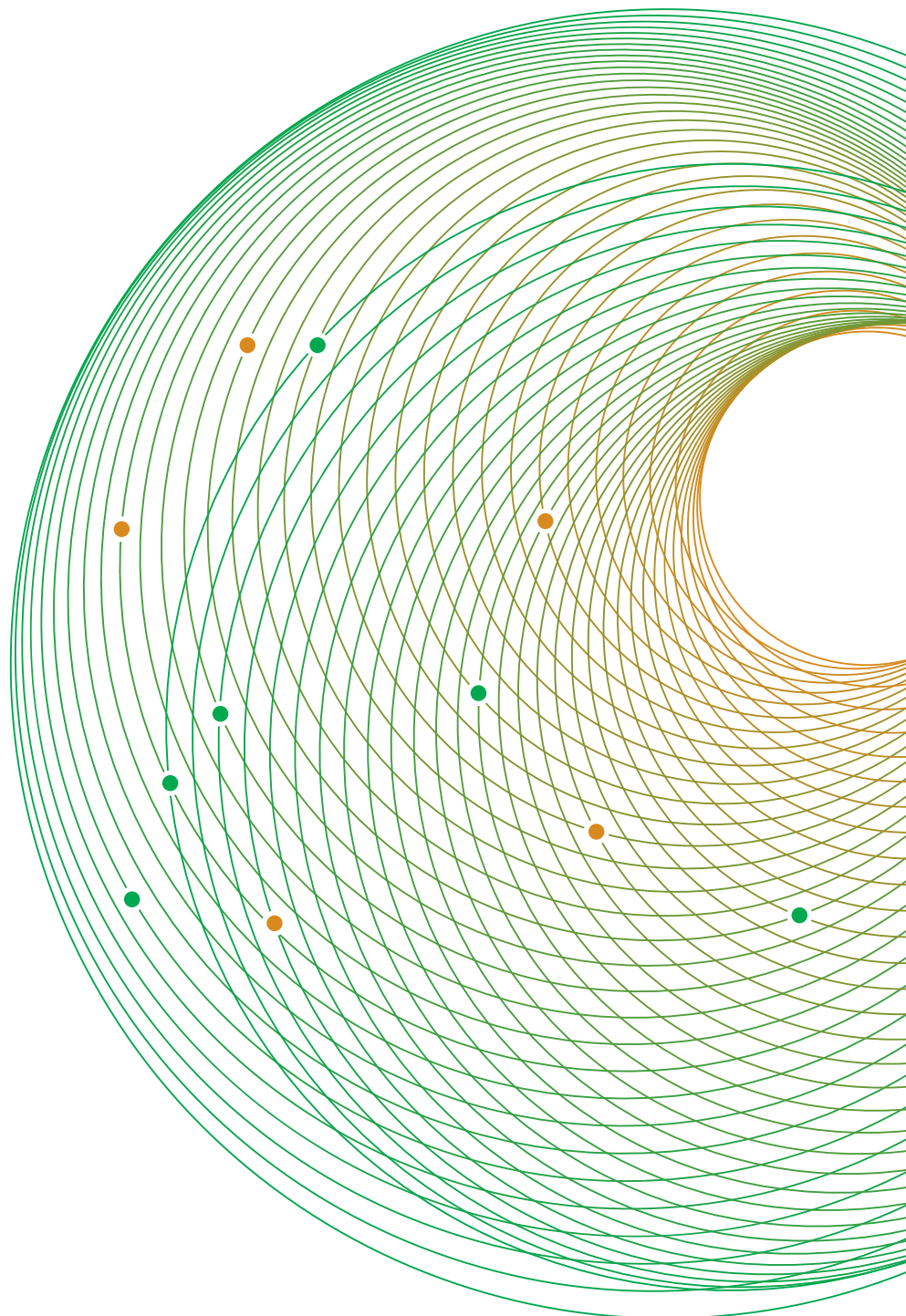




CONNECTING THE DOTS: Creating an Enabling Environment for SDG12 in ASEM

Stream 1: Anti-microbial Resistance (AMR) | **POLICY BRIEF**

Health Agenda Post COVID-19 — Example of AMR and “Mindful Eaters”



Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the impact of the health crisis on our society. There is a range of health threats beyond respiratory infection like SARS-CoV-2. Out of those, one which may cause a future catastrophe is Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)¹. AMR is often referred to as a “slow pandemic”, the “climate change of health” or a “silent tsunami”. Those descriptions all imply the magnitude of the issue AMR can impose to our lives, which may not be visible now to the general public yet is certainly happening. It is estimated that AMR currently causes 700,000 death annually, and the figure is projected to increase to 10,000,000 by 2050².

According to the World Bank, the economic impact connected to AMR is projected at approximately USD 100 trillion in total by 2050³. It is now well-recognised that public health emergencies can jeopardise our life freezing social and economic progress. The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health issue requiring collaboration from the public, such as social distancing and handwashing. Without our effort individually, the health sector alone cannot combat the COVID-19 pandemic, and AMR is the same. For example, a large number of antibiotics are used for livestock, which is part of the food systems for our daily life. It is important to acknowledge how AMR is part of our life, and both consumers and producers have the power to mitigate.

- 1 AMR occurs when bacteria and other microorganisms develop resistance to medicines after being exposed to antimicrobial agents. Antibiotics are among the most common antimicrobial drugs used in humans and animals. Antibiotic resistance occurs naturally, but inappropriate and high levels of antibiotic use accelerate its development. The world is running out of effective antibiotics to treat infectious disease, and unless urgent action is taken, decades of advances in health and medicine risk being undone. For instance, routine surgery will become very risky, and illnesses which are currently curable will once again become fatal. The emergence and spread of resistant bacteria are a threat to global health, food security and development, that will negatively affect the objectives tied to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 2 <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-04-2019-new-report-calls-for-urgent-action-to-avert-antimicrobial-resistance-crisis>
- 3 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2016/09/18/by-2050-drug-resistant-infections-could-cause-global-economic-damage-on-par-with-2008-financial-crisis#:~:text=Several%20re-cent%20reports%20on%20AMR,trillion%20in%20total%20by%202050.>

“ Without our effort individually, the health sector alone cannot combat the COVID-19 pandemic, and AMR is the same.

For this reason, the ENVForum Annual Conference 2020 held a session to facilitate much-needed dialogue on AMR with the aim of increasing awareness beyond the health sector. The session intended to encourage and stimulate inter-sectoral collaboration between the health and the non-health sectors over the challenge posed by AMR, which is still largely seen as a sole issue of the health sector. Currently, the issue of AMR has a limited involvement of the public, including consumers and producers. Nonetheless, the session ultimately agreed that everyone has a role to play in fighting against AMR. Considering ASEM Partners accounts for 60 % of the world population, the movement initiated by consumers and then producers across Asia and Europe will have a significant impact on changing the current practice to mitigate AMR.

How we can include the public into the fight against AMR: from the viewpoint of “mindful eaters” at the national level

WHAT TO KEEP

It is essential to continue supporting the education on AMR at all levels and the research in the field of life sciences, including AMR, to build knowledge and increase awareness among consumers. Periodic monitoring and evaluation of citizens’ knowledge on the use of antibiotics and its impact on their food system should be included to form future policy decisions in this area accordingly. The trend of shifting to the plant-based diets can also be expanded further across Asia and Europe, after carefully calibrating it with the food security of the regions. An increase in awareness of AMR and the shift in the diet can potentially lead to larger numbers of “mindful eaters” among consumers. They are active participants of the food system who are willing to know more about their food and have an influence on consumption patterns. The change in the consumption pattern can potentially trigger a change in a production method – less use of antibiotics can be expected. Awareness of AMR should be included in the factors influencing consumers’ behaviour. Finally, the behaviour changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, including good hygiene practice to lower infection risks, are also useful measures for fighting against AMR.

- 4 Mindful eaters are citizens who want to know much more about where their food comes from and who want to engage with rather than be passive participants of the food system. Although price will continue to drive purchasing decisions, the numbers of citizens who make decisions based on health and sustainability will continue to grow. Signs are that numbers of mindful eaters will continue to grow in Europe/North America, although we will witness more rapid growth of mindful eating in parts of Asia/SE Asia. Provenance and locally sourced ingredients will appeal. Younger people, particularly millennials and generation Z will continue to drive a shift to the regional cuisines of Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, experimenting with new food ingredients and those that improve gut and mental health. (<https://tastingthefuture.com/2019/09/17/sustainable-food-trends-in-2020-ten-to-watch/>)

WHAT TO DISCARD

Although there is an increased demand in meat and consumers' expectations of low price, intensive animal farming should be discouraged, particularly pigmeat and poultry. Intensive farming often involves higher stocking densities (more animals per farm area) and unhygienic environments. Such factory-style farming often compromises animal welfare and co-exists with the inappropriate use of antibiotics. It includes the use of antibiotics as a preventative measure, not necessarily as a response to disease, as well as growth-promoting purpose, which should be discontinued. A legal ban has already been in place in the EU since 2006⁵, and the expansion of such measures is highly recommended for other regions, including Asia. It is also encouraged to reduce the dependence on the global value chain in food. While it has enabled to lower prices and provided large consumer choices, the future of food is more likely to be primarily local rather than global. Consumers, including mindful eaters, have the power to influence producers in the mentioned points, which can lead to the change in practice in producers ends. Positive changes brought by consumers and producers will have an impact on the fight against AMR.

WHAT NEEDS TO IMPROVE

It is crucial to be clear on the message that AMR is an extremely urgent issue, in order to sustain a public debate. AMR is a real threat now, rather than a theoretical risk in the future. To combat AMR, producers and consumers must get involved in acting now, not later. Scientists and policymakers must find the right language to make people acknowledge the individual's responsibility beyond the health sector. While doing so, it is also important to avoid blaming particular groups⁶, but to highlight that everyone has a role to play in fighting against an AMR-pandemic. It is also essential to acknowledge that the solutions for the AMR problem is essentially inter-sectoral in nature and information sharing between sectors is one of the most important steps. The behaviour changes of consumers, eating less but better, i.e. non-antibiotic fed meat at a higher price point, can be an influential factor to mitigate AMR. A debate on planetary health might also help to raise awareness of AMR in the broader population. Lastly, producers, driven by large consumer markets for animal products, need better incentives to move away from factory farming with the routine use of antibiotics. Such incentives should target farmers as well as other stakeholders, including wholesalers, food preparation businesses, and consumers. The support towards the less-affluent, who are disproportionately affected by AMR, should not be forgotten so that they can also be mindful eaters.

5 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_05_1687

6 While some expressed concern over the primary responsibility of pharmaceutical industries, it is made clear that no single sector can be more responsible than others on AMR, which has a cross-sectoral nature.

WHAT TO SCALE UP

The majority of ASEM Partners already have national action plans on AMR, which includes actions related to increasing awareness of AMR. In June 2018, the United Nations Inter-agency Coordination Group (IACG) on Antimicrobial Resistance stated that “many countries need a stronger narrative that can engage both policymakers and the general public, by linking AMR to national interests, such as food, health, environment and economic development.”⁷ It was what the session identified, too – the action on this needs to be accelerated. For example, an environmental impact from the disposal of antibiotics is not well-known. AMR's influence on the environment may also be of interest to the public. Public interest in AMR will be a strong driving force for accelerating actions needed. Further desirable actions include scaling up the production of free-range livestock, and consumption of locally grown food items. Mindful eaters can support sustainable production that leads to economic stability for farmers without the use of unnecessary antibiotics.

How we can include the public into the fight against AMR: from the viewpoint of “mindful eaters” at the global level

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of a public health emergency to our daily life has been widely acknowledged. AMR is a public health emergency that requires urgent actions. Lessons learnt from COVID-19 can be applied to the fight against AMR, using the momentum that public health concerns have gained over the course of this year. For example, consumers already possess an opportunity to make better and healthier meat choices, supporting businesses that operate without routine use of antibiotic. Consumers should be aware of the use of antibiotics in food production and its impact on AMR and their future health. To generate more mindful eaters, increasing public knowledge on AMR beyond the healthcare setting is essential. The health sector has been working on AMR under the One Health concept, and they need support from the public to win over AMR. It is the time for “One Health, Our Health”, to have global inter-sectoral collaboration, including consumers and producers.

Taken together, these steps to keep positive trends, discard negative factors, improve certain efforts and scale up others at the national level should create a more receptive environment by including the public into the fight against AMR across the world, including Asia and Europe. As the participants of the ENVForum Annual Conference 2020, we firmly believe that AMR requires more attention from the public to generate necessary discussions for intersectoral approaches and actions to prevent future catastrophe.

7 https://www.who.int/antimicrobial-resistance/interagency-coordination-group/IACG_AMR_National_Action_Plans_110618.pdf

About the ASEF Public Health Network (ASEF PHN)

The Asia-Europe Foundation Public Health Network (ASEF PHN) is part of the ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza. In 2008, ASEM leaders at the 7th ASEM Summit stated their determination to combat a possible human influenza pandemic. Reflecting this strong political statement, the initiative was officially launched in 2009 with the financial support from the Government of Japan. The initiative consists of Stockpiling of Anti-viral Drugs & Personal Protective Equipment as well as ASEF Public Health Network.

The ASEF Public Health Network is a participatory platform which encourages public health dialogue between Asia and Europe. It provides space and opportunities for health and non-health sector representatives to share their knowledge and experience to combat Emerging Infectious Diseases

(EIDs). This exchange facilitates partnerships between multi-level actors from governments, international organisations, corporations, academia, non-profit organisations and the media. The Network strengthens cooperation between Asia and Europe to tackle common public health challenges with the focus on pandemic preparedness and response. Its projects include research, workshops, meetings, public briefings and training. Through such activities, the Network helps to raise people's level of awareness on public health issues in Asia and Europe.



ASEF'S contribution is made possible with the financial support of the Government of Japan.

About the Asia-Europe Environment Forum (ENVforum)

Established in 2003, the Asia-Europe Environment Forum (ENVforum) is a partnership of: [Asia-Europe Foundation \(ASEF\)](#), Government of Sweden through the Regional Asia Environment Conference Support Programme administered by [Stockholm Environment Institute \(SEI\)](#), [Hanns Seidel Foundation \(HSF\)](#), [ASEM SMEs Eco-Innovation Center \(ASEIC\)](#) and the [Institute for Global Environmental Strategies \(IGES\)](#).

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in "Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" presents multiple challenges for countries to implement SDGs. One of the central issues impeding the success of the 2030 Agenda is unsustainable consumption and production pattern.

Consumption and production are the building blocks of the economy, and thus essential to economic growth and development. However, with the projected world population to reach 9.8 billion by 2050, current consumption and production pattern is detrimental to our environment. At this rate, the magnitude of natural resources required to meet the demand of the projected population is equivalent to almost three planets. As the shortage of natural resources looms, it is imperative to achieve SDG 12 "Ensuring Sustainable Consumption and Production" and transition from linear to a circular economy.

The ENVforum Annual Conference 2020, took place amidst a global pandemic. The conference titled "Connecting

the dots: Creating an enabling environment for SDG12 in ASEM" took place 9-11 November 2020 virtually, brought new perspectives on the topics of antimicrobial resistance (AMR); inclusive food value chains; sustainable garments; and single-use plastics, all with special consideration to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The 3-day conference provided a platform for representatives from various stakeholders including civil society organisations, governments, and businesses from Asia and Europe to exchange experiences, including challenges and best practices, on sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and the transition into the circular economy. The conference was designed to promote exchanges on regional and international levels and highlight different multi-stakeholder initiatives or partnerships, including from the private sector, in promoting the adoption of SCP practices.

These were the thematic streams explored during the conference:

- » Stream 1: Health Agenda Post COVID-19— Example of AMR and "mindful eaters"
- » Stream 2: Inclusive Food Value Chains as a Way of Transition to Circular Economy
- » Stream 3: Sustainable Garment
- » Stream 4: The Plastic Initiatives – 3R in action

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