

WHY AND HOW TO INTEGRATE THE **ONE HEALTH** APPROACH INTO TRAINING OF COMMUNITY ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS

Living in close contact with animals and their natural environment, members of rural communities - and livestock farmers in particular - often have a deep-rooted understanding of the One Health approach¹. However, actors from the sectors of human health, animal health and environmental health still too often operate in silos, at both central and local level.

With appropriate training and follow-up, Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs)² can act as the missing link at local level and make the One Health approach operational on the ground. In daily contact with farmers, animals and the environment, they are front-line players and are trusted by their communities.



© Aïdelle Beshizi / VSF Belgique



¹ One Health implementation in the Global South: a holistic approach to address the key challenges of livestock-dependent communities. vsf-international.org/project/one-health-implementation-paper/



² Community-Based Animal Health Workers (CAHWs): Guardians for quality, localised animal health services in the global South vsf-international.org/project/community-based-animal-health-workers-policy-brief/



ONE HEALTH

One Health is an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. It recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and inter-dependent. The approach mobilizes multiple sectors, disciplines and communities at varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems, while addressing the collective need for clean water, energy and air, safe and nutritious food, taking action on climate change, and contributing to sustainable development.

One Health High Level Experts Panel, 2021



CAHWs

CAHWs are farmers/field workers selected by their community in collaboration with private veterinarians, the public veterinary service and support organisations (projects and NGOs). They provide basic animal health services and advice on animal husbandry to livestock farmers. They are therefore responsible for disseminating certain animal husbandry techniques and methods in order to optimise livestock production. As relay agents, they play an important role in epidemiological surveillance.

VSF International, 2018

WHY TRAINING CAHWs IN THE ONE HEALTH APPROACH?

CAHWs are usually connected to other animal health actors, but often lack of linkages with the stakeholders from the human health and the environmental sectors (whether at community level or more widely at regional or national level). This lack of connection limits opportunities for exchange of knowledge and practices and hinders the operationalisation of the One Health concept.

Integrating CAHWs in the One Health approach therefore has three objectives:

- **To create a link between CAHWs and actors from the human and environmental health sectors**, so that they truly embody the transdisciplinary practices inherent to the One Health integrative approach and interconnectedness.
- To provide CAHWs with **knowledge and skills in some technical concepts and topics** related to the interface between animals, humans and the environment.
- To help CAHWs develop **the awareness, values and attitudes needed for effective communication and collaborative working**³.

These objectives can be achieved, among other things (but not only), as part of their initial and/or refresher trainings.

³ Laing G., et al (2023) Advancing One Health: Updated core competencies. CABI One Health. <https://doi.org/10.1079/cabionehealth.2023.0002>

HOW CAN CAHWs BE TRAINED IN THE ONE HEALTH APPROACH?

Recommendations on training content:

While allowing space for alternative and local knowledge, CAHW training should ideally cover:

- The One Health concept and **the interconnectedness of all domains (human, animal, plant, ecosystem)**. Often already applied in the field, this is an opportunity to provide explanations using **local examples** that illustrate the issues and risks at stake.
- Basics of **collaborative working and communication**, ideally including some practical examples on how and when to break siloes and reach out to actors of other sectors when needed.
- **Prevention and control of animal diseases** (including zoonotic diseases) that have economic or health importance at local level.
- **Epidemiological role of wildlife**, and possible circulation of pathogens between domestic and wild animals (including increased risk of emergence of new zoonoses).
- Basic good practices in **food hygiene**.
- **Prudent and responsible use of antibiotics and parasiticides**, to prevent development of antimicrobial resistance.
- **Correct disposal of waste** (both the chemicals themselves and the containers, packaging and equipment).
- **Impact of poor livestock and crop farming practices** on the environment (e.g. overgrazing, cutting or burning of trees and shrubs, destruction of wildlife habitats, absence of crop diversity, etc.).
- **Impact of a degraded environment** (caused by human activities) on human and animal health (pollution, surface water quality, etc.).
- Sometimes, and if the needs are expressed locally, the CAHWs can also receive **basic information on public health issues**, such as HIV, COVID-19, access to water, sanitation and hygiene, etc., in order to disseminate good practice messages to their communities.



THE ENVIRONMENT, A TOPIC TOO OFTEN NEGLECTED

The environmental aspect of the One Health approach is often sidelined in training courses, even though it is one of the 3 health pillars. Particular attention should be paid to emphasizing the link between the health of ecosystems and human and animal health with concrete and practical examples.



EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

By integrated training and collaborative work of community-based workers of the different health sectors, we can achieve:



Joint provision of human and animal health care (e.g., via mobile caravans, or at fixed points in livestock camps in pastoral settings)



Networking and information sharing between community stakeholders concerning the occurrence of diseases or environmental hazards (contaminated water, bush fires, etc.).



Joint interventions for disease outbreaks surveillance, early warning, preventive and mitigation measures, management of a healthy environment and ecosystem.

Recommendations on training methodologies:

- To be more impactful, **training courses should involve a variety of stakeholders**: for instance, a doctor providing training on human health aspects, a veterinarian on animal health topics, and an environmental officer on natural resource management issues. The One Health approach is above all a cross-sectoral approach. These contributions also help to create a link between community players and the technical advisers from the 3 health sectors in their area.
- It is worth organising **joint training courses for community-based actors of the 3 sectors (human, animal, environment)**. These training sessions hence become exchange opportunities where the people get to know each other, identify each other's responsibilities and the interests they may have in exchanging information and practices on some subjects. This facilitates future communication and cooperation. These collective training sessions can also be the opportunity for CAHWs and local human and environmental health actors to identify the cases that require transdisciplinary management and develop, through practical exercises, some simple "procedures" to know whom to contact and how.
- In parallel of training CAHWs, it is necessary to **raise awareness and train staff from decentralized technical services in the One Health approach**. Involving local representatives of the decentralized technical services as trainers helps strengthening the legitimacy of the CAHWs, increases trust between the actors and communities and makes communication in the field more fluid.

WHAT'S NEXT?

CAHWs, in conjunction with human health and environmental health stakeholders, contribute to the implementation of the One Health concept within their communities. **Community-based One Health committees**, bringing together stakeholders from the 3 sectors, can be set up at local level for integrated surveillance but also for steering and monitoring. In this later case, regular meetings are usually held to check the effectiveness of the scheme and discuss any obstacles encountered.



© Arlette Bashihi / VSF Belgique

SOME EXAMPLES WHERE THESE RECOMMENDATIONS WERE APPLIED AND TESTED

● Countries where VSF International operates

SENEGAL

As part of project Thiellal in Senegal, AVSF facilitates joint training of community agents (traditional healers, midwives, and CAHWs) in risk perception and good management practices of chemicals, pesticides, and human and veterinary medicines. Trainers are staff from district veterinary services and a head doctor from a local health centre. Community members reported a better understanding of the challenges, and some changes of practices in the use of pesticides for minimizing risks have been extended thanks to these collaborations.



© AVSF

MALI

Through the Mixed Mobile Health Caravans in Northern Mali, CAHWs, Community Health Workers (CHWs) and environment community agents are jointly trained by the heads of the decentralised services of the 3 sectors (veterinary services, health post and environment).

SOMALILAND

In Somaliland, VSF Suisse organized joint training of Community Health Workers (CHWs), CAHWs, and natural resources management agents on livestock diseases, zoonoses, and environmental health. Additional workshops were held to train local actors on how to make them coordinate instead of doing activities separately. Community members have been reported to be very positive to the One Health approach, acknowledging its benefits in terms of information sharing, improved communication, and increased collaboration between actors.

© Thomas Cytrynowicz / VSF Belgique - MdM



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Around the Kahuzi-Biega national park in DRC, VSF Belgium and Médecins du Monde installed local committees in the 13 pilot villages of their joint project. These committees gather local animal health, human health and environmental health actors for community-based integrated surveillance around the park.

VÉTÉRINAIRES SANS FRONTIÈRES INTERNATIONAL

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières International is a network of non-profit organisations working all over the world to support small-scale farmers and livestock keepers. As a whole, VSF International members are active in more than 40 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.



SCAN ME

vsf-international.org