

N4H Advance Efforts in Upstream Prevention at CBD COP15

Nature for Health (N4H), a collaborative effort to reduce the risk of pandemics by strengthening the environmental aspects of One Health, had a strong presence at the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) in Montreal. Alongside bilateral events and participation in relevant health and biodiversity negotiations, N4H and its Consortium Partners hosted a side event to unveil its first Country Partners and an interactive dialogue to engage with diverse stakeholders and partners on the challenges of implementation. It was a valuable opportunity for to explore how N4H can help advance a post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

The second phase of the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) took place in Montreal, Canada, from 7 to 19 December 2022. Nations agreed on a historic package of measures to address biodiversity loss and restoring natural ecosystems. Convened under UN auspices, chaired by China, and hosted by Canada, the Parties to this Convention adopted the “Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework” (GBF), including four goals and 23 targets for achievement by 2030.¹ The newly adopted framework recognises that urgent policy action at the global, regional and national level is required to transform economic, social and financial models and help to stabilise the trends that have exacerbated biodiversity loss by 2030 and allow for the recovery of natural ecosystems, with net improvements by 2050.

In addition to the landmark framework agreed at the conference, there was also clear progress on health and biodiversity with advocacy efforts on pandemics and the need for their prevention. N4H and its Consortium Partners had a solid presence at the conference where it was able to capitalise on the strong and varied participation and build momentum on integrating both the health and biodiversity agendas towards pandemic prevention.

N4H side event celebrates its first six partner countries

Zoonotic diseases such as SARS, Ebola and Zika are emerging as a result of environmental degradation, climate change, land use changes, biodiversity loss, animal husbandry and wildlife trade and consumption. 75% of new human infectious diseases originate with animals and then spill over into humans and this figure is increasing due to anthropogenic pressures.

¹ See: <https://www.cbd.int/article/cop15-cbd-press-release-final-19dec2022>

The human suffering and economic cost of pandemics is enormous: COVID-19 has already caused over 6.5 million deaths and cost the global economy USD 13.5 trillion. The price of prevention is estimated to be just a small fraction of this cost – at most 1%. During the side event, countries discussed these drivers and explore how prevention can be achieved by investing in the upstream environmental drivers of zoonotic pandemics, stopping them from emerging in the first place.



Photo credit: CDB

From left to right: Ms. Jeanne d’Arc Mujawamariya, Minister of Environment, Rwanda; Ms. Steffi Lemke, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection; Mr. Gustavo Manrique Miranda, Minister of the Environment, Water and Ecological Transition, Ecuador; Ms. Inger Andersen, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme

On Thursday 15th December, N4H hosted a side event to introduce its first partner countries: Ecuador, Ghana, Mongolia, Rwanda, Vietnam and Zambia. These Country Partners will work with the N4H Consortium Partners, leading UN agencies, intergovernmental organisations and civil society groups in the field of environment and health, to reduce the risk of pandemics through upstream prevention of zoonotic disease spillover.

N4H’s six new country partners had been selected from more than 50 applications from countries where biodiversity is under threat and the risk of animal-to-human disease transmission is high. The partners will work with the N4H Consortium Partners, leading United Nations agencies, Intergovernmental Organisations and civil society groups working in the field of environment and health, to reduce the risk of pandemics through upstream prevention of zoonotic disease spillover. The COPE5 event, featured high-level addresses, including Ministers from the Country Partners including Ms. Jeanne d’Arc Mujawamariya, Minister of Environment for Rwanda and Mr. Gustavo Manrique Miranda, Minister of the Environment, Water and Ecological Transition, Ecuador.

The event was convened by N4H and German Government², who have generously funded the first phase of N4H’s work through an initial contribution of 50 EUR via [Germany’s International Climate](https://www.bmu.de/en/)

² Specifically the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV): <https://www.bmu.de/en/>

[Initiative](#) (IKI)³. Ms. Inger Andersen, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme⁴ (UNEP) was invited to make the opening remarks for the side session. These were then followed by remarks from the first panel, which consisted of the Environment Ministers of Rwanda, Ecuador and Germany, who all demonstrated their commitment to reducing the risk and impact of future zoonotic epidemics and pandemics that are emanating from environmental degradation, climate change, land use changes and biodiversity loss.

“It is very encouraging to see that the rationale for including biodiversity in the One Health approach is receiving increasing attention at all levels and resonating strongly with the needs of our partners. The strong commitment of six pioneering countries gives life to the initiative. This will help leverage the ambition for GBF implementation”.

Steffi Lemke - German Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection

They also recognised the complex and challenging task that lies ahead when it comes to implementation. Building on this, Ms. Steffi Lemke from the German Ministry underlined that additional financing will be necessary and called upon donor countries to contribute to the N4H Multi-Partner Trust Fund.



Photo credit: CDB

From left to right: Ms. Steffi Lemke, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection; Mr. Gustavo Manrique Miranda, Minister of the Environment, Water and Ecological Transition, Ecuador; Ms. Jeanne d’Arc Mujawamariya, Minister of Environment, Rwanda; Ms. Inger Andersen, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme; Dr. Catherine Machalaba, EcoHealth Alliance

Moderated by Principal Scientist, Health and Policy, Dr. Catherine Machalaba, from EcoHealth Alliance⁵, one of N4H’s Consortium Partners, who set the scene by highlighting the importance and indeed, the critical need, for investing in pandemic prevention so that we can collectively ensure more resilient societies. *“Zoonotic diseases are now emerging more frequently as a result of how we source and grow our food, trade and consume animals and disrupt our environment. By tackling the upstream*

³ See: <https://www.international-climate-initiative.com/en/>

⁴ See: www.unep.org

⁵ See: <https://www.ecohealthalliance.org/>

environmental drivers of zoonotic pandemics, there is a unique opportunity to prevent them from emerging in the first place. N4H is working to do just that by working nationally to prevent pandemics and related health risks by strengthening the environmental aspects of One Health.”



Photo credit: CDB

Speaker: Ms. Jeanne d’Arc Mujawamariya, Minister of Environment, Rwanda

The next segment focused was on preparation for the N4H implementation phase which will demonstrate the linkages between biodiversity, climate change and pandemics whilst advancing the implementation of One Health at the national level. The new N4H animated video⁶ was shown to the participants which helped to explain the rationale for investing in the upstream environmental drivers of zoonotic pandemics and visualised the challenges ahead.

A second panel - consisting of a representative for one of N4H’s new Country Partners, Dr. Batkhuu Nyam-Osor, Advisor to the President of Mongolia; N4H Consortium partner, International Union for Conservation of Nature⁷ (IUCN)s Charles Karangwa who is the Regional Lead for Forests, Landscapes and Livelihoods Programme for Africa; and a youth representative from Egypt, Omnia El Omrani - were then invited to reflect on the animation and share their implementation challenges. The main barriers mentioned were multiple and context specific but included: the need for mindset shifts, involvement of the private sector, how to design collaborative action, how to bring together science and policy, transboundary considerations, surveillance as a tool and the challenge of resource mobilisation.

The side event closed with a discussion around next steps and N4H’s role in contributing to an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Dr. Monique Eloit, Director General of the World Organisation for Animal Health⁸ (WOAH), also an N4H Consortium Partner, considered both the next steps and actions that will be required to implement preventative One Health through the new Partner Countries and also highlighted the need for strong collaboration to achieve impact at scale.

“Congratulations to the first six countries to join N4H representing different regions of the world. Your experience in implementing the projects under this initiative will demonstrate the feasibility and practicality to implement One Health on the ground and particularly its environment components

⁶ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6k18DbLwfDg>

⁷ See: www.iucn.org

⁸ See: <https://www.woah.org/en/home/>

including biodiversity. It will inform the next phase of the project and we hope it will inspire other countries to join the initiative.”

Dr. Monique Eloit - Director General of the World Organisation for Animal Health

The N4H Reception: An interactive session to test the N4H approach and engage stakeholders

On Friday, 16th December, N4H hosted a reception event which aimed to provide an interactive space for N4H Consortium Partners and Country Partners to engage with a broad range of stakeholders to discuss key issues and challenges that will shape and influence the N4H operational phase. This included partnering with the private sector, defining preventative One Health, bringing youth on board and designing a learning network.

During the opening remarks, Laetitia Sieffert, Programme Management Officer for Health and Biodiversity from the CBD⁹, began by highlighting the biodiversity and health linkages reflected in ongoing discussions at the COP15. Melissa de Kock, Head of Biodiversity, People and Landscapes at UNEP focused on the high-level demand for support in establishing One Health platforms and Mr. Stefan Tidow, the State Secretary for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear and Consumer Protection, called for more partners and funders to join N4H.

Participants were then invited to join one of eight discussion tables each led by a N4H Consortium Partner and/or Country Partner, where a diverse range of stakeholders representing different organisations and perspectives discussed the challenges to implementation. Discussion issues followed the themes in table below and covered leveraging more local indigenous and community knowledge, the engagement of traditional healers and those working with traditional medicines, the creation of “Chapters” in the Youth Constituency in different countries, organising regular university debates on such topics, establishing nature clubs in schools etc.

Discussion tables	
Awareness raising	What should be the goal of awareness raising efforts on the interconnectedness between biodiversity, climate change, and emergence of infectious diseases and the environmental determinants/dimensions of One Health?
Resource mobilization	What are the challenges to accessing sustainable financing within national structures, particularly when trying to foster interdisciplinary collaboration?
Collaboration	What are the key success factors when implementing collaborative One Health models which ensure inclusive engagement across sectors?
Policy	Are there existing national legal mandates, frameworks and policies that effectively link environment and health and global health, biodiversity and climate change?
Locally relevant stakeholders	What approaches are currently being utilised to integrate traditional knowledge and expertise into preventative One Health approaches?
Private sector	How can the private sector be effectively engaged in national preventative One Health approaches and reduce disease risk?
Business case	Should the business case for preventative One Health focus on the costs of inaction or on the return on investment and co-benefits?
Capacity building	What are the technical capacity gaps to effectively implement preventative One Health approaches?

⁹ See: <https://www.cbd.int/>

This structured, yet informal dialogue was welcomed by participants and lasted twice as long as planned demonstrating the high level of engagement in this topic among participants. It was particularly welcomed against the backdrop of the COP/negotiations as well as the complexity and diversity of the One Health agenda. Consortium Partners reported on rich and valuable interactions and the role of N4H as a learning platform was once again proposed.



Next steps

N4H looks forward to contributing towards the implementation of this new landmark GBF and enabling the integration of the biodiversity and health agenda. By investing attention on the upstream drivers of zoonotic pandemics, the work of N4H will aim to focus on preventing zoonotic diseases from emerging in the first place while also tackling leading causes of biodiversity loss and climate change. This global agreement has highlighted more starkly than ever the crucial importance of N4H's work at the interface between biodiversity and human health and we look forward to moving our initiative forward under the auspicious environment ushered in by this framework.

Please contact N4H on <https://www.nature4health.net/> info@nature4health.net with any questions or more information.