



Keeping people nourished and safe: Why One Health matters for nutrition and food security in fragile settings

In fragile contexts, nutrition and food security fail when health, agriculture, animal health and environment systems work in isolation

One Health in context

For those working in global health, the primary entry point is often nutrition – including access to safe and nutritious diets and the integration of nutrition services within health systems. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, however, nutrition outcomes are closely shaped by food security, agriculture and livelihoods, including risks linked to livestock disease, crop pests and transboundary agricultural shocks, foodborne illness, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), climate extremes (such as drought and flooding), environmental degradation and wider shocks to food systems.

One Health provides a way to **connect these risks**, recognizing that malnutrition is not only a dietary issue, but also a function of animal health, food safety, livelihoods and environmental conditions. In fragile contexts, where systems are stretched and institutions fragmented, co-ordination across these domains becomes especially critical.

Why this matters

- Undernutrition and food insecurity are closely linked to **animal health, food safety and climatic and environmental shocks**.
- Fragile settings amplify cross-sector risks while weakening co-ordination.
- Poor food safety undermines nutrition gains, particularly for women and children.
- Livelihood-linked food systems shape resilience to crisis and displacement.
- These dynamics sit squarely within **humanitarian response, resilience and health systems strengthening**.

Practical examples

- **One Health and planetary health in humanitarian settings – framing food security and malnutrition**. This article reframes food security and malnutrition in humanitarian contexts through a One Health and planetary health lens. It highlights how environmental degradation, disrupted food systems and disease risks interact to worsen nutritional outcomes. The article highlights how siloed responses miss upstream drivers of malnutrition, and argues that co-ordinated action across health, food systems and environment is essential – yet institutionally difficult in crisis settings.
- **'The Missing Link in Humanitarian Response: Why One Health Matters More Than Ever'**. This blog post focuses on humanitarian settings where human, animal and environment health risks converge, particularly affecting food security and nutrition. It illustrates how neglecting animal health, food safety and environmental factors can undermine humanitarian nutrition interventions. The piece underscores that One Health is often recognized rhetorically in crises, but poorly operationalized due to co-ordination, mandate and funding constraints.
- **'Making Food Safer in Palestine: A One Health Approach to Antimicrobial Resistance'**. While not a study of a classic nutrition programme, this case study demonstrates how food safety and AMR intersect with nutrition and public health in a fragile context. It shows how antimicrobial use in food systems can affect both health and food security, and how cross-sector co-ordination is required to manage these risks. The case study highlights governance and capacity challenges in politically and institutionally constrained environments.

Common challenges in practice

- **Fragmented** humanitarian and development systems, limiting continuity.
- **Weak co-ordination** between nutrition, agriculture, animal health and environment actors.
- **Food safety risks** that are under-prioritized in nutrition programming.
- **Institutional silos** that are reinforced by funding and reporting structures.
- **Short-term crisis cycles**, crowding out prevention and systems thinking.
- **Limited space** for cross-sector governance in fragile settings.

Factors that make these approaches work

- **Recognition of food systems as health systems.** Nutrition outcomes improve when food safety, animal health and environment are treated as integral to, not external to, nutrition.
- **Cross-sector co-ordination mechanisms.** Even light-touch platforms can improve alignment in fragile contexts.
- **Risk-informed programming.** Integrating disease, food safety and environmental risks strengthens resilience.
- **Linking humanitarian and development action.** Sustained nutrition outcomes depend on continuity beyond emergency response, including prevention efforts that reduce future risks to food safety, livelihoods and nutrition.
- **Context realism.** One Health approaches must adapt to institutional constraints, not assume ideal conditions.

Possible entry points for those working in global health

- **Recognizing cross-sector drivers of nutrition outcomes.** In fragile settings, nutrition risks may be linked to livestock health, food safety or environmental shocks, which can create opportunities for dialogue with agriculture or food system actors.
- **Encouraging broader risk consideration in food security assessments.** Where relevant, there may be opportunities to consider factors such as livestock disease, pasture and water stress, crop pests, flooding, drought, and ecosystem disruption as part of routine assessments of nutrition and food security.
- **Advocating for integration of nutrition within agriculture and livestock outreach.** Preventive nutrition messaging may be more effective when aligned with existing agriculture or livestock advisory services reaching the same communities.
- **Encouraging consideration of food safety.** Foodborne risks can sometimes undermine nutrition gains, particularly for women and children.
- **Linking humanitarian and development perspectives.** Nutrition programmes may intersect with longer-term food system resilience, livestock health or environmental management.
- **Supporting information sharing where relevant.** In some contexts, co-ordination between health, agriculture and food system actors can help identify risks affecting nutrition outcomes.

Want to know more?

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Key resources:

- **'One Health Explainer'** – <https://www.cabi.org/cabi-publications/one-health-explainer/>
- **'One Health and planetary health in humanitarian settings'** – <https://www.alternatives-humanitaires.org/en/2025/03/31/one-health-and-planetary-health-in-humanitarian-settings/> (Conceptual / analytical article)
- **'The Missing Link in Humanitarian Response: Why One Health Matters More Than Ever'** – <https://www.vwb.org/site/blog/2025/08/18/missing-link-humanitarian-response> (Opinion / practice blog with programmatic examples and conceptual framing)
- **'Making Food Safer in Palestine: A One Health Approach to Antimicrobial Resistance'** – <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/10.1079/onehealthcases.2023.0007> <https://www.quae-open.com/produit/336/9782759240265/one-health-atlas> (Empirical One Health case study / implementation and learning case) [https://virtual-learning-center.fao.org/pluginfile.php/262489/mod_page/content/12/Abu Sufian presentation .pdf](https://virtual-learning-center.fao.org/pluginfile.php/262489/mod_page/content/12/Abu_Sufian_presentation.pdf)

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