



Minutes of ENCA Webinar Corona&Biodiversity, 17 June 2020, 14:00-16:00 CEST

Host: INPA, Israel

Chair: Henriette Spyra (Environment Agency Austria)

Approx. 45 participants

Welcome by Martin Schamann (ENCA network)

Corona pandemic makes dangers of zoonoses clear. Role of biodiversity loss focus of this webinar.

Introduction by Henriette Spyra

Key note presentations

Franz Essl (University of Vienna): Link between biodiversity, climate change and Corona and how can society deal with such risks?

Biodiversity an important aspect as regards responses to Covid19. Humans and domesticated animals dominate the biosphere. Wild animals only take up a small share. Drivers for decline in nature are: Population increase and transformation of rural areas into conglomerations; draining of wetlands which also contributes to Climate Change (CC); over-hunting; Drivers show up in IPBES assessment. Indirect drivers result in direct ones: biosphere integrity is threatened.

According to the Global Risk Report of the World Economic Forum the 5 biggest threats refer to environmental risks (Feb 2020). Zoonosis was not considered a threat!

We have a poor understanding of current and immediate threats. We ignore and underestimate systemic, diffuse risks (climate change, biodiversity loss) compared to concrete limited ones. Loss of biodiversity is ongoing; biodiversity loss and climate change are likely to cause crises of a similar scale.

Key lessons to be learned:

- Resilient biodiversity is essential for human society and economy
- Biosphere (ecosystem Earth): integrity of our biosphere must be preserved to allow us, as a society, to cope with future risks
- Climate and biodiversity crises are twins and must be considered at the same time.

Concrete tasks:

- Appreciate the long-term risks we are facing
- Post 2020 framework should be given mandate to assess high-risk scenarios
- Treat known high risk activities together

Green Deal of the EU Commission as transformation of Europe into a sustainable society is the political answer that is needed; it should become the global answer.

Rodrigo A. Medellín, (Instituto de Ecología, UNAM, Mexico): Zoonosis, coronavirus and bats (transfer of viruses from animals to humans and the other way round)

Three major benefits from bats: pollination, pest control and seed dispersal.

How does a virus travel from an animal to a human? Nipah and Marburg viruses are linked to durian – bats were eating durian above pigs, which infected pigs, which infected humans. As a consequence: bats were killed. Bat killing stopped when people were made aware that this would be the end of durian (industry). Illness is just one piece of the puzzle, regard whole ecological process to understand zoonosis (transfer from one animal to another (including humans)).

There is an estimate 10^{31} viruses on earth. We only know 8000 so far, a virus free world is impossible. We would die without viruses (they eat up to 50% of bacteria). Most viruses are beneficial. App. 400 viruses are counted to corona family, but only 7 are known to cause discomfort to humans, and only 3 are really dangerous: MERS, SARS. SARS-Cov2 is a human virus (passed on only by humans, no animal can pass a virus to us. Maybe with the exception of the first one, but it is not known how this first human has been infected). NO animal can pass a virus to us.



First line of defense against the next pandemic is ecosystem and biodiversity conservation to keep the dilution effect (mice are the vectors). Regulating and reducing illegal, unsustainable bushmeat consumption may help mitigate the next pandemic.

We must lower our consumption of animals, and respect animals and animal health.

Most pandemics arise from a combination of ecosystem degradation, unsustainable bushmeat trade and poor farm animal management.

William B. Karesh (EcoHealth Alliance, New York): One Health Concept

One Health: Health of animals and people is linked to the environment. We need a healthy world to live in. There are billions of people getting sick annually from infectious diseases.

EID emerging infectious diseases: easy example for one health. Billions of cases that humans get sick every year from diseases that are shared between animals and people. Main drivers (risk factors): land-use change and agricultural industry change (deforestation, agricultural intensification, habitat destruction and fragmentation). Some areas on the earth are more at risk than others.

The frequency of EID events is increasing, those from wildlife exponentially.

Response to Covid19 is based on fear of the economic impact. Great wakeup call for the world. Costs of prevention is borne by individual sectors, but should be borne by society as a whole (all society approach of one health). One Health practice document by World Bank¹, how to implement One Health. Eco Health Alliance supports implementation.

Global collaboration needed → Moving from pandemic response towards risk reduction (disaster management, security and defense, public health). Adoption of One Health approaches for integrated health and biodiversity risk assessment, surveillance and prevention strategies.

What can we do? Need to educate people about how to live safely with bats. Risks from pandemics can be reduced: inform local communities what is safe to do and what is rather to be avoided.

Reduce food waste. Make sure there is an adequate cool chain. → invest in better food management systems. Wet markets keep people in poor conditions.

Roundtable discussions based on the following two questions:

- Economic stimulus packages are being developed in many places to revive the economic situation. Is there any consideration in your country to include biodiversity in these stimulus packages? If so, what are the proposals?
- On the connection between biodiversity and health: What contributions should the EU make to global biodiversity protection in terms of preventive health protection (e.g. against the development of new diseases)?

Country presentations

Sally Thomas (UK/Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, SNH) – focus on question Q2

SNH advises their government on how to include biodiversity in these stimulus packages, “green recovery”. Scotland has been in lockdown for 3-4 months, has increased the time of people to engage with nature (close to home). They are interested in recording wildlife and include it in local schooling. Changed engagement with nature. How can this be used in the long run? Access to nature has not been there for everybody; inequality – especially in low urban income groups. The future shall be radically different: attacking the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change, focus on wellbeing of people rather than maximizing economic growth.

Green recovery: Focus on Nature based Solutions as a remedy to climate change. Build on natural capital. Fight against climate change and biodiversity loss and for health and education.

Lorenzo Ciccarese (Italy, ISPRA) – focus on Q2

¹ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/961101524657708673/pdf/122980-REVISED-PUBLIC-World-Bank-One-Health-Framework-2018.pdf>

GEO-6 report Healthy planet, healthy people² recalls holistic concept of one health. 75% of emerging diseases stem from livestock and our environment. Humans putting pressure on ecosystems, and on wildlife. Disruption of natural ecosystems. EU COM on how to reduce global deforestation and forest degradation. Europeans are responsible for rainforest destruction and global deforestation. Communication stresses 5 priorities to intensify EU action against deforestation.

CBD Kunming communication: focuses on the importance of preserving the integrity of the biosphere to prevent pandemics.

We must take care not to lose momentum of this pandemic, make aware of ecosystem services..

Helmut Gaugitsch (Austria, Environment Agency Austria) – Q1 and Q2

Question 1: EAA developed policy paper for stimulus package, biodiversity is a precautionary approach in the fight against pandemics. Suggested:

- biodiversity check as part of sustainability check of all measures implemented in all Austrian stimulus packages;
- fostering implementation for green infrastructure and ecosystem connectivity
- measures for wet- and peatland restoration

Only recently the Austrian government has provided money for climate change mitigation measures in the frame of a stimulus package.

Question 2: Suggested activities at international level:

- SBSTTA-24 meeting: health and biodiversity on agenda
- Health and biodiversity: overall theme of SBSSTA-24 poster session. Proposal: ENCA could also prepare and issue a poster with specific recommendations (see below)
- EU contributions for SBSTTA and COP -15: Concrete proposals for ambitious, realistic and implementable measures against ecosystem degradation in the global post-2020 biodiversity framework – Proposal: ENCA could provide concrete suggestions to the EC and MS for the post 2020 framework
- Integrate “One Health Concept” – could be included in global post 2020 biodiversity framework (see above, possible proposal to be elaborated by ENCA)
- Focus on capacity-building efforts in development cooperation
- Involving Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and other stakeholders concerned

ENCA could propose to foster a joint global effort CBD-WHO (such as a global consultation on biodiversity & health)

Summary

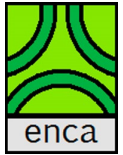
Viruses are essential and part of our lives, only a few are dangerous for humans. Pandemics can occur again at any time. At present, the focus of the problem is fear of economic impact and disaster management. Shift towards prevention and risk reduction is the order of the day. Taken as a whole, the climate and biodiversity crises must be seen as twins. Conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity are seen as the most important precautionary measures, with land use changes and our dietary habits in particular contributing significantly to both crises. Awareness raising, information and communication are essential to avoid misconduct and provide effective precautions.

ENCA is grateful for the recommendations concerning the possible role of the network in this topic which will be discussed internally.

References:

- The European Environment Agency is planning a smaller project to analyse possible impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown in Europe on nature and biodiversity. The contract will probably run from Aug to end of Nov 2020 and will also include a small survey (incl. to the ENCA network).

² https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27539/GEO6_2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y



- The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) has published a position paper on the CORONA crisis and its relation to wildlife trade (available only in German) at: https://www.bfn.de/fileadmin/BfN/presse/2020/Dokumente/2020_04_02_BfN-Papier_Wildtiere_final_bf.pdf

Outlook by Martin Schamann

ENCA will continue using flexible communication techniques. Announcement of planned Webinar by IG GMO focusing on new breeding techniques in the autumn.