

FAO releases Asia-Pacific wildlife, health, and livelihoods nexus

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The interplay between the wildlife–health and livelihoods nexus in the Asia-Pacific region is currently at a critical juncture, requiring immediate attention and action, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) announced in

recognition of World Wildlife Day (3 March).¹ The Information Brief, drafted with inputs from more than 120 experts, emphasizes balancing wildlife use for rural communities and Indigenous Peoples while reducing zoonotic disease risks.

The recommendations in the Information Brief will further contribute to shaping future FAO interventions in the region, including the introduction of new actions under the Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) Programme² scheduled for launch in 2024.

The urgency of the call is underscored by the significant impacts of recent zoonotic disease outbreaks, including severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), avian influenza, Nipah virus, and the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting devastation on health and economies in the Asia and Pacific region.

Factors such as population growth, urbanization, and mounting pressure on natural resources in the Asia-Pacific region add to the complexities of this nexus. Failure to address these challenges could result in damaging consequences for both human and wildlife populations, including increased risks of disease transmission, biodiversity loss, and threats to livelihoods. However, despite its crucial role in mitigating future calamities and sustainable coexistence between humans and wildlife, examining this nexus, holistically, has received minimal attention at both research and policy levels.

FAO has published proposed actions that should be taken, outlined in an Information Brief.³ These include a range of strategies, such as improving data collection, monitoring, and statistical analysis regarding wildlife's impact on rural economies, food security, nutrition, and health. Coordinated efforts are recommended to facilitate the development and dissemination of knowledge and solutions to address this complex nexus at both national and regional levels. Scott Newman, FAO's One Health Programme Priority Lead in Asia and the Pacific, emphasizes "the relevance of these strategies for the region, particularly given its status as a hotspot for emerging infectious diseases."

"These initiatives aim to deepen understanding, foster collaboration, and shape policy frameworks to effectively tackle the intricate interactions, consequently promoting resilience and sustainability across the region," said Ilias Animon, FAO Forestry Officer.

FAO's Strategic Framework for 2022-2031 aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, focusing on transforming agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, better environment, and a better life for all, leaving no one behind. FAO provides technical advice and supports international processes and frameworks related to this nexus, including the UN Forum on Forests, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Food System Summit outputs. FAO works with partners to address emerging infectious diseases through initiatives like the One Health Quadripartite and the Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action Programme. These efforts aim to reduce the risks of zoonotic epidemics and promote global health, environmental conservation, and sustainable development.