas of concern for emerging and endemic zoonotic diseases.

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set out by the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERBF) at Brooke, and received approval from the University College London (UCL) Research Ethics Committee (REC).

Results

1. Animal health investment drives sustainable development. Improving animal health and welfare through quality animal health services is vital to global health security, livelihoods, and food security and safety.

2. One Health approaches remain inequitable. There remain policy and implementation gaps attributable to a lack of awareness of the public health and economic benefits of animal and environmental health.

3. Better regulation, legislation, and implementation of animal health services are essential. Gaps in the workforce, animal health service delivery and accessibility, disease surveillance infrastructure, laboratory capacity and practices, and vaccine availability, safety and accessibility hamper effective animal health systems.

4. Communication and connection are key to One Health. Communication gaps and a lack of data sharing are major challenges for disease surveillance, prevention, and control.

Figure 1

Conclusions

The animal health sector is subject to low levels of public investment and consequent weaknesses in animal health systems, as well as a lack of awareness of the relationship that animal health has to global health and sustainable development. This risks the emergence of infectious diseases that affect both animals and people, increase incidences of AMR, and threaten food safety and security. Governments, donors and implementing agencies should prioritise investment in and focus on animal and zoonotic disease prevention as a cost-effective health protection strategy. As well as combating global health threats, this will have knock-on impacts on food security, nutrition, climate resilience and income security for people who depend on livestock.

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References


www.actionforanimalhealth.org