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ONE HEALTH POLICY

National Policy for the Implementation of OH in Sierra Leone
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FOREWORD

The COVID-19 pandemic, the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak, and the 2024 Mpox epidemic are clear examples of the critical interdependencies between human, animal, and environmental health, highlighting the importance of adopting a One Health approach to address cross-cutting health threats. These outbreaks and other public health threats like Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), food safety, climate change, and ecosystem degradation continue to highlight existing vulnerabilities in our society. These issues underscore the importance of resilient and sustainable health systems capable of preventing and mitigating threats in a collaborative and holistic approach. Today's health problems are complex, transboundary, multifactorial, and multispecies. Approaching these issues from a purely medical, veterinary, or ecological standpoint is unlikely to yield sustainable mitigation strategies.

This One Health policy outlines strategic actions to integrate the expertise of multiple sectors to enhance prevention, rapid detection, and timely response to cross-cutting health threats. It strategically aligns with the government of Sierra Leone's Big Five Game changers by providing a framework to reduce vulnerabilities and mitigate against the risks posed by public health events while promoting sustainable development. The policy also aligns with international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, Quadripartite One Health Joint Plan of Action, the International Health Regulations, and the Performance of Veterinary Services standards. Through this collaborative effort, Sierra Leone seeks to enhance resilience in the face of evolving health threats and ensure the well-being of its people, animals, and the environment. Successful implementation of the One Health policy will require improved coordination, communication, and collaboration between sectors. It will require a shift from primarily vertical programs focused on specific diseases to those that can strengthen overall systems by engaging stakeholders beyond the health sector.

I call upon all human, animal, and environmental health stakeholders across all sectors (government, civil society, development partners, academia, the private sector, and communities) to actively support the implementation of this policy. The Government of Sierra Leone remains resolute in its unwavering dedication to providing the requisite resources, legislative support, and institutional frameworks necessary to implement the One Health policy effectively. We are committed to cultivating robust partnerships with international organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and our communities to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive response to the intricate health challenges we encounter.



Dr. David Moinina Sengeh
Chief Minister
Office of the President

PREFACE

Our history of catastrophic zoonotic disease outbreaks highlights our vulnerability to health risks at the interface of humans, animals, and the environment. Environmental and human behavioral factors, including land use changes and habitat destruction such as deforestation and pollution, exacerbate these risks. These challenges require an integrated approach to intervene effectively and efficiently. In addition to mitigating health risks, case studies by the World Bank clearly demonstrate that countries can make significant economic savings and avert socio-economic losses by establishing effective multisectoral prevention, detection, and response systems.

This policy addresses these issues by focusing on six strategic objectives anchored on six policy pillars: governance and coordination, workforce development, research and development, OH financing, integrated surveillance and response, and advocacy, communication, and community engagement. Through these pillars, we aim to attain the government's goals of improving health security in a coordinated and collaborative manner responsive to the population's needs. This policy promotes collaboration among diverse sectors, including human, animal, agriculture, wildlife, environmental, water, and disaster management. There is, therefore, a need to raise awareness and ensure that the objectives of this policy are understood and wholly owned by the various stakeholders and implementing partners.

The policy was developed through a participatory process involving all human, animal, and environmental health stakeholders, including government ministries, departments and agencies, development and implementing partners, and sub-regional leadership. Effective implementation of this policy will contribute to the improved prevention and control of endemic and epidemic-prone zoonotic diseases, which reduces the country's vulnerability and risk of outbreaks. It will also contribute to better management of antimicrobial resistance and food safety threats and enhance the integration of environmental sector programs in health planning. We hope that the efforts outlined in this policy will be supported by all the stakeholders, including our development partners and communities, to ensure improved health outcomes for Sierra Leone and our interconnected world.

Chief Medical Officer | Chief Agriculture Officer | Chief Environmental officer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of the Sierra Leone One Health Policy would not have been possible without the collaboration and dedication of One Health stakeholders in the country. We express our deepest gratitude to the government of Sierra Leone, particularly the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and the Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation, for their leadership, vision, and commitment to addressing the interconnected challenges of human, animal, environmental health.

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Minister of Health

Minister of Agriculture and Food Security

Minister of Environment and Climate Change

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ACRONYMS

AFENET	African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET)
AMR	Antimicrobial resistance
AVHE	Acute Viral Hemorrhagic Fever
EID	Emerging Infectious Disease
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
IHR	International Health Relations
IMSC	Interministerial Steering Committee
JEE	Joint External Evaluation
JHPIEGO	Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics
LMICS	Low and middle-income countries
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MDRO	Multi-drug Resistant Organisms
NBW	National Bridging Workshop
NERP	National Emergency Response Plan
NOHP	National One Health Platform
NOHS	National One Health Secretariat
OH	One Health
OH JPA	One Health Joint Plan of Action
OHCC	One Health Coordinating Committee
OHP	One Health Policy

OHTC	One Health Technical Committee
POE	Point of Entry
PVS	Performance of Veterinary Services
PZDs	Priority Zoonotic Diseases
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
US CDC	United States Center for Disease Prevention and Control
WHO	World Health Organization
WOAH	World Organization for Animal Health

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)	AMR occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites change over time and no longer respond to medicines, making infections more challenging to treat.
Biodiversity	Biodiversity is the variability among living organisms and the ecological complexes they are part of; this includes diversity within species, between species, and ecosystems.
Climate Change	Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. In our context, climate change is addressed in relation to its impact on health in a myriad of ways, including by leading to death and illness from increasingly frequent extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, storms, and floods, the disruption of food systems and increase in food-, water- and vector-borne diseases.
Environment	The environment in the context of this document includes the complex interaction of physical, chemical, and biotic factors, including land, air, water, soil, and plants, all living things that interact within it.
Ecosystem Health	The state of an ecological system in which its dynamic processes maintain biodiversity, productivity, and resilience over time, ensuring the sustainability of its functions and services.
Emerging Infectious Diseases	Emerging infectious diseases are infections that have recently appeared within a population or those whose incidence or geographic range is rapidly increasing or threatens to increase in the near future.
Endemic Zoonotic Diseases	Diseases that are constantly present in a defined population within a defined area.
Epidemics	Refers to an increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected in that population in a defined area.

Food safety	Food safety is a science-based discipline, process, or action that prevents food from containing substances that could affect human or animal health.
One Health	One Health is an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals, and ecosystems. It recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and interdependent. The approach mobilizes multiple sectors, disciplines, and communities at varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems while addressing the collective need for clean water, energy, and air, safe and nutritious food, acting on climate change, and contributing to sustainable development.
One Health Joint Plan of Action (OH JPA)	A global framework developed by the Quadripartite organizations to strengthen collaboration and capacities to prevent, predict, detect, and respond to health threats.
One Health threats	Health risks at the interface of humans, animals, and the environment that require a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach. These threats include zoonotic diseases (including emerging and re-emerging diseases, endemic zoonoses, neglected tropical and vector-borne diseases), food safety, climate change and AMR, and other emerging OH issues, including water, chemical, and radiation events.
Pandemics	An epidemic that has spread over several continents, usually affecting a large number of people.
Performance of Veterinary Services	The Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) Pathway is an evaluation of national veterinary and aquatic animal health services strengths and weaknesses using a globally consistent methodology based on WOAH international standards on animal health and welfare. It provides a useful external perspective that can reveal gaps, inefficiencies, and opportunities for innovation.
Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEIC)	A PHEIC is an extraordinary event that is determined to constitute a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response.

Public health surveillance	Public health surveillance is the continuous and systematic collection, orderly consolidation, and evaluation of pertinent data with prompt dissemination of information for action.
Quadripartite	A collaboration framework between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) to strengthen cooperation to sustainably balance and optimize the health of humans, animals, plants and the environment.
Re-emerging Infectious Diseases	Diseases that once were major health problems globally or in a particular country and then declined significantly but are again becoming health problems for a significant proportion of the population.
Zoonotic Diseases	A zoonosis is any disease or infection that is naturally transmissible from vertebrate animals to humans.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

One Health is an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems. It recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and interdependent, and there is a need to mobilize multiple sectors, disciplines, and communities at varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems. The approach mobilizes multiple sectors, disciplines, and communities at varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems while addressing the collective need for clean water, energy and air, safe and nutritious food, taking action on climate change, and contributing to sustainable development [1].

The COVID-19 pandemic, a human public health crisis resulting from a virus of potential animal origin, underlined the importance of the One Health concept in understanding and confronting global health risks. This approach is critical for the control of priority zoonotic diseases such as rabies, avian flu, or viral hemorrhagic fevers such as Ebola and numerous cross-cutting issues, such as antimicrobial resistance, food safety, and health risks arising from climate change because managing these significant global health risks requires a multisector effort. It requires the full cooperation of the animal, human, plant, and environmental health sectors [2].

Zoonoses – diseases or infections naturally transmissible from non-human animals to humans are one of the health risks where the deep interconnections of human, animal, and environmental health are most visible. Recent global estimates suggest that approximately 60% of existing human infectious diseases are zoonotic, and 75% of emerging infectious diseases (including Ebola, HIV, influenza, and COVID-19) have an animal origin. Controlling zoonotic pathogens at their animal source is the most effective and economical way of protecting populations. Sierra Leone has experienced several zoonotic disease outbreaks in recent years, such as Ebola, Lassa Fever, COVID-19, anthrax, and brucellosis. The 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone resulted in over 14,000 reported cases and nearly 3,600 deaths, highlighting the profound impact of diseases of zoonotic origin on public health and the economy [3]. Recognizing the importance of proactive preparedness and response efforts in the face of limited resources, Sierra Leone prioritized six zoonotic diseases for monitoring in 2017, including Acute Viral Hemorrhagic Fever (AVHF), rabies, plague, anthrax, salmonellosis, and zoonotic influenza. This list was reviewed in 2023 to reflect the country's evolving

[1] https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/statements/joint-tripartite-and-unep-statement-definition-one-health
[2] https://www.who.int/health-topics/one-health#tab=tab_1 (accessed on 10 October 2024)
[3] https://www.afro.who.int/publications/sierra-leone-ebola-virus-disease-lessons-learned-2016

landscape of zoonotic diseases and the imperative to adapt and strengthen preparedness and response strategies in alignment with current challenges and global health trends. The prioritization of the ten zoonotic diseases was based on five criteria that are ranked and weighted using the One Health Zoonotic Disease Prioritization (OHZDP) tool: severity of the diseases, impact of the disease, available interventions for the disease, pandemic potential of the disease and presence of the disease in the country [4].
Ten zoonotic diseases have been prioritized in Sierra Leone:

Table 1 - List of top ten priority zoonotic diseases in Sierra Leone

1. Ebola	6. Marburg HF
2. Rabies	7. Rift Valley fever
3. Anthrax	8. Yellow fever
4. Lassa Fever	9. Salmonellosis
5. Zoonotic Avian Influenza	10. Brucellosis

Another key driver of the One Health approach is **food safety**. Food safety is strongly related to animals since a significant exposure route for foodborne diseases is contact or consumption of animal products. The One Health approach is thus crucial for ensuring food safety. The increasing demand for food production, particularly from animal sources, has intensified livestock keeping. This often results in unsafe practices, such as the overuse of antibiotics in livestock, unsanitary conditions in food production, and closer contact between humans and animals, which can facilitate the spread of zoonotic diseases like salmonella, avian influenza, and other foodborne illnesses. Ensuring food safety requires coordination across sectors, including veterinary health, agriculture, and public health, to prevent contamination and manage risks at every stage of the food supply chain.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a global health threat for humans, animals, and plants because it impairs our ability to treat infections. It is associated with the misuse of antimicrobials in various sectors, including agrifood systems and human and veterinary medicine. AMR spreads through animal and human populations, plants, and the environment and can alter the effectiveness of treatments for animal, human, and plant diseases. AMR threatens to undermine modern healthcare by rendering antibiotics less effective, leading to higher rates of infections that are harder to treat. In addition, drug-resistant infections impact the health of animals and plants, reduce productivity in farms, and threaten food security. One Health addresses AMR by promoting responsible use

[4] https://www.cdc.gov/one-health/php/prioritization/index.html

of antimicrobials in animals, humans, and plants, fostering better hygiene practices, and advocating for developing alternatives to antimicrobials in agriculture [5].

Climate change is a growing driver of One Health, as changing temperatures and ecosystems alter the distribution of disease vectors (e.g., mosquitoes and ticks), contributing to the spread of diseases like Rift Valley fever, dengue, and yellow fever. Research shows that 3.6 billion people, primarily in LMICs, live in areas highly susceptible to climate change. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from undernutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress alone[6]. Climate change also impacts food security, water quality, and biodiversity, creating new risks for both human and animal health. Climate mitigation and adaptation are thus essential to decreasing health risks. By addressing these interconnected challenges through a One Health approach, countries can mitigate the risks posed to global health security [7].

In summary, the One Health approach is essential to Sierra Leone's national health security, as it enhances coordination, collaboration, and communication across the human–animal–environment interface to address cross-sectoral health threats. Effective implementation of this approach will support the country in meeting IHR core capacities, such as zoonotic disease, disease surveillance, food safety, and risk communication, while advancing PVS standards, including strong veterinary governance and effective disease prevention. This synergy ensures comprehensive health risk management, enhances compliance with global standards, and strengthens the resilience of national health systems against emerging threats.

1.2 Situation analysis: Implementation of the OH approach in Sierra Leone

The Government of Sierra Leone adopted the One Health approach in 2017, establishing a multisectoral National One Health Platform (NOHP) to strengthen the prevention, detection, and response to public health threats following the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak. The platform's mandate is to coordinate the implementation of the one health approach in Sierra Leone, foster collaboration between sectors, and harness synergies for more effective prevention, detection, and response to public health threats. The objectives of the National One Health Platform are:

1. To create a conducive platform for the effective engagement of state and non-state actors in the promotion of the One Health agenda;

[5] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antimicrobial-resistance
[6] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health
[7] Mackenzie JS, Jeggo M. The One Health Approach-Why Is It So Important? Trop Med Infect Dis. 2019 May 31;4(2):88. doi: 10.3390/tropicalmed4020088. PMID: 31159338; PMCID: PMC6630404.

2. To guide the establishment of an institutional framework, working collaboratively, to support a One Health approach;
3. To create and maintain public health awareness of the One Health concept
4. To promote national capacity and expertise in One Health and ensure a multidisciplinary approach to solving public health threats

The OH Sierra Leone Governance Manual 2024 outlines the OH coordination framework (Figure 1). The key components within the NOHP framework include:

- The Interministerial Committee (IMC) is responsible for policy formulation, coordination, and oversight of all One Health programs and activities.
- The One Health Coordination Committee (OHCC) is a high-level body that provides strategic oversight, direction, and coordination.
- The One Health Technical Committee (OHTC) supervises the Technical Working Groups (TWGs).
- The One Health Secretariat (OHS).
- Technical Working Groups (TWGs) focused on specific technical areas such as disease surveillance, laboratory diagnostics, and research.
- District and Chiefdom One Health Committees, which coordinate the implementation of the One Health approach at the sub-national level.

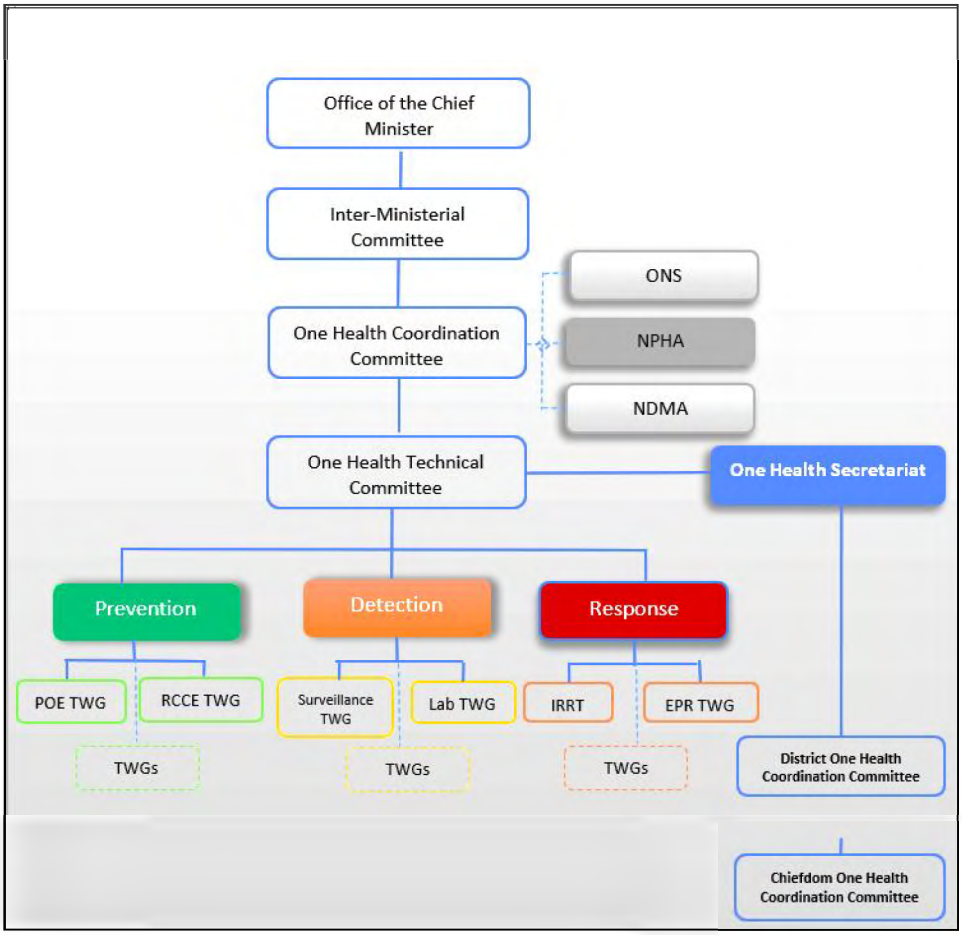


Figure 1 - NOHP organogram

The IHR-JEE of 2023, the PVS evaluation follow-up mission report of the veterinary services of Sierra Leone (2022), and the revised NBW report of 2022 provide a critical assessment of OH implementation in the country [8]. The NOPH has made significant progress in implementing OH in Sierra Leone. Successes include developing joint preparedness, detection and response tools, prioritization of zoonotic diseases, developing one health-aligned workforce, enhancing multisectoral coordination by establishing a NOHP, training of multisectoral rapid assessment teams, and the successful implementation of joint training programs, such as the Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP).

Although there has been significant progress in implementing OH in Sierra Leone, several gaps and challenges exist. These include:

1. Limited surveillance data sharing across the three sectors, particularly at intermediate and lower levels.
2. Weak surveillance systems in the environmental, plant, and wildlife health sectors.

[8] https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240081376

3. Inadequate human, material, and financial resources for OH implementation and coordination by the NOHP. One health activities are primarily financed by partners, affecting the sustainability of OH programs.
4. There is a low level of One Health awareness among policymakers and the public on the burden of zoonoses and the benefits of One Health.
5. Sub-optimal involvement of the environmental sector in OH work plans.
6. Insufficient workforce capacity and limited opportunities for One Health workforce development.
7. Inadequate representation of experts such as ecologists, entomologists, and social scientists within One Health structures.
8. Limited understanding of socio-economic and cultural factors influencing human-animal-environment interactions at the community level.
9. Unequal representation of relevant sectors in the OHS.

Below are recommendations to enhance OH implementation as per the Sierra Leone IHR-JEE 2023 and 2022 PVS report:

1. Develop memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to formalize coordination of priority and endemic zoonoses surveillance activities and structured data sharing between human, animal, environment, and wildlife sectors to integrate a fully functioning Zoonoses technical working group (TWG) into the One Health platform at the national level, as outlined in the One Health Strategic Plan.
2. Provide targeted national laboratories for food safety with the required equipment, reagents, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for foodborne diseases or food contamination (chemical and microbiological) detection according to existing reference tests. Train the staff and evaluate their capacities during simulation exercises.
3. Increase human resource capacity by 20% at all levels in the animal health sector, ensuring the availability of personnel in wildlife and for improved animal production practices through active recruitment, training, and deployment.
4. Develop MoUs or agreements detailing the roles and responsibilities of the public health and security authorities during a public health event and update the 2019 National Emergency Response Plan (NERP) accordingly.
5. Workforce development is needed to enhance preparedness, detection, and response, particularly in the animal and environmental health sectors.
6. Develop an all-hazards plan for Points of Entry (PoEs) with a multisectoral approach that includes the NERP and the national surveillance system.
7. Enhance preparedness activities using the OH approach, including developing and testing multisector all-hazards plans and linking public health and security authorities.
8. Improve multisector risk communication and community engagement.

1.3 Rationale for the National One Health Policy

The history of zoonotic disease outbreaks like Ebola, anthrax, and Lassa fever, and the ever-present risk of EIDS due to high population growth, increasing urbanization, land-use changes, climate change, and other OH threats like AMR and food safety threats, make a clear case of why implementation of OH is critical to the health security of Sierra Leone. The JEE report outlined that enhanced One Health Coordination in Sierra Leone would enable a coordinated, multisectoral approach to health challenges, fostering collaboration between all sectors. This integrated strategy would strengthen disease surveillance systems, improve early warning mechanisms for potential outbreaks, and enhance the country's capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to health emergencies. Furthermore, a One Health approach would support sustainable development by promoting practices that balance economic growth with environmental conservation and public health protection, ultimately building a more resilient health system to safeguard the well-being of Sierra Leone's people, animals, and ecosystems.
Besides achieving optimal health outcomes through the OH approach, case studies have demonstrated a significant return on investment from savings made through early detection and rapid response to public health events. For instance, the World Bank estimates that global investments in One Health approaches could generate economic benefits of over $30 billion annually by preventing pandemics and reducing the burden of endemic zoonotic diseases [9]. At the international level, adopting a One Health approach aligns with global health security initiatives, improving Sierra Leone's ability to meet IHR capacity requirements and conform to global efforts to strengthen health security and pandemic preparedness.

Successful implementation of the OH approach depends on a policy framework that outlines how whole-of-government and whole-of-societal coordination, cooperation, and collaboration can be implemented effectively and sustainably. The actualization of a One Health approach in Sierra Leone depends on strong political commitment at all levels. The policy guides the priority areas of investments by the government and partners to achieve the outcomes outlined below:

1. Enhanced detection and timely response to public health threats emanating from the human-animal-environmental interface to reduce their public health and socio-economic impacts on the Sierra Leonean society
2. Strengthened health systems through better coordination, integration, partnerships, and collaboration across sectors.
3. Enhanced surveillance and response capacity for foodborne disease and food contamination risks or events, with effective communication and collaboration across sectors

[9] World Bank. (2022). *Putting Pandemics Behind Us: Investing in One Health to Reduce Risks of Emerging Infectious Diseases.* Washington, DC: World Bank

4. Availability of cross-cutting data to support evidence-based interventions at the human, animal, and environmental interface to improve health outcomes

The OHP Aligns with the government's Big Five Agenda, the National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2021–2025, and the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024–2030, which all aim to improve health and economic outcomes in the country. The linkage between the OHP and strategic country development policies, strategies, and other international agendas is outlined below.

1.4 Alignment of One Health Policy to Existing Policies and Legislation

This section outlines some international and national legal and policy frameworks within which the OHP will operate.

1. **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The One Health approach aligns closely with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The human health component is emphasized in SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 1 (No Poverty), among others. The health of animals, plants, and the environment is captured in SDGs addressing clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), climate action (SDG 13), life below water (SDG 14), and life on land (SDG 15). Additionally, the well-being of all living systems depends on progress toward goals related to essential services and resources, such as food security and sustainable agriculture (SDG 2), as well as sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). Finally, achieving SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) is vital to successfully implementing a One Health approach.

2. **Africa Union One Health Framework**: The African Union (AU) actively promotes the One Health approach, recognizing its importance in addressing the interconnected health challenges of humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems. The AU's efforts are spearheaded by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and the Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR). The policy aligns with AU's Framework for One Health Practice in National Public Health Institutes and the African Union Framework for Antimicrobial Resistance Control 2020–2025.

3. **Big Five Game Changer:** The intersection between Sierra Leone's Big Five Agenda and the One Health approach is rooted in their shared goals of improving health, economic development, and sustainability. The Big Five Agenda—focused on human capital development, food security, infrastructure, energy, and revenue mobilization—aligns closely with One Health principles emphasizing human, animal, and environmental health interdependence. Strengthening

human capital through improved healthcare and education supports the One Health objective of integrated health services. A One Health approach can also improve Sierra Leone's economic resilience by preventing disease outbreaks that can disrupt critical sectors. The Big Five Agenda and One Health create a comprehensive pathway toward sustainable development and a healthier, more prosperous Sierra Leone.

4. **National Health and Sanitation Policy 2021:** The country's health policy framework highlights the importance of multisectoral collaboration, which aligns with One Health principles, recognizing the need to address interconnected health challenges that involve human, animal, and environmental factors. The policy outlines the Universal Health Coverage Roadmap to ensure equitable access to healthcare and align with global health standards, which aligns with the OHP goal of improving health outcomes for all by integrating efforts in human, animal, and environmental health.

5. **Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024–2030:** The MTNDP aims to enhance health service delivery, improve food security, address climate change, and promote economic growth—all critical components of the One Health framework. The plan acknowledges the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health by prioritizing sectors like agriculture, health, and environmental management. For example, focusing on strengthening healthcare systems, advancing climate adaptation strategies, and ensuring food safety aligns with One Health's goal of integrated health management. The MTNDP also emphasizes disaster risk reduction, sustainable agricultural practices, and water and sanitation improvements, reflecting the One Health commitment to holistic and collaborative solutions. This alignment highlights Sierra Leone's commitment to a comprehensive development strategy that fosters health and well-being across all sectors, building a resilient and healthy future for the country.

6. **National Climate Change Policy, 2021:** Sierra Leone's National Climate Change Policy focuses on mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, particularly because the country is vulnerable to extreme weather events like rising temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns. This policy emphasizes sustainable natural resource management, ecosystem conservation, disaster risk reduction, and climate-resilient agriculture. The One Health approach aligns with climate change policy goals by addressing how climate variability affects human and animal health, disease patterns, and environmental sustainability. For example, climate change can influence the spread of vector-borne diseases like malaria, impact agricultural productivity, and alter wildlife habitats, increasing the risk of zoonotic diseases. A One Health perspective ensures that health,

agriculture, and environmental sectors work together to mitigate these impacts, leading to holistic and sustainable solutions.

7. **The Public Health Act, 2022:** The act provides for the promotion, protection, and improvement of public health and well-being in Sierra Leone, to provide for the protection of individuals and communities from public health risks, to provide for the prevention and control of the spread of infectious diseases, to provide for local government and community participation in protecting public health, to provide for early detection of and prompt response to diseases and public health threats and to provide for other related matters.

8. **The Food and Feed Safety Act, 2017:** Food safety is a central component of One Health, as it directly affects the well-being of humans, animals, and ecosystems. By integrating human health, veterinary, and environmental expertise, the OHP supports the Food Safety Policy's goal of reducing health risks linked to unsafe food, thereby protecting public health.

This policy supports and complements other existing national frameworks: the Animal Diseases Act (1979), which governs animal health and disease control, and the Environmental Protection Agency Act (2008), which regulates environmental management. The OHP also aligns with the National Disaster Management Agency Act (2020), Water and Sanitation Policy (2010), Environment Protection Agency Act (2008; amended in 2010) and Wildlife Conservation Act (1972).

By integrating One Health principles, this policy enhances synergies among various sectoral policies, promoting a more cohesive and practical approach to health and environmental challenges.

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

This section outlines the components of the policy framework and the underlying principles that will guide the human, animal, plant, and environmental health sectors toward the policy mission.

2.1 Vision

A resilient Sierra Leone where the highest standards of human, animal, plant, and environmental health are achieved through collaborative, sustainable, and equitable One Health actions ensuring the well-being of all communities.

2.2 Mission

To effectively and efficiently prevent, detect, and respond to public health threats at the human-animal-plant-environmental interface by strengthening multisectoral coordination and integrating efforts across all relevant sectors.

2.3 Policy Goal

To reduce the burden of public health threats and mitigate risks from the human-animal-plant-environmental interface through enhanced coordination, collaboration, and integration of efforts among multiple sectors.

2.4 Policy Objectives

The policy objectives detail the specific outcomes needed to attain the overall policy goal. To achieve this overall goal, five strategic objectives, based on the OH-JPA will guide this policy:

Policy Objective 1: To strengthen OH governance, coordination, and collaboration among different relevant stakeholders at all levels (National, District, and Chiefdoms)

A key principle of the OH approach is recognizing the need for multisectoral collaboration and coordination to achieve optimal health outcomes due to the interconnection between humans, animals, and the environment. This policy objective aims to ensure a reliable and sustainable framework for coordinating OH stakeholders at all levels by strengthening the capacity of the NOHS to coordinate the implementation of all OH activities by state and non-state actors in line with the country's OH strategic plan and governance manual.

The priority policy strategies are:

1. Enhance the human resource capacity of the OHS, ensuring formal and equitable representation from all relevant sectors.

2. Advocate for GoSL direct financial allocation and material support to the NOHP

3. Enhance operational capacity by mainstreaming regulations and legislation to enforce multisector coordination.

Policy objective 2: Develop and implement multisectoral strategies for the prevention, early detection, rapid response, and effective control of zoonotic (including endemic, emerging, and remerging disease), neglected tropical, and vector-borne diseases

Reducing the burden of diseases of zoonotic origin has clear long-term benefits for public health, animals, and the environment, as well as for the broader economy by improving livelihoods and minimizing associated socio-economic losses. Increasing the

capacity to detect endemic zoonotic, neglected tropical, and vector-borne diseases also enhances the likelihood of early detection of EIDs with epidemic or pandemic potential.

Investments in multisectoral preparedness strategies, surveillance, early warning systems, and joint response systems are crucial to reducing the disease burden and mitigating risks and vulnerabilities.

The policy strategies are;

1. Strengthen integrated surveillance and joint risk assessments at the human-animal–plant–environmental interface to strengthen rapid detection and reporting capacity.

2. Strengthen community engagement and risk communication to support early detection and reporting to encourage behavior change and community-centric interventions.

3. Support operational research to generate data for evidence-based mitigation, detection, and intervention programs.

4. Enhance the capacity for joint, cross-cutting response and intervention strategies to OH threats.

Policy Objective 3: Strengthening the assessment, management, and communication of food safety risks

Food and water-borne diarrhea diseases are leading causes of illness and death, particularly in LMICS like Sierra Leone. The globalization of food production and food trade has increased the potential likelihood of health events of food-borne origin, like zoonotic diseases, food poisoning, and transmission of antimicrobial-resistant pathogens. As a net importer of food, Sierra Leone is particularly vulnerable. How food is produced may affect not only the safety of the products but also the health and welfare of animals, the health of plants, and the contamination of the environment. Reciprocally, the food production environment, animal health, and plant contamination may impact food safety. This close interconnectivity means a OH approach is critical to addressing food safety. In the context of this policy, the OH approach will foster collaboration to identify, understand, and mitigate risks at every stage of the food chain. The priority policy strategies are outlined below:

1. Establish a formal mechanism for information sharing among relevant stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of food safety programs, focusing on One Health coordination along the entire value chain.

2. Develop and disseminate multi-sectorial guidelines and SOPs for joint training of stakeholders in surveillance, response, rapid risk assessment, and diagnostic laboratory testing for food safety.

3. To develop multisectoral mitigation strategies, support integrated risk management decisions, and improve food systems data and analysis, scientific evidence, and risk assessment.

Policy Objective 4: Enhancing One Health framework to fight Antimicrobial Resistance

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a severe public health issue. It makes infections more complex to treat, leading to prolonged illnesses, higher healthcare costs, and increased mortality as common antimicrobials become ineffective. AMR is evolving at an alarming rate and is outpacing the development of new countermeasures capable of thwarting human infections. This situation threatens patient care, economic growth, public health, agriculture, and economic and national security. AMR is associated with the misuse of anti-microbials in various sectors, including agrifood systems and human and veterinary medicine. AMR is present in all countries, but its burden is disproportionately high in LMICs, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. There are significant gaps in AMR surveillance, prevention of Multidrug-Resistant Organism (MDRO), and optimal use of antimicrobial medicines in human health and agriculture in the country.
AMR has multiple drivers and needs to be tackled on many fronts. A OH approach is essential to ensure that all sectors and stakeholders communicate and work effectively.

The priority policy strategies to improve AMR are;

1. Enhance AMR inter-agency coordination and governance structures.

2. Developing and implementing a national action plan to combat AMR, consistent with the Global Action Plan (GAP) on AMR.

3. Surveillance capacity for AMR and antimicrobial use at the national level following and using internationally agreed systems, such as the WHO Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS).

4. Promote prudent (optimal) use of antimicrobials, ensuring appropriate use of antimicrobials, including assuring the quality of available medicines, conservation of existing treatments, and access to appropriate antimicrobials when needed while reducing inappropriate use.

5. Raise awareness of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through awareness-raising campaigns, education, and training to achieve necessary behavioral change.

Policy Objective 5: Strengthening the integration of the environment sector into OH

The health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the environment are interdependent. Global anthropogenic change is a key driver of disease emergence. Every form of environmental degradation has direct or indirect consequences for human and animal health. The effects of air, water, and soil pollution on human and animal health are well documented. To prevent and mitigate these threats, the biodiversity conservation, environmental, public health, and animal health/veterinary sectors need to understand these interlinkages and implement One Health in a harmonized approach. The mandates and priorities of the environmental sector need to be fully integrated into the One Health approach, including integrating ecological data into One Health decision-making, fostering a better understanding of ecosystem issues in the One Health community, and boosting the capacity of the environmental sector and institutions to have an equal voice at the One Health table and in decision-making.

The priority policy strategies to improve integration of the environmental sector into OH include the following:

1. Integrate environmental knowledge, data, and evidence into One Health decision-making by enhancing ecological surveillance (including wildlife health surveillance) and data sharing.

2. Integrate environmental conservation efforts into public health strategies. This includes reforestation and afforestation programs, sustainable land use planning, pollution control, and addressing climate change as a driver of health risks.

2.5 Values and Guiding Principles

These guiding principles will guide the decision-making and implementation of the policy. These principles contribute to achieving policy goals and enhance reputation and trustworthiness by ensuring that all interventions are conducted ethically, inclusively, and with respect for the interconnectedness of all life forms. The policy's guiding principles are consistent with international standards and the ethical frameworks advocated by the Quadripartite organizations, reinforcing our commitment to global best practices.

1. ***Multisectoral approach to realizing OH policy objectives***

Multisector coordination is a cornerstone of the One Health approach, emphasizing the importance of collaboration across diverse sectors such as human health, animal health, agriculture, environment, and wildlife. Effective coordination ensures stakeholders share information, resources, and expertise to address complex health challenges that transcend individual disciplines.

2. Gender equity, equality, and inclusion

There will be no exclusion or social disparities in implementing this policy. Interventions to improve health outcomes shall be provided equitably to all, regardless of gender, age, race, educational status, geographical location, tribe/ethnicity, religious beliefs, persons with disabilities, and socio-economic status. The policy will focus on inclusiveness, non-discrimination, social accountability, and gender equality.

3. ***People-centered approach to OH interventions***

Interventions will be based on people's legitimate needs and expectations. This necessitates community involvement and participation in deciding, implementing, and monitoring interventions, promoting active participation of communities in decision-making processes, and recognizing their vital role in the success of One Health initiatives.

4. ***Professionalism, ethics, and integrity***

This principle is based on the need for high standards of expertise and accountability among all stakeholders to ensure effective and efficient policy implementation. Ethical standards provide a moral framework for decision-making, emphasizing fairness, honesty, and respect for all stakeholders involved. Integrity demands transparency, consistency, and adherence to moral principles, fostering trust and credibility across sectors.

5. ***Evidence-based interventions***

This principle will ensure that interventions and strategies are grounded in the best available scientific knowledge and data to ensure that interventions are effective, efficient, and sustainable.

6. ***Sustainability***

Commitment to practices that ensure the health of humans, animals, and ecosystems is maintained for present and future generations.

7. ***Transparency and Accountability***

Ensuring open communication, responsible actions, and accountability to stakeholders and the public throughout the implementation of the policy.

3. POLICY INTERVENTION AREAS AND POLICY STATEMENTS

The policy's thematic areas outline the priority intervention zones where investments will be directed to achieve the policy objectives. The One Health (OH) policy identifies six broad priority intervention areas, each accompanied by a policy statement outlining the government's commitments to addressing each policy issue.

1. Governance and coordination
2. Integrated surveillance and response to zoonotic diseases, including endemic, emerging and re-emerging diseases, AMR, food safety, climate change, and other OH-related issues
3. Development of OH workforce capacity
4. Operational research and development to guide evidence-based decision-making
5. Advocacy, communication, and community engagement on zoonotic diseases, food safety, AMR, climate change, environmental health, and other public health issues
6. One health financing and resource mobilization

3.1 Governance and Coordination

Integrating human, animal, and environmental health is crucial for tackling complex cross-cutting health issues at the human, animal, and environmental interface. A well-funded OH and functional governance structure is essential for fostering partnerships and establishing effective communication, collaboration, and coordination among stakeholders at all levels. The established NOHP structure should be utilized to take the lead in multisector coordination to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in preparedness and response to public health threats and emergencies emanating at the human-animal-environmental interface.

Policy statement

The GoSL shall support strengthening OH governance and coordination by enhancing equitable human resource capacity, allocating sustainable resources, and mainstreaming and enacting laws and regulations to support multisectoral coordination and collaboration.

3.2 Integrated surveillance and response to OH threats

Integrated human, animal, and environmental surveillance is essential for early detection, risk assessment, preparedness, and the effective management of OH threats. Integrated surveillance systems that facilitate analysis and the timely sharing of valid transdisciplinary data are essential in early detection and timely response. Although surveillance and data-sharing frameworks exist in the human and animal health sectors, significant challenges exist, especially in wildlife, plant, and environmental/ecological health surveillance.

Policy statement

The GoSL shall support capacity building for integrated surveillance and multisectoral data sharing and utilization at all levels, including implementing multisectoral

preparedness and response plans to enhance the capacity for early detection and rapid response to OH threats.

3.3 Development of OH Workforce Capacity

A well-capacitated, One Health-aligned workforce, working effectively within and across sectors, is critical for addressing the complex health challenges at the intersection of human, animal, plant, and environmental health in Sierra Leone. Regular training and professional development should be implemented across all relevant One Health sectors to enhance the development of a capable One Health workforce.

Policy statement

The GoSL shall facilitate the capacity building of a OH workforce by supporting frameworks to enhance pre and in-service training and professional development of a multisector workforce on core OH competencies at all levels.

3.4 OH Research and Development

One health research generates data to support evidence-based policy and intervention formulation. Particular attention will be given to how research can guide the development and implementation of effective early warning and rapid response systems to OH threats and how the linkage between government and research organizations, including tertiary institutions, will be strengthened to enhance collaboration and data sharing.

Policy statement

The GoSL shall support the implementation of a national OH research agenda that links research institutions to the NOHP, fostering innovation, evidence-based policy-making, and the development of effective interventions through collaborative and interdisciplinary research efforts.

3.5 OH advocacy, communication, and community engagement on OH threats

The policy emphasizes the importance of effective communication strategies to raise awareness about public health threats at the human-animal-environmental interface. Community engagement will be promoted to empower communities to participate in the prevention and control of OH threats.

Policy statement

The GoSL shall support the establishment and financing of a comprehensive One Health communication and community engagement strategy and mechanisms to raise awareness, promote behavioral change, and empower communities to actively mitigate OH threats.

3.6 OH financing and resource mobilization

Implementing the OH policy requires a systematic, sustainable, and well-coordinated approach to mobilizing, utilizing, reporting, monitoring, and evaluating domestic and external resources. This policy pillar relates to the establishment of structures to mobilize and manage the financial resources needed to ensure the implementation of the policy.

Policy statement

The GoSL commits to progressively facilitate OH implementation by providing sustainable financing for OH activities and supporting adequate mobilization of resources from domestic and international partners, ensuring efficient utilization of financial, technical, and operational resources for OH activities.

4. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The office of the Chief Minister will oversee and coordinate the implementation of the OH policy through the NOHP.

4.1. Governance framework

The successful implementation of this policy depends on the collaborative efforts and synergies of all One Health (OH) stakeholders. The Office of the Chief Minister, through the National One Health Platform (NOHP), will oversee and coordinate the implementation of the OH policy using established governance frameworks to support its execution at national and subnational levels. The revised Governance Manual 2024 clearly outlines the organogram and functions of the NOHP.

To foster collaboration and ownership, the governance framework will ensure inclusive representation from all relevant sectors and stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, academia, the private sector, and community representatives.

The establishment and functions of the governance structures will be formalized through legislation or executive orders, providing a legal mandate and authority to facilitate effective coordination and implementation of One Health activities.

4.2. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Policy Review

Monitoring and evaluation of the OHP is essential to assess its effectiveness, ensure accountability, and inform necessary adjustments to achieve desired outcomes efficiently. A comprehensive M&E framework based on the performance indicators outlined in the national One Health Strategic Plan will be developed to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the policy. Regular progress reports will be prepared and disseminated annually to stakeholders to foster transparency, guide decision-making, and enable timely adjustments to strategies and interventions. The OHCC will oversee the implementation of this M&E framework.

Policy Review

The policy will be reviewed every 10 years, with a mid-term review after five years. The review will consider the situation analysis, including emerging threats and global best practices that are in response to the needs of society, as well as evidence from health research. The mid-term policy review will involve comprehensive stakeholder consultations, evaluation of progress, identification of challenges and lessons learned, and recommendations for policy revisions to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.