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Mar 01, 2023 The Anniversary of the UNEA Nexus Resolution

By Andrew Rowan, DPhil **and** Kathleen Rowan CEO, WellBeing International

On March 2, 2022, the United Nations Environment Assembly (the world's environment parliament) passed a landmark resolution calling on the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) to produce a report on the Nexus between animal welfare, the environment, and sustainable development. This Resolution offers enormous potential for a significant reset in how humanity approaches, values, and interacts with our world moving towards a more holistic global approach (including humans, animals, and the environment). The United Nations agreed first to the Millennium Development Goals and then, in 2015, to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Persuading all the members of the UN to approve the SDGs was a substantial (and surprising?) achievement. However, the SDGs continued to emphasize human needs and approach achieving a sustainable world through a distinctly anthropocentric lens.

The UNEA resolution raises the exciting and transformative possibility of resetting the SDGs. Wellbeing International actively supports this Resolution,

producing articles about the issue and publishing a Nexus Resource Document. This [document](#) and an [exhibit](#) on the Nexus are freely accessible to global readers on the [WBI Studies Repository](#). One year after UNEA passed the Resolution, we again call attention to its *transformative potential for people, animals, and the environment*.

The links, interconnections, and causal directions between people, animals, and the environment are complex and often unclear. UNEP's Nexus report should provide a more robust description and understanding of these links and interconnections, thus reducing the risk of under-valuing essential factors contributing to global sustainability.

The following examples describe a few cases illustrating the complexity of the workings of a healthy and sustainable world.

One Health and Bird Flu

As we approach the anniversary of the UNEA Resolution on the Nexus, the world is again confronting a significant health threat arising from how we interact with and raise animals for food. One Health initiatives note that around three-quarters of new and emerging diseases (e.g., the Covid, SARS, and NIPAH viruses) are zoonotic (i.e., emerge from animals). Market hunting has been identified as a particular problem in the emergence of new diseases. However, new diseases are not just arising from the hunting and consumption of wild animals. How we raise animals in intensive husbandry systems also increases the risk of new diseases and the emergence of antibiotic-resistant pathogens. Resistant pathogens are probably just as serious a health threat for people and animals as the appearance of new diseases. A recent “highly pathogenic” avian influenza (HPAI) virus that has spread worldwide apparently first originated in China in an area with many intensive animal agricultural systems (see the update in this newsletter on avian flu).

Climate Change & Marine Life – Carbon Storage

Recent studies show that whales and other marine life can substantially mitigate the harmful climate effects of excess atmospheric carbon dioxide. Marine life incorporates, and hence removes, substantial quantities of carbon from the atmosphere. The carbon sequestration by marine life in shallow water lasts for months to decades, while carbon sequestration by marine life in deep waters, where whales sink upon death, lasts hundreds to thousands of years. The President of the Ocean Foundation, Mark Spalding, is quoted in [UNEP's Technical Report](#) on oceanic blue carbon. "The results confirm the great ecological value of whales and other marine life to help mitigate climate. The global community must consider this evidence as part of their ongoing efforts to manage and recover marine life and address global climate change."

Bees and other Insect Pollinators

Bees and other insect pollinators are an illustrative case study of the importance of biodiversity to global health. Insect pollinators are an essential but often unappreciated component of food security, human livelihoods, and biodiversity. Around 75% of food crops depend on insect pollination to some extent. Livelihoods would be adversely affected by the absence of such creatures. In addition to honey production, many important cash crops (e.g., avocados, cocoa, and various nuts and fruits) depend heavily on insect pollination. Overall, the absence of insect pollinators would reduce global crop yields by around 10%.

As regards animal biodiversity, modern nicotinoid pesticides are a possible cause of the reductions in bee and other insect populations. Insect declines also affect other animals. A recent [study](#) notes, "[t]here is compelling evidence that agricultural intensification is the primary driver of population declines in unrelated taxa such as birds, insectivorous mammals, and insects."

Implementing the Nexus Report

The Resolution calls on UNEP to coordinate with its three partners in the Quadripartite Collaboration for One Health – the FAO, the World Health Organization, and the World Animal Health Organization. The four organizations signed the Quadripartite MoU specifically to provide "a legal and formal

framework ... to tackle the challenges at the human, animal, plant, and ecosystem interface using a more integrated and coordinated approach.”

The [World Federation for Animals](#) has produced a report entitled “[Unveiling the Nexus](#)” to mark the first anniversary of the passage of the UNEA Nexus Resolution and urge UNEP’s immediate launch of an effort to produce a comprehensive Nexus Report.

Conclusion

To develop and achieve sustainable world goals, we must first value and then respect all people, all animals, and the environment, because each element is tightly connected to and dependent on the well-being of the others. (WellBeing International, 2021). A comprehensive Nexus report would be a significant step forward.