Accelerating action against antimicrobial resistance: closing the gaps in the animal health sector

The issue of antimicrobial resistance will be addressed for the second time since 2016 during a High-Level Meeting on the sidelines of the upcoming UNGA. WOAH is participating in the discussions alongside its Quadripartite partners (FAO, UNEP and WHO). Our aim is to support the development of an action-oriented declaration to mobilise political will and efforts at the national, regional and global level to address the root causes and challenges of AMR.

Antimicrobials are critical medicines whose effectiveness must be preserved for the treatment, control and, where appropriate, for the prevention of infectious diseases in animals, humans and plants. Therefore, the animal health sector has to be adequately supported to help accelerate the response to this growing threat. What is needed and why?

The animal health sector: a key player in the fight against antimicrobial resistance

One Health
Humans, animals, plants and the environment are connected and interdependent. Pathogens that are resistant to antimicrobials can be transmitted between animals, humans, plants and the environment through direct contact, consumption of contaminated food, or the environment. Tackling AMR requires a cross-sectoral collaborative effort that must integrate the expertise of animal health professionals.

Shared antimicrobials
Many antimicrobials used in veterinary medicine are also used in human medicine and plants. Their misuse and overuse across sectors can lead to the emergence of resistant pathogens, thus making diseases more difficult to treat with available molecules. The responsible use of antimicrobials in animals is key in contributing to the global effort to curb AMR.

Food security
Farmed animals contribute to secure local and global economies, enabling access to nutritious and safe food, essential for human health. Effective antimicrobials are critical to ensure animal health and thus the achievement of many Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), such as good health and well-being, responsible consumption and production, as well as zero hunger.

Environment
The inappropriate use of antimicrobials in animals can lead to the release of antimicrobial residues and resistant pathogens into the terrestrial and aquatic environments, contributing to the spread of AMR. Effective management of animal waste and safe disposal of unused veterinary medicinal products on farms is key to preventing the emergence and spread of drug-resistant pathogens in the environment.
How can we better tackle AMR? Four priorities for the animal health sector

Cross-sectoral coordination
The animal health sector needs to be fully integrated into national AMR strategies.
- More than 90% of countries had developed National Action Plans on AMR, but only half of them have an effective multisectoral coordination mechanism in place to guide and oversee the implementation phase.
- Lack of coordination between the animal, human and environmental sectors leads to isolated and less effective initiatives to tackle AMR.

Resourced surveillance
National surveillance systems must be strengthened and institutionalised to support informed decision-making.
- One out of three countries do not use relevant data on antimicrobial consumption to inform decision making and guide policy development across sectors.
- Less than half of WOAH Members (42%) have an integrated multisectoral surveillance system for AMR and antimicrobial use (AMU).
- Almost 25% of WOAH Members do not have an animal AMR surveillance system in place.

Prevention
Preventative measures must be prioritised, starting by strengthening research, development and implementation of innovative tools in animal health.
- Animal health investments represented only 7% of total funding in AMR research and development (R&D) from 2017 to 2024.
- 6 cents for every 10 USD were allocated to R&D in animal health vaccines from 2017 to 2024.
- Investments in animal health vaccines have decreased by 59% since 2018.

Adequate funding
AMR initiatives involving the animal health sector must be better resourced.
- In 2023, only 25% of countries had costed and budgeted the activities of their National Action Plans on AMR and had an effective monitoring system in place.

WOAH’S CALL TO ACTION

The animal health sector plays a pivotal role in the global efforts to curb AMR by promoting a more responsible use of antimicrobials. **Members are called upon to provide sustainable and predictable funding sources for their National Action Plans.** This will enable the implementation of cost-effective interventions across various sectors, guided by robust surveillance programs.

We must **prioritise preventive measures**, starting with **addressing the severely underfunded R&D pipeline for animal vaccines**. Only by accelerating our global response to the growing threat of AMR can we prevent a return to the pre-antimicrobial era and its consequences. We all have a role to play in enhancing animal health systems, everyone’s health is at stake.