



The challenges of policy actors to integrate the One Health approach into health emergency policy initiatives

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INTRODUCTION

The One Health approach facilitates collaboration and communication through coordinated activities across human, animal and environment sectors to combat challenges like infectious and zoonotic diseases (e.g. Covid-19 & Salmonellosis) or antimicrobial resistance. However, the institutionalisation of the One Health approach faces various challenges like structural issues from local to national levels, lack of funding, and lack of opportunities for interdisciplinary education, training and jobs. This study aims to identify political drivers and constraints for the integration of the One Health approach across Europe. Specifically, it intends to shed light on how One Health topics are included in the policy- and decision-making processes of key political actors and networks.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study relies on a unique online survey conducted March to July 2021 with more than hundred responses from policy actors working in national agencies, ministries, European Union agencies and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) in the areas of public health, veterinary, food and environment across Europe. Represented IGOs are e.g. the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, and the World Organization for Animal Health and the Joint Programming Initiative on Antimicrobial Resistance. European Union agencies included the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the European Food Safety Authority, the European Medicines Agency and the European Environment Agency. The survey contains both quantitative indicators as well as open-ended question for qualitative data. The questionnaire includes 23 questions categorised under demographics; experiences with One Health; science to policy; coordination of One Health and coordination of antimicrobial resistance activities. The study draws on the policy network theory, which offers insight into the interconnectedness of actors and the process of turning scientific knowledge into policies.

RESULTS

The preliminary findings are based on the responses of 103 participants who are from 23 countries in Europe. The results reveal a surprising consensus of national governments on the importance for pushing One Health legislation forward while accommodating the needs of research institutes and relevant industries. At the same time, 41 respondents (39 %) indicate that One Health does not receive adequate attention from policy-makers, and 35 respondents (33 %) did perceive communicating scientific findings to policy-makers (science to policy) as not working well. A barrier is, as a respondent put it, that 'One Health requires a long term strategic approach and policy-makers generally take a short term view'. Respondents pointed out that this might be the result of a lack of funding, collaboration across ministries and political awareness. However, to spark discussions about One Health on a political level, 81 respondents (75 %) agree that informing the public about the One Health approach can be crucial. Suggestions were to improve general education of the public, to use outlets like social media or TV news to inform the public about One Health.

DISCUSSION

Even though there is awareness for the One Health approach among government representatives, the network is complex, which means that communication of scientific findings to political actors must be tailored and targeted. To unravel the interconnectedness of actors in the political and scientific networks, engaging knowledge brokers could be beneficial, as those individuals are able to convey information comprehensibly from science to policy. They can frame a problem, considering scientific and bureaucratic knowledge, local conditions, values and emotions. Those aspects can help to make the One Health approach something tangible and real for policy-makers. Further, it can aid in engaging the public and increasing their awareness about One Health. Researchers should exploit communication via social media and news outlets. This may lead to increased knowledge about One Health among the public and can potentially be a political driver by increasing pressure to put One Health onto the political agenda.