

‘One Health’ Approach

What is the issue?

The battle against COVID-19 should be used as an opportunity to meet India’s ‘One Health’ targets.

What is the “One Health” approach?

- The approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness of animals, humans, and the environment is referred to as “One Health”.
- The father of modern pathology, Rudolf Virchow, emphasised in 1856 that there are essentially no dividing lines between animal and human medicine.
- Studies indicate that more than two-thirds of existing and emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic.
- In other case, they can be transferred between animals and humans, and vice versa, when the pathogen in question originates in any life form but circumvents the species barrier.
- Another category of diseases, “anthropozoonotic” infections, gets transferred from humans to animals.

What is the significance now?

- The transboundary impact of viral outbreaks in recent yearshas further reinforced the need to consistently document the linkages between the environment, animals, and human health.
- These include the Nipah virus, Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Avian Influenza.
- This concept is ever more salient now as the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is India’s framework for “One Health”?

- **Framework** - India’s ‘One Health’ vision derives its blueprint from the agreement between the tripartite-plus alliance comprising -
 - i. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
 - ii. the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)
 - iii. the World Health Organization (WHO) (and)
 - iv. the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- It is a global initiative supported by the UNICEF and the World Bank under

the overarching goal of contributing to 'One World, One Health'.

- **Initiatives** - In keeping with the long-term objectives, India established a National Standing Committee on Zoonoses as far back as the 1980s.
- Recently, funds were sanctioned for setting up a 'Centre for One Health' at Nagpur.
- Further, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) has launched several schemes to mitigate the prevalence of animal diseases since 2015.
- The funding pattern works along the lines of 60:40 (Centre: State), 90:10 for the Northeastern States, and 100% funding for Union Territories.
- Under the National Animal Disease Control Programme, around Rs. 13,000 crore have been sanctioned for Foot and Mouth disease and Brucellosis control
- In addition, DAHD will soon establish a 'One Health' unit within the Ministry.
- Additionally, the government is working to revamp programmes that focus on -
 - capacity building for veterinarians
 - upgrading the animal health diagnostic system such as Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD)
- In the revised component of assistance to States/UTs, there is increased focus on vaccination against livestock diseases and backyard poultry.
- To this end, assistance will be extended to State biological production units and disease diagnostic laboratories.
- **Rabies** - WHO estimates that rabies (also a zoonotic disease) costs the global economy approximately \$6 billion annually.
- Considering that 97% of human rabies cases in India are attributed to dogs, interventions for disease management in dogs are considered crucial.
- DAHD has partnered with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in the National Action Plan for Eliminating Dog Mediated Rabies.
- This initiative is geared towards sustained mass dog vaccinations and public education to render the country free of rabies.

What is the impending challenge?

- Scientific observations suggest that there are more than 1.7 million viruses circulating in wildlife.
- Many of them are likely to be zoonotic.
- This implies that unless there is timely detection, India risks facing many more pandemics in times to come.
- To achieve targets under the 'One Health' vision, efforts are ongoing to address challenges pertaining to -
 - i. veterinary manpower shortages

- ii. the lack of information sharing between human and animal health institutions
- iii. inadequate coordination on food safety at slaughter, distribution, and retail facilities

What is the way forward?

- Existing animal health and disease surveillance systems should be consolidated.
- E.g., the Information Network for Animal Productivity and Health, and the National Animal Disease Reporting System
- Best-practice guidelines should be developed for informal market and slaughterhouse operation (e.g., inspections, disease prevalence assessments)
- Creating mechanisms to operationalise 'One Health' at every stage down to the village level is another essential requirement.
- Now, as India battles yet another wave of a deadly zoonotic disease (COVID-19), awareness generation, and increased investments toward meeting 'One Health' targets is the need of the hour.

Source: The Hindu

