



IMPACTinACTION

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WASH and NTD Collaborations that Work

Keeping zoonotic diseases at bay through a One Health approach – progress in The Gambia

Zoonotic diseases – any disease or infection that is naturally transmissible from vertebrate animals to humans – represent a significant and growing threat to global health. It is estimated that 70% of new and existing diseases in humans have a zoonotic origin.

The transmission of over half of diseases on the World Health Organization's (WHO) NTDs list, including Guinea worm, cysticercosis and schistosomiasis, is affected by some degree by domestic or livestock animals.

These are often also diseases affected by water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH services), and their prevention and eventual elimination requires the implementation of a comprehensive, One Health approach. This has been defined by the One Health High Level Expert Panel as “an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. It recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and inter-dependent.

The approach mobilizes multiple sectors, disciplines and communities to varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems, while addressing the collective need for clean water, energy and air, safe and nutritious food, taking action on climate change, and contributing to sustainable development.”

In 2022, the WHO launched a companion document to the NTD road map, [Ending the neglect to attain the sustainable development goals. One health: approach for action against neglected tropical diseases 2021-2030](#), which set out the ambition for a paradigm shift towards One Health in national NTD programmes.

Since this publication, several countries have ramped up efforts to apply this One Health approach within their own NTD programme as well as their overall approach to strong and sustainable health systems.



Zoonotic diseases, transmissible from animals to humans, are a significant and growing global health threat. An estimated 70% of new and existing human diseases have a zoonotic origin. Credit: Unlimit Health/William Mgobela.

Ahead of World Zoonosis Day, we sat down with Balala Jatta (right), Programme Manager for NTDs at the Ministry of Health in The Gambia, and Chair of the [Kikundi NTD Managers Community of Practice](#), to find out about the significant progress made by The Gambia on One Health.

How has One Health been addressed by the government of the Gambia?

The main step taken has been the establishment of a Technical Working Group that brings together the human health, animal health and the environment sectors, led by the MoH and an appointed One Health focal point.



The working group has not only met frequently since its establishment, but has already been delivering real impact. The Gambia experienced a highly pathogenic influenza event, and we were able to respond through a coordinated approach. This included a joint risk assessment that involved all relevant departments and partners including WHO and WOA. We also sent representatives from the animal and human health, and environment sectors, to undertake

One Health leadership training in Ghana, followed by an outreach training course delivered by the University of Ghana and the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH).

To ensure political buy-in and resourcing,

“Impact in Action” is a series showcasing successful collaborations between WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) initiatives and Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) programmes. Curated by the NNN WASH Working Group in partnership with WHO, this series brings together insightful case studies from around the globe. Each story highlights innovative strategies and tangible outcomes resulting from integrating WASH practices with NTD control and elimination efforts. [View more case studies and download WASH and health working together: a 'how-to' guide for neglected tropical disease programmes, second edition.](#)



the group is working to establish a One Health national platform. This was close to establishment at the end of 2023, but has been slightly held back by ministerial changes, and the group has been continuing its advocacy and administrative efforts to establish the platform.

What has been the impact of the collaboration so far?

The benefits of collaboration across sectors through a One Health approach cannot be overemphasised. During the highly pathogenic influenza event, we identified significant capacity gaps in the animal health sector's ability to respond; this led to efforts and training on incident response and management plans, which increased the response capability of the sector. The human health sector also now includes all One Health in our activities; for instance, half of the participants in our recent field epidemiology training came from the animal health sector. They are also included in any other meetings and training activities.

Multiple heads are better than one, and we are able to approach complex issues more effectively. For example, we are currently undertaking surveillance for Human African Trypanosomiasis, and all surveillance activities are being coordinated with animal surveillance. WASH collaboration is also crucial, and this includes our own WASH Unit within the MoH, as well as the Department for Water Resources and Department for Community Development. We include them in our strategic plans and activities, ensuring we incorporate WASH in our prevention efforts and risk communications.

When we collaborate, we are able to see the bigger picture beyond our own disease control activities. This is important since most diseases require a One Health approach that includes the WASH sector, the environmental actors, vector control programmes, etc.

What challenges have you faced in implementing this approach?

The main challenge is at the political level. Political buy-in and will is needed to ensure sufficient resources for delivery. We do not have dedicated funding for One Health, meaning we rely on support from external partners such as the WHO, FAO and WOH. The national One Health platform will need to address the issue of funding, and help drive domestic resource mobilisation. We are working on this through advocacy, to engage politicians and help them understand the issues at hand.



Below: participants in a roundtable session during a recent One Health Joint Sector Review in The Gambia. The Technical Working Group (above) brings together the human health, animal health and environment sectors, led by the MoH and an appointed One Health focal point. Credit: Balla Jatta.

As well as domestic and political support, external support is also still needed – in terms of financial resources and technical support, but also on advocacy: NGO partners (such as members of the NNN) can support advocacy and resource mobilisation activities, as demonstrated by the extensive advocacy undertaken by United to Combat NTDs ahead of the Kigali Summit on Malaria and NTDs. Such political engagement is something that NGOs are well-placed to support, whereas it can be challenging for technical government staff. We are also engaging through the ALMA process, as well as with the AU commission on driving One Health at the continental level.

What is your vision for the coming few years?

I am optimistic that the OH platform will reach its intended targets over the next couple of years. I would tell my fellow national NTD programme managers that collaboration improves implementation – it helps us pull in more resources and expertise; improves effectiveness and efficiency, reduced duplication and maximise gains.

[Click here to see a video on YouTube.](#)



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