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on the occasion of

WORLD HEALTH DAY

7 APRIL 2021

"Building a fairer, healthier world"

As vaccines are being rolled out to curb the COVID-19 pandemic and strategies are defined to address emerging viral variants, this year's World Health Day recalls the critical right to health for all.

Health is a fundamental human right, as stated in the constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO): "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition".

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted health systems and the global economy, with the harshest impacts being felt by vulnerable and marginalized groups. Moreover, vulnerable populations also face negative health outcomes from environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change, as they mostly rely on natural resources. And yet, such health inequities are preventable, including by tackling social and environmental determinants of health appropriately.

To build a fairer world, we urgently need to address these glaring health inequities. This includes focusing on conditions for equitable access to health products and services, ensuring appropriate living and working conditions which underpin good health, and enabling the effective involvement of communities in decision-making processes.

To build a healthier world, we must also consider human health in its broader ecosystem and recognize the intricate linkages between the health of people and the health of the planet, as 24 per cent of all global deaths are linked to the environment, according to WHO estimates. This also means ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and providing equitable access to ecosystem goods and services essential for human health and wellbeing.



As the global community builds on lessons learnt from COVID-19, a paradigm shift away from 'business as usual' is required to build a fairer and healthier world. One that restores humanity's relationship with nature. Amongst key transitions that would be needed to achieve the vision of living in harmony with nature, a biodiversity-inclusive One Health transition can play a catalytic role in addressing the common drivers of biodiversity loss, disease risk and negative health outcomes.

As we celebrate the 2021 World Health Day, we need all stakeholders to work together to make this year a critical turning point in our path towards a fairer and healthier world, where nature and biodiversity are recognized for their importance and true value to human health and wellbeing and where health equity to all is achieved, leaving no one behind.

On this important date, we commend the commitment of all the dedicated and courageous health workers, including nurses and midwives, who stand at the forefront of the response to COVID-19. These women and men are all heroes of our time, and they deserve our uncompromised support and admiration.
