



Special Session
IDRC's Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health
Saturday, 11:00am- 1:00pm, Room 121/VDB

Featuring:

Betancourt, Óscar “Weaving Strategic Alliances for Health and Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

DePlaen, Renauld “Building the links between transdisciplinary research, policy and action.”

Houenou, Yveline Marie Thérèse “Fostering Environment and Health Linkages into the New Partnership for the Development of Africa (NEPAD.)”

Nuwayhid, Iman “Understanding the Linkages between Water and Health As a Key to Community Development in Bebnine: The power of transdisciplinarity & the challenges to community participation.”



Betancourt, Óscar

Title: Weaving Strategic Alliances for Health and Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean

Topic: Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health: Building the links between transdisciplinary research, policy and action (Organized by IDRC)

Text: FUNSAD is currently involved in three different partnership building efforts, each addressing different spheres of policy and action for integrating health and ecological considerations into sustainable development:

Local development planning. Research since 1999 on the impact of small-scale gold mining in the Puyango River basin of Ecuador showed high concentrations of particulate matter, mercury and lead in the river. Blood Pb levels were high in 39% of the population sample, high levels of blood Hg were found in 10% of the sample. The Ministry of Energy and Mines is using the research findings to promote interventions with miners for reducing contamination. An Environmental Management Unit was created in the Zaruma County, and policymakers

county civil committees were trained in environment and health management.

North-South-South scientific collaboration. The Community of Practice for Ecohealth - Toxics in Latin America and the Caribbean (COPEH-TLAC) is a multidisciplinary network of scientists from Canada and the LAC region. It focuses on research and linkages to policy concerning toxic substances, health effects and better management of exposures. COPEH-TLAC is organized into five regions, each led by a Centre of Excellence on a specific theme: Canada, ecosystem approaches and neurobehavioural effects of exposure to toxics; Mexico, vector transmitted diseases; Central America and Caribbean, pesticides in agriculture; Andes, mining and heavy metals; Southern Cone, economic restructuring, gender and health; Brazil, scaling up Ecohealth approaches.

Regional economic development. An hemispheric research partnership launched by a coalition of eight research institutes from across the Americas brings together expertises in international and environmental law, health, environment and development. The initiative studies how impact assessment laws and policies are functioning in practice, key gaps and opportunities for improvement. A key aim is to influence treaties and laws around regional integration by promoting the use of impact assessments on human health and environment.

Collaborators: Alberto Narváez, Marc Roulet, Donna Mergler, Sebastián Betancourt, Catharina Wesseling, Ruth Arroyo, Douglas Barraza, Jean Remy Gimaraes, Julia Medel, Nicolás Schweigmann, Mario Henry Rodriguez, Marie-Claire Cordonier, María Leichner, Soledad Salvador

Charron, Dominique & DePlaen, Renaud

Title: Building the links between transdisciplinary research, policy and action

Topic: Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health Panel (Organized by IDRC)

Text: The Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health research framework is based on the premise that human health and well-being are intimately tied to the health of the ecosystems in which people live and work. Sustainable improvements to both are seen as interdependent and require an integrated understanding of social and ecological determinants. Ecosystem approaches to human health address key limitations of narrow disciplinary approaches (be they medical, scientific or economic) that may promote progress in one sector at the expense of other sectors, or target one outcome disregarding secondary or other down-stream effects on other outcomes. IDRC supports research for development, capacity building, and policy influence. The Centre's Program Initiative on ecosystem approaches to human health focuses on social, political, economic and ecological contexts that influence health, toward a vision of improved well-being, sustainable living in healthy ecosystems, equitable development and reduced poverty. The Ecohealth program at IDRC emphasizes transdisciplinarity, multi-stakeholder participation, and gender and social equity. It supports research that generates and applies knowledge for development through a process that brings together scientists, local decision makers and communities to tackle problems of immediate relevance to developing country populations.

The panel session presents case studies from Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean on building dialogue, partnerships and concrete multi-sector actions for

improving human health in varied cultural, ecological and socio-economic contexts. The case studies illustrate challenges and opportunities in developing transdisciplinary, multi-sector and multi-stakeholder processes at various scales - from the municipal level (the case of Bebnine in Lebanon) to the regional level (promoting environment and health linkages in NEPAD and the LAC community of practice in Ecohealth on environmental toxics).

Houenou, Yveline Marie Thérèse

Title: Fostering Environment and Health Linkages into the New Partnership for the Development of Africa (NEPAD)

Topic: Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health: Building the links between transdisciplinary research, policy and action (Organized by IDRC)

Text: The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine in some depth the potential to promote health and environment linkages within initiatives of NEPAD and support the extension and consolidation of partnerships between scientists and research and development institutions of the region through the building of a community of practice on ecosystems approaches (COPEH) in Sub Saharan Africa. The study involved multiple steps: review of documents, visits to key institutions in West, East and South Africa, conference calls and face-to-face meetings, and workshops between multiple stakeholders, including African scientists and NEPAD officials, decision makers and principal technical and financial partners. NEPAD remains a global vision of development for Africa initiated by the African heads of State. It integrates the objectives of the Millennium development goals and the initiative of the United Nations on water and hygiene, energy, health and environment, agriculture and biodiversity and management of ecosystems (WEHAB). The original structures set in place for its implementation are undergoing change to improve effectiveness. Health and environment priorities were originally defined separately and entrusted to different heads of State. However, during the development of the action plan for the environment program, responsible officials perceived the importance of the complex interdependence between health and environment, leading to the identification of cross-cutting themes for support. Strategies for achieving an integrated conceptualization of health and environment linkages in the analysis of problems and design of interventions remain to be made nonetheless. This offers an opportunity for researchers, decision makers in health and environment, and principal actors of the NEPAD to strengthen their collaboration through an integrated, transdisciplinary and participative approach. A follow up project is being developed. For Central and West Africa a consensus has been reached for using applied research on 'waste management, sanitation and health linkages in urban and peri-urban settings of Africa' as an entry point to the reinforcement of capacities and the development of networks for training and communication in Ecohealth Approaches to guide policies and intervention strategies in these pressing development problems.

Collaborator: Crescentia Dakubo

Nuwayhid, Iman

Title: Understanding the Linkages between Water and Health As a Key to Community Development in Bebnine: The power of transdisciplinarity & the challenges to community participation

Topic: Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health: Building the links between transdisciplinary research, policy and action (Organized by IDRC)

Text: The Interfaculty Graduate Environmental Sciences Program (IGESP) at the American University of Beirut is applying an ecosystem approach to understand the linkages between water and health in the town of Bebnine in north Lebanon. The research project is conducted in collaboration with the municipal council and an advisory committee with the goal of providing the community with the knowledge and skills needed to improve the water situation in the town and decrease water-related morbidities. IGESP is an innovative educational model where a Master degree in Environmental Sciences is jointly offered by four Faculties (Agriculture/ Arts & Sciences/ Engineering/ Health Sciences) in collaboration with Medicine and Business. The Bebnine project cemented the symbiotic relationship within IGESP and provided a live example of the power of transdisciplinary research when linked to community development at the local level. After all, the bottom-line research question on the association between water related factors and enteric diseases is rather obvious to the community. The community is aware that contaminated drinking water, poor wastewater management, and improper hygienic practices increase the risk of enteric diseases. However, the ecosystem approach to this research question introduces a new dimension. Our research aims at understanding the “why” and “how” of linkages between people, water, and health. Furthermore, the collected information is open for public use and will provide the municipal council and development agencies with important management and planning tools. Questions like who are willing to connect to the new water network and for what cost were explored. Detailed information on water sources used for drinking and other domestic purposes were also collected. A surveillance system linking all 5 public health centers in Bebnine will soon be started to monitor cases of diarrhea and enteric diseases over the year. All of these activities are relevant to the community and its development plans and will help identify capacity building needs for the town and its health centers in addition to the identification of the etiology and distribution of diarrhea by season, neighborhood, and water source.

Collaborators: Mutasem El-Fadel, Rima R Habib, Mona Haidar, Dima Jamali, Rami Zurayk