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One health: A new paradigm in fighting infectious diseases in West Africa

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Zoonotic infectious diseases have been an important concern to humankind for more than 10,000 years. Today, approximately 75% of newly emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) are zoonoses that result from various anthropogenic, genetic, ecologic, socioeconomic and climatic factors. Zoonotic EIDs remain a major global concern and such threats are expanding, especially in less developed regions. Current Ebola epidemic in West Africa is an extreme stark reminder of the role animal reservoirs play in public health, which reinforces the urgent need to operationalize a one health approach. Building opportunities to overcome the challenges largely depends on four key capacity-building needs: (1) development of adequate science-based risk management policies, (2) skilled-personnel capacity building, (3) accredited veterinary and public health diagnostic laboratories with a shared database and (4) improved use of existing natural resources and implementation. This paper highlights the key issues as building block for synthesis of the one health approach to address the challenges and opportunities for tackling infectious diseases at the human, animal and environment interface in low-resource settings. Health laboratory services are essential for the efficient delivery of quality and cost-effective healthcare. Training in laboratory services has long been a neglected part of the one health approach in countries like Sierra Leone. Njala University is actively working with other partners of Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) Post-Ebola Resilience Project, further reinforcing the one health concept by focusing on both human and animal health and its interface.

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