PMAC PRINCE MAHIDOL AWARD CONFERENCE 2023

PL 3

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: TAKING ACTION ON THE GROUND

| BACKGROUND

Political opportunities for action in 2022: taking stock of global commitments

The year 2022 presents a great opportunity to mainstream social justice and health in the global environmental agenda, with far-reaching consequences for the long-term health and resilience of communities and societies worldwide.

In recovering from the global shock caused by COVID-19 - and the resulting damage to livelihoods, health, and sustainable development – governments are increasingly prioritizing a healthy and sustainable recovery of their economies that takes into account the broader social, commercial and environmental determinants of health. To encourage a healthy post-COVID recovery, in May 2020, WHO launched its Manifesto, laying out 6 prescriptions and over 70 actions for achieving more sustainable, just and healthy societies.

Efforts by civil society groups, local communities, and policy makers at various levels have led to the increased recognition of the interconnections between our planet and our health. This is increasingly reflected in international fora, each of which present essential entry points for more coordinated, transformative change. This section will discuss essential entry points to raise ambition at the global level, examples include: World Health Day 2022 “Our planet, our health” campaign, the UN convention on biodiversity (CBD) process to develop a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the Health argument for climate action in the lead up to COP 27, the G7 and G20 commitment to the protection, management and restoration of biodiversity, and an improved understanding of the interrelations between nature, climate and health crises. (G7 2030 Nature Compact, G7 One Health Initiative), The Sao Paulo Declaration on Planetary Health (2021).

Taking action for our planet and our health: Creating opportunities from the ground up (national and local examples)

Investing in basic services can protect the health of the most vulnerable from the risks associated with climate change and nature loss. Investing in well-designed health services, infrastructure, sanitation, clean drinking water, drainage, electricity, and land-rights, can transform development opportunities, reduce inequalities, increase adaptive capacity, and reduce vulnerability to climate-related risks.

We have the solutions at hand. Priority actions to address the current climate, biodiversity and health crises include: protecting and restoring nature as the foundation of our health; building health resilience to climate risks; creating energy systems that protect and improve climate and health; transforming urban environments, transport, and mobility; promoting healthy, sustainable, and resilient food systems; and finance a healthier, fairer, and greener future to save lives.

1) Enhancing resilience at the national and local levels through national reporting mechanisms

Country strategies and plans, such as the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement, are progressively integrating actions at the nexus of climate change, environment, biodiversity and health, in order to safeguard and promote livelihoods, wellbeing and climate resilient development.

Currently, significant global environmental settlements do not include many health aspects. Greater inclusion of health in NDCs (nationally determined contributions) and climate change mitigation policies could simultaneously increase health benefits and achieve the "well below 2°C" commitment across a range of regional and economic contexts. The NDCs Synthesis report by the secretariat found that health was identified as an adaptation priority in many of the adaptation components, with relevant policy frameworks and plans described. The importance of building the capacity of health institutions and enhancing information and awareness was highlighted. Enhancing the climate resilience of public health systems was a recurring theme, with countries aiming to build or improve related infrastructure.

2) Strengthening multi-sectoral coordination from the ground up: Operationalizing the One Health approach

WHO and the World Health Assembly (WHA) have recognized the role of biodiversity in protecting and promoting human health (WHA A71/11), and has made considerable efforts to integrate environmental determinants in the operationalization of the One Health approach.

At the global level, WHO is also working with FAO, OIE and UNEP to mainstream a broader understanding of One Health, including through the work of the newly expanded quadripartite alliance for One Health, the recent establishment of the WHO-IUCN expert working group on One Health, and by developing and field testing indicators to mainstream biodiversity for nutrition and health (e.g. WHO biodiversity workshop, WHO manifesto for a green and healthy recovery from COVID-19).

3) The health sector leading by example

Coordinated action in the health sector itself is also needed, to reduce its environmental and carbon footprint (4.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions) and build climate-resilient health care. This section will examine health sector leadership toward a low-carbon economy, supported by case studies and examples.

Socio-political, economic and financial dimensions

The public health benefits of actions and investments to reverse the climate and biodiversity crises far outweigh the costs. The health co-benefits from climate change actions are well evidenced, offer strong arguments for transformative change, and can be gained across many sectors. Effective solutions to reverse nature loss - such as protecting existing forests and other ecosystems, sustainable agriculture and balanced and healthy diets - offer some of the highest potentials for mitigation and adaptation while also bringing many health benefits.

1) Financing a healthier, more sustainable future

While recent years have sharply increased carbon dioxide levels in the air and global warming, renewable energy sources continue to grow rapidly, paving the way for future expansion and the development of cleaner energy economies. The development of clean energy is accompanied in parallel by rebounds in coal and oil use (looping back to the extreme levels of carbon dioxide), highlighting the need of placing the energy sector at the core of sustainable change and collaborative action needed to battle climate change and its impacts on human and planetary health, finding new solutions while balancing the rise in demand with a growing global population.

Financial decisions made in the coming months and years can either lock in economic development patterns that will do permanent and escalating damage to the ecological systems that sustain all human health and livelihoods, or, if wisely taken, can promote a healthier, fairer, and greener world (WHO 2021). In recovering from COVID-19, financial reform will be unavoidable. By transitioning towards a wellbeing economy that is aligned, financial systems would be redirected to prioritise human needs rather than unsustainable economic growth.

Key action points to finance a healthier, fairer, and greener future to save lives may include:

- **Stop funding pollution.** End harmful subsidies for fossil fuels, both domestically and abroad.
- **Close the health financing gap.** Invest in health adaptation and resilience and help close the health financing gap.
- **Ensure public finance does no harm.** Prevent investments in unsustainable and polluting activities that threaten communities' health and wellbeing.
- **Provide debt relief to vulnerable nations**. Show global solidarity for those most impacted.

| OBJECTIVES

PMAC 2023 Plenary session on the Sub-Theme 3 "Making a difference: Taking action on the ground" will serve as an opportunity to critically reflect on the opportunities for action that are needed to create well-being societies. And it will exhibit initiatives, case-studies, alternative worldviews and socio-economic models for protecting and promoting health on a rapidly changing planet. These examples will represent a broad range of actors, sectors, geographies and perspectives and will highlight the multiple co-benefits of working across sectors for health, social justice, biodiversity and climate change.



Panelist / Panelist

Vanida Khumnirdpetch

Director of Bureau of Foreign Agricultural Affairs

Office of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
Thailand