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One-Health Regional Platform (update on progress made so far and plans for the establishment of One-Health Regional Platform)

Executive Summary

Livestock contributes to between 30 and 80 percent of agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is the main source of income for vulnerable populations in rural areas. The Near East and North Africa (NENA) region is exposed to several transboundary animal and zoonotic diseases. While zoonotic diseases represent a direct threat to human health, livestock diseases can have a devastating impact on animal productivity and production, as well as on economic development. Climate change, increased animal-human interactions, land use, and human encroachment increase the risks of outbreaks with zoonotic potential. Antimicrobial resistance, food safety/food-borne diseases, environmental degradation, and water scarcity are regional challenges that require joint multi-sectoral efforts. One Health is an integrated, unifying approach, that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals, and ecosystems, recognizing that humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and interdependent. The approach mobilizes multiple sectors, disciplines, and communities across society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems.

The FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (FAO RNE) organized a virtual regional technical dialogue in 2020, the “One Health approach for managing animal diseases and zoonoses and the impact of COVID-19 on the livestock sector”, and in 2021, “Operationalizing One Health approach to prevent future pandemics”. At the 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC 36), during the Senior Officers Meeting in January 2022, a side-event entitled “One Health to combat transboundary pests and disease” took place. The participants welcomed FAO’s plan to establish a regional One Health platform in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders in the region and called upon regional organizations to strengthen interagency collaboration in support of countries’ efforts to implement the One Health approach. The meeting also called upon countries to support the establishment of a regional One Health platform, ensuring close and effective coordination among various sectors and stakeholders. In the 69th Session of the Regional Committee for World Health Organization (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Region, held on 22 October 2022, a technical paper titled “Advancing the implementation of One Health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region”, produced in close consultation with the regional Quadripartite partner organizations, was presented.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

In May 2022, technical officers from the Regional Quadripartite organizations formed a regional One Health technical working group, undertaking online meetings on a regular basis. FAO RNE drafted regional One Health Platform operational guidelines with inputs from the group.

In May 2023, the first high-level regional quadripartite One Health meeting, “Accelerate the Implementation of One Health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region”, took place in Muscat, Oman. The meeting was financed by WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO) and planned in close collaboration with the regional Quadripartite One Health group. The meeting served as an opportunity for countries to share their experiences and challenges in One Health implementation, and to discuss best practices to move forward. One of the main recommendations was to finalize the establishment of a regional One Health platform and ensure its sustainability.

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I. Introduction

1. The Tripartite organizations, FAO, WHO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) (founded as Office International des Epizooties [OIE]) have been working together for decades to address risks at the human–animal–environment interface. The Tripartite became a Quadripartite in March 2022 with the addition of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The global One Health Joint Plan of Action (OH JPA) (2022–2026) was developed by the Quadripartite. During NERC 36 in 2022, participants welcomed FAO’s plan to establish a regional One Health platform in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders in the region, to promote the One Health approach across the region. Countries were asked to support the establishment of the platform and to encourage effective coordination among stakeholders. Since mid-2022, the Regional Quadripartite organizations meet regularly to advance the establishment of a Regional One Health Coordination Mechanism (One Health Platform), with the role of defining the strategic direction, convening stakeholders and partners, and coordinating action and support to member states across the region. Operational guidelines have been developed, and the group is working on the development of a Joint Regional One Health (OH) Action Plan. Despite this considerable support and engagement, implementing One Health approach in practice still proves to be challenging, with technical, institutional, and professional barriers, in addition to sustainability concerns, competing priorities, and funding deficiencies acting as obstacles.
2. The implementation of One Health requires national and subnational institutionalization, building appropriate policies and legal frameworks that support its institutionalization, raising greater awareness among all stakeholders, and allocating appropriate investments.

II. Update on progress made on the establishment of a regional One Health Platform and One Health activities in the Near East and North Africa Region

One Health in the NENA region: status and trends

3. Following the virtual regional technical dialogue events in 2020 and 2021 on the One Health approach for managing animal diseases and zoonoses, prevention of future pandemics, and the role of One Health in the control of transboundary diseases in 2022 in the Senior Officers Meeting of NERC 36, the need to create a regional One Health platform in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders was unanimously stated.
4. Since 2022, the Regional Quadripartite organizations have met regularly to discuss the establishment of a Regional One Health Coordination Mechanism and develop operational guidelines. Under the Regional One Health Platform, the Regional Quadripartite will provide leadership by defining the strategic direction, convening stakeholders and partners, and coordinating action and support Members across the region, developing a Joint Regional OH Action Plan and provide guidance for its implementation.
5. Countries expressed their agreement and underlined the importance of operationalizing a One Health approach in the region by approving a resolution highlighting the urgent need to build on and strengthen existing cooperation among the Quadripartite to develop options for consideration by their respective governing bodies. In addition, countries approved an Operational Framework for the adoption, adaptation, and implementation plan for a One Health approach in countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region between 2022 and 2027. Since 2022, technical officers from the Regional Quadripartite organizations have been undertaking online meetings regularly, resulting in the creation of the Regional One Health Platform Operational Guidelines. In May 2023, the first high-level Regional Quadripartite One Health meeting on the implementation of One Health in the region took place in Muscat, Oman. Relevant stakeholders from governments and civil society have been invited and took the opportunity to discuss the present situation and the future perspectives in One Health in the region, as well as the best way to move forward in a concerted and clearly mapped process, resulting in a list of recommendations for the Regional Quadripartite Organizations.
6. Based on the outcomes of the meeting and previous discussions among the Regional Quadripartite technical officers group members, the group started drafting a Regional One Health

Action Plan for the Near and Middle East and North Africa/Eastern Mediterranean region for 2024-2025, with strategic objectives and related activities.

Opportunities and challenges

7. FAO promotes One Health in its work, not only to control transboundary animal and zoonotic diseases, but also for food security, sustainable agriculture, food safety, Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), nutrition, animal and plant health, fisheries, and the protection of livelihoods. The application of a One Health approach is critical for achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite global and regional support and engagement, implementing One Health in practice still proves to be challenging, with technical, institutional, and professional barriers, in addition to sustainability concerns, competing priorities, and funding deficiencies acting as obstacles. The implementation of One Health requires cross-sectoral competency and capacity-building, joint workforce training, effective governance rooted in transdisciplinary and multisectoral principles, the creation of career pathways and opportunities, community engagement, and the inclusion of stakeholders.

8. The Near East and North Africa region is exposed to several transboundary animal diseases, for example, foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), peste des petits ruminants (PPR), lumpy skin disease, etc., and zoonotic diseases (Rift Valley fever, highly pathogenic avian influenza, rabies, Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus [MERS-CoV], brucellosis, bovine tuberculosis etc.). Several countries in the region are in armed conflicts and protracted crises. In such environments, the risks of disease outbreaks and instances of disease with zoonotic potential increase. AMR, foodborne diseases, general food safety, and climate change are threatening food security.

9. A lack of awareness among decision-makers, fragmented and outdated legislation, unclear funding mechanisms, unclear roles and responsibilities, lack of communication between sectors due to conflicting priorities, a shortage of skilled workers and limited know-how delay the implementation of a One Health approach. Another challenge is that the regional Quadripartite Organizations differ in their scope of geographical coverage. WHO EMRO includes Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran (the), Pakistan, and Somalia, which is not the case for the FAO RNE region. For UNEP, UNEP Africa and UNEP West Asia are involved. The modalities of the Regional OH need to be agreed on, as do the financial arrangements, and the Quadripartite Organizations need to commit sustainable funding.

Response options

Global response:

10. The OH JPA (2022-2026) supports achieving public health, animal health, food safety and security, and ecosystem health. The OH JPA also builds on the 74th World Health Assembly (WHA74.7) resolution calling to “build on and strengthen the existing cooperation among WHO, FAO, WOA (founded as OIE) and UNEP to develop options, for consideration by their respective governing bodies, including establishing a common strategy on One Health, including a joint workplan on One Health to improve prevention, monitoring, detection, control and containment of zoonotic disease outbreaks”. The vision (impact) of the OH JPA and its future iterations expressed as the desired impact within a 15-20-year timeline is “a world better able to prevent, predict, detect, and respond to health threats and improve the health of humans, animals, plants, and the environment while contributing to sustainable development”.

11. The goal is expressed in two long-term outcomes expected to be achieved in alignment with the 2030 development agenda:

- a. **Long-term outcome 1:** Improved health of humans, animals, plants, and the environment while identifying sustainable system-wide One Health solutions that allow our ecosystems to thrive in harmony.
- b. **Long-term outcome 2:** Reduced risk and impact of health threats at the human-animal-plant-environment interface using a One Health approach efficiently, effectively, and equitably.

Regional response:

12. During the NERC 36 Senior Officers Meeting in January 2022, the idea of a Regional One Health Platform was well received by delegates. The regional organizations were asked to strengthen interagency collaboration in support of countries' efforts to implement the One Health approach.
13. In the 69th Session of the Regional Committee for WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, held in October 2022, countries expressed their agreement and underlined the importance of a regional One Health approach.
14. The first high-level regional quadripartite One Health meeting, "Accelerate the Implementation of One Health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region", took place on May 2023 in Muscat, Oman. The meeting was financed by WHO-EMRO and prepared with the regional quadripartite. The main recommendations were:
 1. finalize the establishment of a regional Quadripartite One Health platform;
 2. provide resources and technical support to countries to help them adapt and implement One Health plans;
 3. in collaboration with universities and technical institutions, develop a standardized One Health training package for rollout in relevant countries; and
 4. conduct a One Health meeting annually to review progress and accelerate the implementation of regional One Health activities.
15. The following actions were pointed out as needs for the countries involved:
 1. update national plans to align with the global and regional plans where possible;
 2. ensure One Health is included in the different plans;
 3. cost the One Health plan, allocate domestic resources and engage in resource mobilization efforts to support the implementation;
 4. set up a monitoring and evaluation mechanism;
 5. develop a One Health workforce strategy;
 6. develop a capacity-building programme for One Health;
 7. integration of One Health into undergraduate, graduate, etc. curricula.
16. In their respective regions in the Near East/North Africa/Eastern Mediterranean, the FAO, WHO, WOAHA and UNEP Quadripartite are joining forces to promote and enable the optimal use of available resources and synergies in the fight against health risks at the human, animal, and environmental interfaces, in support of member states' long-term outcomes.
17. Regional One Health Platform Operational Guidelines were developed in the consultation meetings of the technical officers from the regional Quadripartite Organizations. These meetings are being held on a regular basis, with the objective to advance the establishment of the regional One Health platform and enhance the implementation of regional activities. The final targets are:
 - establishment of a One Health platform as a formal multi-sectoral coordination mechanism
 - the Regional One Health Platform have been developed
 - formalization of the platform to steer the implementation of agreed action plans;
 - development of the Terms of Reference with areas of collaboration in technical matters;
 - mobilization of financial resources for the agreed work;
 - development of a joint communication and advocacy strategy.
18. The Regional One Health Platform will accelerate action towards three medium-term outcomes by 2026:
 - Outcome 1:** Regional One Health Strategy and Action Plan in line with the OH JPA developed and implemented to optimize the health of humans, animals, and ecosystems.
 - Outcome 2:** Enhanced coordination and synergies among quadripartite organizations to support the countries in various One Health aspects, including capacity-building, provision of policy and technical support, policy dialogues, and development of resources, knowledgebases, and content.

Outcome 3: Improved coordination among countries in the region to formulate policies, undertake joint surveillance and reporting, and rapidly respond to health issues using the One Health approach.

19. Operational Guidelines for the Regional One Health Platform have been developed in the consultation meetings of the technical officers from the region. The regional Quadripartite One Health platform will provide leadership by defining the strategic direction, convening stakeholders and partners, and coordinating action. The areas and initiatives covered by the One Health Platform will be as follows:

- enhancing One Health capacities to strengthen the human-animal-environment interface;
- addressing the risks from emerging and re-emerging zoonotic epidemics and pandemics;
- consolidating efforts to combat human and animal (including aquatic pest) diseases;
- strengthening the assessment, management, and communication of food safety risks;
- controlling the multiple risks of AMR;
- enhancing protection of the environment in all its facets.

20. At present, the technical officers from the Quadripartite Group are working on the Regional One Health Action Plan. The draft version includes the five Strategic Objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: Institutionalize, formalize and strengthen OH Quadripartite regional coordination mechanism at the regional level.

Strategic Objective 2: Improve coordination across sectors at the national level.

Strategic Objective 3: Enhance OH workforce capacities across sectors at the national level.

Strategic Objective 4: Enhance preparedness and response capacities for health threats at the human-animal-environment interface across sectors at a national level.

Strategic Objective 5: Leverage global One Health innovations and new technologies in the region.

Accelerators and cross-cutting issues

21. Under the FAO Strategic Framework, One Health is one of the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) of Better Production to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, through efficient and inclusive food and agriculture supply chains at the local, regional, and global levels, ensuring resilient and sustainable agrifood systems in a changing climate and environment.

22. The One Health scope of intervention includes: strengthening health systems, reducing the risks of emerging and re-emerging zoonotic epidemics and pandemics, consolidating efforts for combating human, animal, plant, and aquatic pests and diseases, strengthening the assessment and management of food-borne diseases, and their related food safety risks, controlling the multiple risks of AMR, and enhancing the protection of the environment in all its facets. Accelerators/cross cutting subjects are:

- **Technology:** Accelerating the uptake of technical innovations and biosecurity guidance to curb pest and disease losses.
- **Innovation:** Innovative, digital solutions for expansive scaling-up of engagement, addressing inequalities in health systems through an integrated One Health approach.
- **Data:** Multiple-source surveillance information systems at the country level, integrated with the Hand-in-Hand Initiative geospatial platform, to better target actions and support user-level decisions.
- **Complements:** Governance (institutional and political economy) analysis to improve One Health governance, global to national; improved food chain monitoring for health and safety; systems-based training and focused capacity development; enhanced science-policy interface.

Guidance from NERC36

23. In the NERC 36 Ministerial Declaration in February 2022, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation supported the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, which calls for a transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind. The framework aims to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs.

24. Ministers and Heads of Delegation equally endorsed the four Regional Priorities under FAO's programme of work, which consists of strategic areas to support countries in the region in transforming their agrifood systems within the umbrella of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. The representatives noted that the four Regional Priorities underscore strategically important issues for the region.

25. Zoonosis, AMR, foodborne diseases, food safety and technology, nutrition and food security, and environment are challenges of major importance in the region, requiring a holistic management approach. In January 2023, a WHO EMRO consultative meeting conducted in Jordan listed Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic fever, leishmaniasis, dengue, rabies, yellow fever, West Nile virus, Rift Valley fever, Chikungunya, and leptospirosis as priority vector-borne and zoonotic diseases. Other diseases of zoonotic importance in the Region include MERS-CoV, avian influenza, anthrax, and brucellosis. Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and its role in animal production, food-borne diseases, and food safety are important challenges in the region.

Action for Consideration by NERC37

One Health should be considered a priority for the region by the 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Near East and North Africa. The establishment of a Regional One Health platform by the Regional Quadripartite Organizations, in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, will enhance countries' efforts to implement the activities outlined in the Regional One Health Action Plan under guidance of the Quadripartite One Health Platform.