COMMENTARY

The Peacekeeping System of the United Nations and its Potential Role in One Health. Looking at its Principles, Policies, and Key Technical Entities

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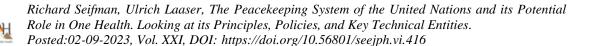[2]Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Public Health, Bielefeld University, Germany.

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Our twenty-first century is a time of heightened risks and benefits for humans, animals, plants, and environmental health. The prospects for successfully addressing such considerations are pursuing a One Health approach. This is the right moment to consider opportunities to apply some or all aspects of the One Health approach.

Our is also a time of complex conflicts within countries, between countries and regions: indeed, there are now more armed conflicts underway in the world than ever since World War II. The nature of such conflict situations and threats is diverse. It has led to the engagement of external entities, particularly the United Nations (UN), its peacekeeping operations, and relevant technical organizations. We know that creating a more sustainable peace requires a military presence and addressing the needs of the affected communities.

Whether in developing or developed countries, UN peacekeeping operations typically have not involved extensive direct community-related public health support. That said, the role of UN peacekeeping is evolving and functions in very different

settings, with enormous challenges in virtually every case. There must be room for innovative thinking and resources to address critical factors, which have historically not been a central aspect of such mandates.
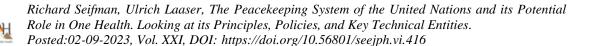
The Basis for UN Peacekeeping Operations

Under the United Nations Charter Chapter VII, the UN Security Council can undertake enforcement measures to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such measures range from economic sanctions to international military action. They can establish UN Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions.

By the 1970s, a new term and concept, "Peacebuilding", was coined by Johanne Galtung. The notion is for a structure different from, perhaps over and above, peacekeeping and ad hoc peacemaking…that there is a need to offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur[1].

In 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali argued in "An Agenda for Peace" that the Organization's aims should

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[1] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bq-uE_IrI-5k28UtVlHh8SLciVCoLs_Z/view?pli=1

include standing "ready to assist in peacebuilding in its differing contexts; and to address the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice, and political oppression."[2]

In 2001 UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan created the Commission on Human Security, which published its Human Security Now Report 2003. In it, the Commission stated:

Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms—freedoms that are the essence of life: Protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental (implicitly encompassing aid, water, soil, affecting humans, animals, and plants), economic, military, and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood, and dignity[3].

This history reflects an evolving and broader notion of what constitutes the United Nations' peacekeeping or peacemaking responsibilities. The 2010 "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guideline" is based on past experiences to serve as a roadmap to benefit and guide planners and practitioners of United Nations peacekeeping operations[4].

It gives insight into how we got where we are and the possible rationale for taking new steps, such as integrating One Health as a complementary addition to the UN toolkit in conflict situations.

What Is One Health

In 2021, a formal collaboration on One Health was established between UNEP, WHO, FAO, and WOAH, known as the Quadripartite. The Quadripartite put forward a widely accepted operational definition of One Health, namely: "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.

[2]Item 29_Agenda for peace_.pdf (un.org)
[3]Commission on Human Security, 2003, p. 4 and: The Role of UN Peace Operations in Countering Health

Insecurity after COVID-19 - Gilder - 2022 - Global Policy - Wiley Online Library
[4]capstone_eng_0.pdf (un.org)

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 changes and contributing to sustainable development."[5]

In March 2023, leaders of these four UN agencies signed a One Health "Call for Action", a commitment to enhanced global action, recognizing that they can achieve together what no one sector can achieve alone. In it, the Quadripartite leaders urge all countries and key stakeholders to promote and undertake the following priority actions:

1. Prioritize One Health in the international political agenda, increase understanding, and advocate for adopting and promoting enhanced intersectoral health governance.

2. Strengthen national One Health policies, strategies, and plans.

3. Accelerate the implementation of One Health plans.

4. Build intersectoral One Health workforces.

5. Strengthen and sustain the prevention of pandemics and health threats at source.

6. Encourage and strengthen One Health scientific knowledge and evidence creation and exchange.

7. Increase investment and financing of One Health strategies and sufficient attention within the peacekeeping community[6].

This suite of priority actions provides an aspirational framework for future One Health collaborative engagement, including in conflict situations.

What the Quadripartite Agencies Have Done or Said

Below gives a sense of how each Quadripartite has pursued One Health in the past. This is incomplete, as each will be doing more going forward.

United Nations Environment Programs (UNEP)

A UNEP report states that following violent conflict, a country's natural resources are its primary assets, which can help kick-start economic recovery, employment, and

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[5]What is One Health? - One Health Commission

[6]Quadripartite call to action for One Health for a safer world (who.int)

livelihoods. Early decisions on how they are used, managed, and allocated can have fundamental implications for short-term stability, security, and peacebuilding. The broader issues surrounding…environmental management have until now not been garnered.

This report showed that peacekeeping operations have possible essential and significant impacts on the environment and are often a fundamental aspect of conflict resolution, livelihoods, and confidence-building at the local level. "By adopting creative and transformational practices, technologies, and behaviors, peacekeeping missions can curtail energy and water use and waste production and generate significant financial savings. The improved health, safety, and security of local communities and personnel, self-sufficiency of camps, and reduced potential for disputes with local communities are further benefits."[7]

World Health Organization (WHO)

There are numerous instances in which WHO has engaged in near conflict or conflict situations. This is an illustration of WHO and its interaction with peacekeeping operations in Mali during the COVID response. It brought its technical expertise to ensure an effective whole-of-society response and to minimize social disruption, including those affecting peacekeeping in Mali.

The multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali was established by the UN Security Council in 2013. After decades of instability, the 2015 peace accord is still being implemented, and there is continued insecurity. Getting appropriate messaging to hard-to-reach populations was a challenge in Mali, leading to a whole-of-society approach supported by WHO. The UN peace radio station, Radio Mikado, relied on WHO information for its crucial role in risk communication. World Health Organization guidance was also critical for the innovative use of speaker drones to deliver messages to remote areas and distribute materials developed by WHO in conjunction with the broader UN community[8].

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[7]https://www.unep.org/resources/report/greening-blue-helmets-environment-natural-resources-and-un-peacekeeping-operations

[8]Frontiers | The World Health Organization's Actions Within the United Nations System to Facilitate a Whole-of-Society Response to COVID-19 at Country Level (frontiersin.org)

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

FAO's focus is on increased agricultural productivity, food security, improvements in animal and plant health, sustainable use of natural resources, and strengthened household resilience. Its technical support can potentially impact peace-contributing by reducing conflict drivers and/or strengthening peace drivers' specific contexts.

At the community level, FAO can influence local peace drivers through direct interventions and activities to provide the framework for participatory development and contribute to the capacity development of dispute resolution sub-committees. Working with Interpeace, it developed specific tools, guidance, and training to enable more systematic and robust context analyses and conflict-sensitive programming. A critical tool developed and field-tested with Interpeace is the Conflict-sensitive Programme Clinic, a structured participatory analysis designed to identify and integrate conflict-sensitive strategies into implementing FAO interventions. In 2019

FAO became an observer of the Peacebuilding Contact Group[9].

The ongoing Russian invasion has a hugely deleterious effect on agricultural productivity, access to needed inputs, and, more broadly, food security in Ukraine and beyond…The United Nations assisted grain shipment agreement was recently terminated, which means a significant halt to Ukraine and Russian grain exports… Its immediate effect is felt most harshly in Ukraine, but this stoppage to needy countries in the Global South exacerbates their food insecurity and indicates hunger rising in all regions of Africa, a continent heavily reliant on grain imports. The ramifications are both direct and indirect, with consequences for such countries regarding their capacity to cope with human, animal, plant and ecosystem health.

World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH)

WOAH has previously engaged with UN peacekeeping missions in addressing animal health. For example, UN peacekeepers in Sudan have trained local people to provide essential veterinary services. Trainees in

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[9] fao_-_peacebuilding_and_sustaining_peace_ thematic_paper_1.pdf (un.org)

Malakal Sudan provide basic services to livestock owners after completing intensive, hands-on training on community animal health. They become certified Community Animal Health Workers and handle livestock disease management, treatment, and best practices in animal husbandry – all lacking in the region.

"I got trained to provide veterinary support and treat common animal diseases. The knowledge I have gained will enable me to provide service to the animals and to get a better income for my family," said Sarah Lual, one of the trainees. The training was offered and given by the Indian troops serving with the UN Mission in South Sudan, with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture and the non-governmental organization World Vision.

Whether such training can continue and lessons learned effectively applied, given the ongoing brutal and destabilizing power struggle, which is virtually a civil war[10]. This will depend on ending the ongoing conflict or at least a cease-fire. Whenever that happens, along with likely UN peacekeepers, would come an assessment of the damage to animal,

plant, and environmental conditions, along with human health factors, followed by efforts by the four technical agencies to assist in the response[11].

Going Forward

UN agencies have been engaged to varying degrees in supporting sustained peace efforts. The role of UN peacekeepers and peacemakers continues to evolve, as is the interface of humans, animals, plants, and the ecosystem. We are not yet at a point where these two critical streams have been or will be regularly integrated to enhance security and well-being.

Certainly, problematic aspects must be considered and addressed before buy-in by those who decide on the role and composition of such missions. Integrating One Health will require additional costs, logistics, and, most importantly, the agreement of political entities on the ground. But in so doing, UN missions could make essential contributions in assisting noncombatants, improving the welfare of people in terms of their health,

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[10]Sudan conflict: why is there fighting, and what is at stake in the region? | Sudan | The Guardian

[11]https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/peacekeepers-malakal-train-community-animal-health-workers

livelihood, and addressing environmental aspects.

More broadly, the One Health community writ large will need to thoughtfully consider how, where, and when the concept can best be applied to dampen the likelihood of escalating conflict during civil or cross-border conflict and planning for the aftermath. This tall order will require in-depth analysis and discussion by knowledgeable partners, well beyond its treatment in this article of the United Nations. This nexus of One Health and peacekeeping and peacebuilding must be addressed in a systematic manner, and it should be within and in support of contributing to the seventeen 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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