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THE PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARDS CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION:

The Tripartite Perspective on Health Systems Strengthening

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INTRODUCTION

Health threats at the human–animal–ecosystem interface have increased over the past decades, imposing a burden on human and animal health systems. The increase in health threats to humans and animals is driven by multiple, inter-related global factors generally related to human behaviour and environmental changes and also reflects the complexities of the ecosystems in which humans and animals coexist. Because reducing these risks cannot be achieved by one sector alone, there is increasing convergence toward a One Health approach that incorporates a collaborative, cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary mode of addressing these threats and reducing health risks.

The One Health approach is necessarily broad, flexible, and inclusive as it is intended to encompass the many facets of the relationships between humans, animals, and the ecosystems in which they interact throughout the world. The inclusiveness of One Health is further reflected in the very broad scope of technical and policy issues, as well as sectors and partners that comprise it. But because it can have different meanings to all

the different partners, it is not strictly definable. However, there is general agreement that the One Health concept or approach means working cross-sectorally and inclusively with the partners appropriate to the question at hand to achieve better, more comprehensive and sustainable results. Importantly, because it is broad and inclusive, the One Health approach is not owned by anyone nor does one size fit all: there is a place for everybody and circumstances will dictate how best to cooperate on health issues using One Health concepts particularly at the national level.

Around the world and at every level, more and more people are thinking about or engaging in the One Health approach, and there is some international momentum, which indicates that the approach resonates. However, there remain constraints – in infrastructure and in thinking – which suggests there is a need for a paradigm shift in the way we look at and think about health and health systems.

There is also need for guidance – how does a country “do” One Health? As a global community, there is often consensus on the main tenants of

the approach, and loose guidance can thus be generated about ideas and mechanisms that are important to consider when applying cross-sectoral approaches. As well, many countries and regions already have useful experience in working together on specific issues at the human-animal-ecosystems interface. Many regional partners and countries have begun to strongly address One Health in their approaches to zoonotic diseases and other health threats at the human-animal-ecosystems interface.

THE TRIPARTITE AND SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING UNDER ONE HEALTH

The international tripartite agencies responsible for animal health and human health - the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the World Health Organization (WHO), “the Tripartite” – have been working collaboratively together for many years. The Tripartite’s work together is to identify, assess, and mitigate impacts from pre-existing and emerging threats to health at the human-animal-ecosystems interface where they overlap among the agencies’ respective mandates, and where the agencies need to work together in order to effectively address the problem in order to support global health security. The Tripartite, therefore, is already working cross-sectorally, within the One Health Concept.

For the tripartite, the focus is on health systems strengthening. Building strong, flexible, and responsive uni-sectoral health systems which comply with international standards is important to and forms the basis for being able to collaborate cross-sectorally nationally, regionally, and internationally.

In the context of systems strengthening, the focus includes pre-existing and endemic diseases, antimicrobial resistance in pathogens, and ensuring food safety along the production chain as well as the capacity to detect and respond to emerging diseases. National systems which can identify and characterise health events quickly can also rule out (or respond to) known pathogens quickly, thus inherently act as monitoring systems for emerging diseases. Ensuring that this capacity is built into national systems, rather than being implemented through special projects, is crucial to sustainability.

In this context, health systems is defined broadly. National health systems include not only systems responsible for surveillance and identification of cases or outbreaks and characterisation of disease agents, but also communications within and among government agencies and the regional and international communities, management of borders and movement of people and animals, and preparedness for management of health events.

These systems built to reduce threats to health require ongoing collaboration among the sectors.

CONSTRAINTS TO ONE HEALTH : HOW DO WE ACCOMPLISH A PARADIGM SHIFT ?

Defining the constraints to implementation of cross sectoral approaches in systems strengthening can help us define a path towards overcoming them. Therefore, in discussions with cross-sectoral partners we have to identify barriers truthfully or openly to be able to find

solutions. Some of the constraints identified are practical and some are conceptual. The practical constraints such as governance issues or the lack of technical mechanisms between systems for collaboration may be easier to tackle, while the conceptual constraints are more complex to solve.

For example, in the High level Technical Meeting (HLTMT) held in Mexico in 2011, two main elements deemed key to supporting implementation of cross sectoral approaches were political will and high level commitment and trust. How can these be built to support health systems at every level?

As well, it is certain that to take One Health approaches we need to break down sectoral and disease “silos.” Given the myriad of personal, professional, and technical issues tied to keeping work in silos, and a recognition of the benefits of keeping human and animal health agencies separate as such, how can we accomplish this?

The Tripartite agencies are each working for our stakeholders - for WHO the Ministry responsible for human health, for FAO the Ministry responsible for agriculture, and for OIE the national veterinary services. Because these different partners often have different objectives and the perspectives from these different parties may conflict, how do the tripartite agencies – and more importantly, the national partners – ensure the objectives of the health systems do not conflict, and allow working together towards common goals?

At the HLTMT, another element deemed key was adequate and equitably distributed resources. In the current global economic situation, there won't be much new money to fund “One Health”, but perhaps health systems and capacity building programmes for those systems that include One

Health approaches may be more robustly funded because they are more effective and impactful. So, the question can be posed, is One Health something new, requiring new funding or is it a way of working that requires a new way of thinking about prioritising the allocation of funds and resources?

It is clear that a paradigm shift is needed to address these and many other constraints. However, we also need to ask, what exactly is the paradigm shift we keep saying we are looking for? How does it relate to health systems? And how to start?

THE TRIPARTITE AND OTHER SECTORS: POLICY, TOOLS AND EMPOWERING FACTORS

At the international level, the Tripartite partnership of FAO, WHO, and OIE has made a Director General-level commitment to address jointly the risks at the animal–human–ecosystem interface. The areas that the Tripartite is focusing on to implement One Health approaches are captured in the 2010 Tripartite Concept Note. This Tripartite Concept Note has become the touchstone for all Tripartite work together, as it sets a strategic direction for FAO, OIE, and WHO to take together and proposes a long term basis for international collaboration aimed at coordinating global activities to address health risks at the human–animal–ecosystem interface. Common areas of work that the Tripartite organizations can build upon are outlined in the Concept Note, and include normative work, public communication, and promoting pathogen detection, risk assessment, and management, technical capacity building

and research development, and development of common protocols and standards, when appropriate. The value of improvements in governance, combined with infrastructure and capacity building within and among all sectors, is highlighted. All of these activities are focused around building strong, responsive health systems that can work together across the sectors.

The Tripartite and its global partners are committed to helping countries to implement cross-sectoral approaches to address their health risks at the human-animal-ecosystem interface. The major outcomes of the High Level Technical Meeting held in Mexico in 2011 were the key elements of effective cross-sectoral collaboration. Facilitating adoption of cross sectoral approaches in health systems strengthening will include using these key elements to generate tools to assist national governments considering the establishment of national cross-sectoral approaches. The Tripartite and its partners could also have a role in assisting regions and countries in translating and implementing the technical and policy aspects of the tools including building them into the existing systems in a sustainable way.

International agencies and partners around the world, including the tripartite, that are implementing cross sectoral approaches can act not only as models but also provide tools and facilitate the adoption of such approaches by regions and countries. Such agencies can also use exiting communication channels within countries to encourage the political will and commitment required. They can also champion a paradigm shift by working in ways which promote trust and inclusiveness.