

Conservation International

From: Neil Vora [REDACTED]
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To: Consultations <consultations@worldbank.org>
Subject: Feedback on Pandemic FIF from Conservation International

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Conservation International appreciates the [opportunity to provide feedback](#) on [the white paper](#) “A Proposed Financial Intermediary Fund (FIF) for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response Hosted by the World Bank”.

It is imperative that the FIF fund activities [to prevent pandemics through reducing the risk of spillover](#) of pathogens from animals to people, which is the source of most emerging infectious diseases. This would be consistent with recommendations from the WHO Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, which in [its report](#) issued in May 2022, stated that there “is an urgent need also to reduce the likelihood of zoonotic spill over events upstream, which requires action to mitigate biodiversity loss and other ecosystem damage”. We therefore agree with the definition of “prevention” proposed on page 2 of the white paper; specifically, that interventions are needed to “needed to mitigate risk and reduce the likelihood or consequences of spillover events at the human, animal, or ecosystem interfaces”.

Unfortunately, the white paper does not return to spillover prevention anywhere else in the document despite the fact that five of the six pandemics of the past 104 years were caused by spillover (and the sixth one, COVID-19, was also likely caused by spillover).

The four priority actions that the FIF should specifically fund to reduce risk of spillover are to:

1. Promote protection, conservation, and stewardship of tropical forests
1. Support domestic and international restrictions on unsafe wildlife trade and markets, while respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities
1. Improve health and economic security of communities living in emerging infectious disease hotspots
1. Enhance biosecurity in animal husbandry

The evidence shows that investing in pandemic prevention, specifically spillover prevention, carries [massive return on investment](#).

Instead, the focus of the white paper is on pandemic preparedness (i.e., post-spillover actions), which is critical but insufficient for reducing harm from future pandemics because pandemic preparedness:

1. Risks exacerbating inequity, in that those with socioeconomic privilege tend to have greater means to procure its benefits (e.g., vaccines) before others;
1. Is imperfect, as evidenced by failed COVID-19 efforts of many wealthy countries that have been investing in pandemic preparedness for decades;
1. Does not address “spillback”, a [theory](#) for how the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 emerged, in which pathogens accrue mutations while moving between animals and people repeatedly;

1. Does not overcome human behavior in an age of disinformation and rising populism, such as choosing to not receive a vaccine or wear a mask despite the evidence.

While we commend and agree with the white paper's emphasis on surveillance, it must be noted that surveillance will not prevent spillover. Rather, it would enable earlier detection and better control of zoonotic outbreaks, and provide a better understanding of the conditions that cause them.

Thus, if the goal of the FIF is to minimize risk of harm from pandemics, a layered approach is needed that invests in both prevention and preparedness.

To address ongoing gaps in funding for environmental conservation efforts such as those focused on deforestation, this new FIF for pandemics must coordinate its efforts with other funds such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It is important to recognize conservation is itself drastically underfunded. As an example, natural solutions (such as conservation of forests) represent more than one-third of the climate mitigation needed by 2030 to stabilize warming to well below 2°C. Yet these approaches receive less than 2% of global funds for climate mitigation. Furthermore, [the loss of primary tropical forest](#) was 12% higher in 2020 than in 2019, despite the economic downturn triggered by COVID-19. In short, administrators of the FIF must not assume that existing funds such as the GEF are dealing with the threat of spillover — they are not.

Beyond specifically funding the four priority actions mentioned above, the FIF must actively engage the three other UN agencies that make up the "[Quadripartite](#)" beyond the World Health Organization (WHO): the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Relatedly, it is imperative that experts in spillover prevention and One Health be included in the governing body and technical body of the FIF.

Finally, to promote transparency, civil society organizations must be involved as representatives in the governing board and technical board.