**One Health Day: working together to protect people, animals and the planet**

Human, animal and environmental health are intrinsically linked. This was highlighted during the recent zoonotic disease epidemics in West Africa including Ebola, anthrax, and highly pathogenic avian influenza. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD), with support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), promotes the adoption of One Health interdisciplinary approach. The approach strengthens systems nationally, regionally and globally – by recognizing the shared health of humans, animals and the environment – in order to prevent, detect and respond to disease threats.

On 3 November, annual One Health Day celebrations have engaged individuals, governments and organisations from different sectors in the West and Central Africa region to make the necessary cultural, behaviour and institutional changes to address and assess health challenges and threats at the animal-human-ecosystem interface. From participation and involvement in awareness raising campaigns such as in Senegal and in Côte d’Ivoire, where FAO ECTAD participated in the national fair to connect stakeholders working in the One Health space to Training sessions to reinforcement of national capacities like in Burkina Faso, where 16 veterinary technicians and 44 district medical staff received One Health FETP frontline training to address emerging animal diseases. Also in Burkina Faso, the establishment of a national One Health platform has been a significant achievement. FAO ECTAD has consistently supported this process, whose regulatory texts of the National One Health Coordination Platform of Burkina Faso have been recently validated.

In other countries, such as Liberia, the One Health coordination platform has reduced the risk of new emerging pandemics through strengthening capacities to prevent, prepare for, detect, and respond to known and emerging public health threats due to the interface of humans, animals and the environment. Endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), FAO, and the Global Health Security Agenda partnership, the platform has been successful in raising awareness on emerging One Health issues in the country, such as rabies prevention, joint zoonotic disease investigations and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).

**One Health approach**

In 2016, Burkina Faso, Niger, Ghana and other countries in West Africa experienced an outbreak of H5N1 highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1 HPAI) that could have caused a pandemic in the human population. As stated by Baba Soumare, FAO ECTAD regional director for West and Central Africa “this situation illustrates the importance for adopting an interdisciplinary One Health approach towards multisectoral preparedness, risk assessment and management when dealing with disease problems”. Countries identified as ‘hotspots’ for disease emergence in the West and Central Africa region have demonstrated the benefits of One Health coordination between medical, veterinary, agriculture and environment sectors. For example, although Senegal and Mali did not experienced HPAI outbreaks (H5N1 and H5N8 subtypes) in 2016-2017, in May 2018, FAO ECTAD organized a cross-border simulation exercise
aimed at assessing the capability and preparedness in addition to strengthening the collaboration between the two countries in preparedness and response towards outbreaks, involving HPAI and other cross-border infectious diseases. The joint exercise involved medical doctors, veterinarians and environmental health experts. This helped to develop a joint contingency plans and surveillance programmes for both countries to respond to potential HPAI outbreaks.

FAO ECTAD has provided technical support to the Veterinary Services Directorate (VSD) of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) in Ghana to celebrate the International One Health Day since 2017 to include ministries, development partners, non-governmental organizations, hospitals, universities, research institutions and the private sector in the commemorations. This year, in collaboration with WHO and USAID Breakthrough Action, FAO will celebrate One Health day to engage as many individuals as possible from as many arenas as possible in One Health education and awareness events and to generate an inspiring array of projects worldwide.

This year, One Health Day have provided an opportunity for experts and the community to join together in education, coordination, and collaboration activities among partners working in animal, human, and environmental health as well as other relevant partners are an essential part of the One Health approach. As expressed by Baba Soumaré, “all stakeholders must team up against these threats”.

Only working together we will be able to have the biggest impact on improving health for people, animals, and our shared environment in the West and Central Africa Region.