One Health: a concept led by Africa, with global benefits

Titus Mlengeya Kamani and others argue that Africa is well positioned and equipped to conduct and benefit from an integrated approach.

‘Africa’s National medical and veterinary institutions are still maturing, which presents African health professionals with an opportunity to build on an instinctive understanding of the connectivity between people, animals and their environments, and to “leapfrog” barriers imposed by more well-established and rigid institutional systems’

Following a succession of global disease problems, such as highly pathogenic avian influenza, SARS, Ebola virus disease and bovine spongiform encephalopathy, which all had their origins in animal populations and are linked with agroecological change, it is perhaps surprising that One Health has gained so little mainstream traction among biomedical professions. A possible explanation is that separate animal and human health agencies, responsible for disease prediction, prevention and control, have been embedded in many developed countries since the 19th century, with institutional barriers impeding horizontal collaboration. The resulting gulf between human and animal health, caused by disciplinary conventions and cultures rather than scientific rationale, divides medicine in two.

In Africa, however, where people’s lives are intimately related to the health and productivity of livestock and the natural environment, the situation is different. National medical and veterinary institutions are still maturing, which presents African health professionals with an opportunity to build on an instinctive understanding of the connectivity between people, animals and their environments.
The world is looking to African researchers as world leaders to develop the emerging discipline of One Health, and the health of the global community will undoubtedly benefit from its effective implementation.

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