

15 JULY 2022

BUILDING BACK BETTER

Animal welfare, sustainable
development, and environment nexus.



ONLINE EVENT | REPORT

SIDE EVENT AT THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2022

ORGANISED WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF WORKING EQUIDS (ICWE).

THIS REPORT:

On 15 July 2022 the World Federation for Animals (WFA) and the Animal Issues Thematic Cluster hosted an online conversation on “Building back better: animal welfare, sustainable development, and environment nexus” between representatives from government, academia, intergovernmental processes, and civil society groups. The event took place on the margins of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. It was organised with the International Coalition for Working Equids (ICWE) and moderated by journalist Urmi Goswami from The Economic Times.

This is a summary of the event's key messages. A recording of the event is available at [WFA's YouTube Channel](#).

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HE. Mr. Dampthey Bediako Asare

High Commissioner of the Republic of Ghana to the Republic of Kenya, who played an important role in the passing of a resolution on the nexus between animal welfare, sustainable development, and environment at the UN Environment Assembly in 2022. These were some of his key messages:

- By Nexus we refer to the correlation between improving animal welfare, on the one hand, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through better environmental outcomes, on the other.
- Better animal welfare will address the driving of harm to nature and benefit sustainable development. The positive causal link has been confirmed through scientific research and by a wide variety of global institutions and governmental fora, such as the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In fact, the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services and others, including the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), have concluded that human actions that rely on the suppression of animal welfare, such as industrial intensive livestock production and wildlife exploitation, are also the main drivers of harm to nature and zoonotic disease emergence.

"The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that the welfare of people depends entirely on the welfare of the ecosystem in which we live, and that increasingly the welfare of these ecosystems depends on our collective ability to protect them. Animals form a critical part of the ecosystem."

- Systems that are critical to human development such as health and climate largely depend on the welfare of animals. Hence, ignoring to promote the welfare of animals will negatively impact the ecosystems on which sustainable development depends.

On the UNEA nexus resolution:

- Getting the support of all member states is not an easy task. But when these come together and adopt a resolution, the next and most important action is to implement it. The Nexus resolution, unanimously adopted, requests UNEP's Executive Director to produce a detailed analysis of the nexus between the elements. This is the most important next step. To support this implementation, Member States and other sources of funding should be mobilised.

Natalia Cediél-Becerra

Natalia is a veterinarian and a public health expert with years of experience carrying out epidemiologic research in zoonoses. She is a member of the One Health High-level Expert Panel that developed the official definition of One Health and identified key underlying principles for its implementation. These are some of her messages:

On the essential role animal welfare plays in One Health:

- COVID-19 increased our awareness on the interrelatedness of the health of animals, plants and ecosystems. One Health needs to recognize that the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants and the wider environment are linked and interdependent.
- Stewardship is a key principle to implement One Health. It means humans have the responsibility to change behavior and adopt sustainable solutions that recognize the importance of animal welfare and the integrity of the whole ecosystem.

On preventing pandemic risks:

- The One Health community understands more advocacy toward prevention is needed.
- Scientific consensus indicates that the rate of infectious disease emergence has been accelerating in more recent decades due to external anthropogenic forces. Decades of research suggest four actions to reduce spillovers: —→

1) Protect tropical & subtropical forests. Wildlife that survives forest clearance or degradation tends to include species that can live alongside people, and that often have pathogens capable of infecting humans. Land use is key for prevention.

2) Ban and better regulate commercial wildlife markets, engaging Indigenous Peoples and the communities that live close to these animals.

3) Increase implementation of biosecurity measures, including by improving veterinary care, feeding, and housing of animals. Although the majority of spillover events that do occur fail to establish circulating infection in the new host, these are more likely in cases where animals are not well cared for.

4) Promote more resilient health systems that integrate animal health, i.e. system oriented interventions and transdisciplinary work. If we do not engage with all the stakeholders in the animal health system and the food system, we are not doing the right work. This means academia, governments, civil society, and the private sector.

"We need to change the way we relate with nature. We need to feed ourselves but we can do it in a different way, in a way that is not transgressive for the ecosystem and for us."





Cleo Verkuijl

Cleo is a Research Fellow at the Stockholm Environment Institute and the lead author of a policy report on how governments can mainstream animal welfare into sustainable development policy. The report's recommendations fed into the Independent Scientific Report for Stockholm+50. These were some of her key messages:

- The way we treat animals impacts our sustainable development. Wildlife trade, livestock farming, increasing habitat loss, all heighten risks of infectious disease emergence, and in the case of the livestock industry, of antimicrobial resistance. Many of these activities often also harm the environment, with negative implications for human well-being.
- Sustainable development activities affect animals. The policies we adopt, the investments we make, the economies we create, and the infrastructure we build, all affect animals. That is important, given the growing body of evidence that many animals are sentient (i.e. they have the ability to experience positive and negative states, to suffer) and that they therefore matter morally for their own sake.

"A sustainability agenda that does not consider the well-being of trillions of sentient beings, risks causing a tremendous amount of harm unnecessarily. Further, not considering animal welfare is a big missed opportunity, given the clear win-win opportunities that could benefit humans, animals, and the environment alike."

Governments have many options to integrate animal welfare into sustainable development, including through:

1) Stronger legal protections

that also apply to often-excluded farm animals, and their enforcement at national level.

2) Shifting our economies.

Currently, harming the environment is profitable because the externalities of what we and companies do usually are not integrated into products' costs. Governments also tend to subsidize products and industries that can be harmful for our health, for the environment and for animals. We need to redirect financing towards more sustainable and compassionate alternatives.

3) An expansive One Health

approach, that considers animal welfare. In conventional One Health approaches, animal health is often only considered to the extent that it affects humans. An expansive One Health approach can be bolder about considering not just animal health, but also welfare, and pursuing more ambitious solutions to improve both human and animal health.

4) Just transitions. Shifting economies and policies requires thinking about who will be affected and engaging with those communities to ensure these needs are met.

Carmen Capriles

Carmen is a feminist and environmental activist, and the founder and director of the volunteer organisation Reacción Climática. She lives in La Paz, Bolivia, and is currently the Global Facilitator for the Women's Major Group for UNEA/UNEP. These were some of her key messages:

- With the pandemic, we have finally understood that it is not only about humans. There are other beings on which in some cases we co-depend and in other cases can really harm us. Zoonotic diseases will begin with humans' bad relationship with a specific species. That is why it is so important that we rethink the relationships that we have with nature, and with animals. And we are finally being able to put this on negotiation tables, to link those processes.
- Managing certain species sometimes represents income for rural women, for example. With industrialisation of livestock farming, they now have to compete with an industry that sees nature and animals as commodities. So, it is important to start linking all these issues at the policy-level, to develop policies that are more environmentally friendly and that will guarantee a quality of life for all humans in the long run. As humans, we cannot live without nature, we cannot live without biodiversity and basically, we cannot live without animals.
- We have to understand that on the planet we are not the only species. We need to start seeing the relationships that we have with animals as a political issue. It is important that governments understand that the policies are not only for humans. These have to consider animals and the whole ecosystem.
- We need to stop seeing animals as only commodities, and start seeing them as part of our quality of life.

On what can be done to collaborate to raise awareness.

- It is important to involve local authorities because in many cases, they are the ones that can do something on the ground to promote animal welfare issues. We must also engage with other kinds of stakeholders, including youth and Indigenous People. We have much to learn in terms of our relationship with nature and animals.

"Let's not let the UNEA's nexus resolution just stand in the drawer and become another paper when we are losing the most beautiful thing that we have on this planet which is life."



