

## COMMENTARY

### Preparing society to create the world we need through 'One Health' education

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**Abstract:**

Growing concerns about a threatened environment, conflicts, inequities, poverty, ideological extremes, and consumerism are all indicative of a pressing need to reflect on the global status quo and to find constructive and long-term, sustainable strategies for planet and people. The need to give the younger generation “a better deal” for helping to shape a sustainable world has been embraced by the global One Health Commission (OHC) in association with the One Health Initiative (OHI). Envisioning a program that provides funding for national and global One Health-themed educational projects, One Health leaders - in collaboration with partners - call for collective action by legislators, public / private educators, and public health professionals to support the development and implementation of progressive and comprehensive global One Health learning opportunities. One Health (and well-being) projects led by teachers who *want to make a difference* could begin in primary/secondary schools and extend through graduate and professional education. The overall intent of the concept paper is to raise awareness about the urgent need for the development and to explore the concept further through a small *pre-project proposal conference* (possibly off and/or on-line) with a view to fleshing out a strong plan to fund the envisioned global learning program.

**Keywords:** Global Health, Planetary Health, Health Education

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Human existence is deeply embedded in the natural world and the survival of all species, including our own, is wholly dependent on a healthy planet. But the health of our planet is in serious trouble. Attempts by scientists, technical professionals, and policymakers to understand and solve many of the problems being confronted today have been fragmented, short-sighted and outpaced by the rate at which the world changes and catastrophic events occur (1). Time is running short. As one example, data from the *Living Planet Index* should “make us stop and think” (2):

*...in less than two human generations, population sizes of vertebrate species have dropped by half. These are the living forms that constitute the fabric of the ecosystems which sustain life on earth - and the barometer of what we are doing to our planet, our only home.*

Global inequities, conflicts and modernity impacting on the human dimension are equally and deeply worrying. In both low and high income nations growing concerns about poverty, ideological extremes, consumerism, and associated consequences are all indicative of a pressing need to reflect on the global status quo and to find constructive and long-term, sustainable strategies for both planet and people.<sup>1</sup> In this regard it is becoming increasingly clear that realigning our relationship with the planet and ourselves rests not with individuals or groups who follow their own narrow self-interests – corporate, political, ideological - but with people who value collaborative approaches to these challenges and who embrace a bolder, broader more hopeful scope of human existence *within* a sustainable world. The “tragedy of the commons” (3) must become the „promise of the commons.“ Recognizing that species“ interdependencies are rooted in the sanctity of life, we are tasked to ensure that the health and well-being of the planet must become the norm, not the exception, worldwide.

In *Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action* (4), UNESCO highlighted that “education is the most effective means that society possesses for confronting the challenges of the future.” The significance of this resolve was also captured in the UN“s Earth Charter, which emphasized the importance of integrating into “education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life (Principle 9)” (5). More recently, the UN 2030-Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reinforce this principle, declaring that by 2030:

*All learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development (SDG 4)* (6).

The need to give the younger generation „a better deal“ for helping to shape a sustainable world has been embraced by the global *One Health Commission* (OHC) (7) [in association with the *One Health Initiative* (8)]. We believe the best opportunity to achieve meaningful societal change and prepare future leaders to create a healthier world must be seized early on in children“s lives as they form fundamental views of their places on the planet and carry those views forward into adulthood. The OHC [and partners] calls for collective action by legislators, public and private educators, and public health professionals to support the development and implementation of progressive and comprehensive global *One Health* learning opportunities beginning in primary/secondary schools and extending through graduate and professional education. We envision a program that provides funding for national and global *One Health*-themed educational initiatives that focus on the formation of:

- *basic values and responsibilities* with respect to “the community of life” (5);

- *knowledge* with respect to the interconnectedness of life on our planet;
- *real world application skills* underpinned by interdisciplinary teamwork, creativity and group problem-solving; and
- *a global network* of One Health education providers who are committed to supporting learners and teachers in their quest to realize a more sustainable world.

Addressing these aims on national and global scales and linking the SDGs (6) to the *One Health* concept/approach (9) is crucial. Today “73 million young people are looking for work and many more are trapped in exploitative jobs” and “more than two and a half million more children in affluent countries” have fallen “into poverty, bringing the total above 76 million” (10). Policymakers cannot ignore the connection between their plight and the world in which they live, that is, recognizing the interdependency of human, animal and environmental health and well-being. Our argument is unequivocal: *One Health* must extend to all living things implicit in the World Health Organization definition - “*good health is a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being*” (11). To this end, we energetically assert that our proposed *One Health* educational initiative is a fundamental step toward preparing the next generation of global citizens and visionary leaders to help shape the healthy, peaceful and sustainable world that we so vitally need (1,6)!

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