

From words to action: ICARS' reflections on the Political Declaration on Antimicrobial Resistance

At the 79th United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2024, world leaders gathered to attend a High-Level Meeting (HLM) on antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Eight years after Member States adopted the first political declaration on AMR, the HLM marked the approval of a new international political declaration.

ICARS welcomes the declaration which covers a full range of AMR mitigation efforts from governance, financing, research and development, to measures such as expanding access to antibiotics and stewardship. With a robust and action-oriented tone, aspects of the declaration resonate with ICARS' mission by focusing on equity and leaving no one behind, emphasising that low-resource settings and vulnerable populations bear the greatest AMR burden, and highlighting the need for global solidarity and international cooperation. The declaration also importantly incorporates some measurable and time-bound targets which will shape the short- and medium-term AMR agenda.

Now is the time for action. The global community must deliver on the commitments in the declaration, including, among others, a move from 20% to 60% of National Action Plans (NAPs) financed, and a 10% reduction in global AMR related deaths by 2030. ICARS is ready to play a key role in reaching these targets by continuing to support countries to co-develop, test, and scale-up sustainable AMR solutions.

In this brief, key components of ICARS' strategic mission and model of engagement are overlaid with commitments from the declaration, and illustrated with real-world examples of mitigation interventions from the diverse portfolio of ICARS-supported projects in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs). The brief aims to demonstrate how ICARS is moving these ideas into action by bridging policy and research.

Use a One Health approach

46. Recognize the need for collaborative and multisectoral efforts to address antimicrobial resistance through a One Health approach that fosters cooperation across human, animal and plant health, as well as environmental and other relevant sectors.

- Political declaration on AMR

AMR is a global challenge that transcends sectors and demands integrated and synergistic action. ICARS supports projects within the human health, animal health and environmental sectors, as well as supporting cross-sectoral and One Health projects. ICARS believes that AMR mitigation should be an integrated part of addressing global health threats that require a One Health approach such as infection prevention and control (vaccination, biosecurity, WASH) pandemic preparedness, sustainable food systems, environmental sustainability and climate change, access to healthcare and diagnostics. Working horizontally across sectors could generate substantial co-benefits and bridge investment gaps for AMR.

Case 1: Vietnam

An ICARS-supported project is addressing antimicrobial misuse in Vietnamese aquaculture. By working with fish producing farmers (*Pangasius* and *Tilapia*) for domestic consumption and export, the project is implementing targeted interventions such as vaccinations and intensive production technology to prevent disease and reduce over reliance on antimicrobials. Apart from improving fish health, survival rates and productivity, reduction in antimicrobial use and more sustainable farming practices will also address issues related to environmental pollution and potential health risks for consumers.



The importance of national ownership

18. Reaffirm the importance of national ownership and the primary role and responsibility of governments at all levels to determine their own path towards achieving universal health coverage, including through addressing antimicrobial resistance, in accordance with national contexts, priorities and needs, and underscore the importance of political leadership for tackling antimicrobial resistance in and beyond the health sector in order to pursue whole-of-government, whole-of-society and community-based approaches, as well as the consideration of health-in-all-policies, equity-based and life-course approaches.

- Political Declaration on AMR

ICARS partners with LMICs to co-develop and implement context-specific, country-owned AMR solutions. ICARS-supported projects empower country leadership by drawing on local knowledge and experience and engaging with diverse stakeholders working top-down (ministry level) and bottom-up (local partners). Our co-development process ensures that AMR mitigation priorities are identified and driven by country teams to address local and national needs, build on existing efforts, and feed into or build on existing AMR NAPs.

Case 2: Zimbabwe

ICARS is supporting a project which aims to reduce antimicrobial use by improving biosecurity and animal husbandry practices in small- to medium-scale broiler farms in Zimbabwe. The project was co-developed with the Directorate of Veterinary Services, from the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Fisheries and Rural Development with input from the University of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Poultry Association, and as a result has political backing and is aligned with national plans:

"The project reinforces the Government of Zimbabwe's thrust towards strengthening food and nutrition security whilst ensuring that food is safe for consumption. The project addresses the strategic objective 3 of the 'One Health' AMR National Action Plan, which focuses on reducing the need for antimicrobials by improving infection prevention and control, farm practices and biosecurity, water sanitation and hygiene, and immunisation." - Dr Pious V Makaya, Director, Department of Veterinary Technical Services, Zimbabwe

Furthermore, the project uses components of a community-based approach called Responsive Dialogues integrated with Farmer Field Schools, to engage with local-stakeholders to understand the social, economic, normative, cultural, and behavioural barriers that drive antimicrobial use on farms. By drawing on local knowledge and experience, the project addresses the real-life situation of the people and communities it is designed to support.



Strengthen capacity through sustainable support

19. Recognize that although progress has been made in developing and implementing multisectoral national action plans on antimicrobial resistance, additional and sustainable financial and technical support is needed to build and strengthen capacity, especially in developing countries.

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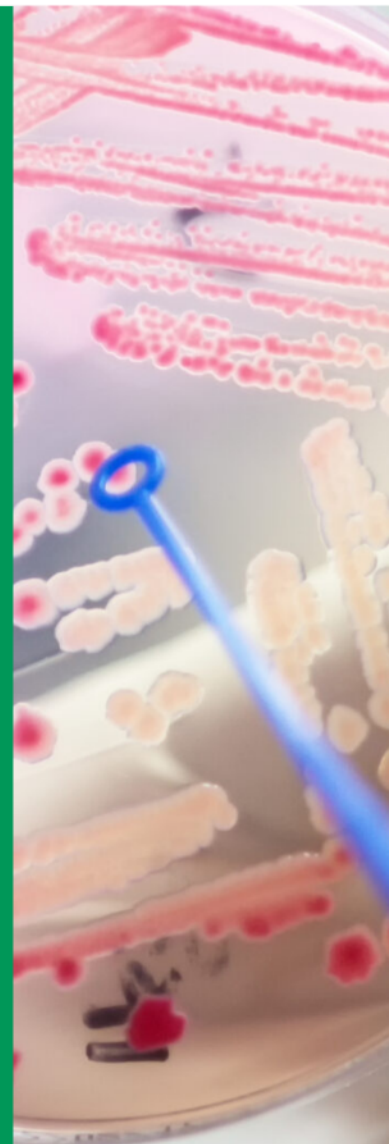
To achieve sustainable change with maximum impact, ICARS-supported projects aim to strengthen relevant in-country capabilities to generate evidence and support the uptake of context-specific solutions into policy. Because AMR is a One Health problem, the projects use multidisciplinary approaches and mobilise a range of expertise to achieve better outcomes. With a strategic focus on cost-effectiveness and partnership, and a core pillar of our work focused on capacity strengthening, we aim to increase opportunities for country-led project expansion, scale-up and complimentary initiatives.

Case 3: Cross-country capacity strengthening

All ICARS-supported projects are multidisciplinary. Each intervention includes an area of research on the effectiveness and economic impact, as well as an assessment of the barriers and enablers to implementation. Furthermore, most projects include postgraduate students to build project team capacity.

In addition to encouraging involvement of multidisciplinary expertise, ICARS is also sponsoring several capacity building initiatives. In partnership with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the EUCAST Development Laboratory (EDL), support is provided to build a centre of excellence for Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing (AST) at ILRI. ILRI has hosted AST training with participants from ICARS-supported projects in Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Zanzibar, and Zimbabwe. The ILRI training programme has also been supplemented by a training of trainers at EDL in Sweden, which has trained individuals from Georgia and from ILRI. The team in Georgia later transferred the training to project teams in Kyrgyzstan and other laboratories in Georgia.

ICARS is partnering with Radboud University Medical Center (Radboudumc) to expand its implementation-focused resources, which help professionals and policymakers develop and implement successful Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs (ASPs) in hospitals, healthcare systems, regions, or countries. The collaborative project aims to adapt Radboudumc's existing DRIVE-AMS tools for use in low-resource settings. Over the next three years, the project aims to train approximately 400 participants, starting with healthcare professionals involved in ICARS-supported human health initiatives, and later extending to those engaged in broader One Health efforts.



Transform funding for addressing AMR

33. Recognize that health financing requires global solidarity and collective effort and urge Member States to strengthen international cooperation to support efforts to build and strengthen capacity in developing countries, including through enhanced official development assistance and financial and technical support and support to research, development, and innovation programmes.

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ICARS provides financial and technical support to LMICs to develop and test AMR solutions, while laying the groundwork for sustainable impact. ICARS-supported projects engage multiple stakeholders, including ministries, to create policy-level buy-in from the start, and to build relationships that could support future scale-up and domestic funding. Furthermore, projects are supported by large in-kind contributions, which utilise existing resources, tap into existing networks, and lay foundations for longevity beyond the project cycle. Aside from supporting projects, ICARS also plays a key role in advocating for context-specific, country-owned AMR solutions. By highlighting this need across national, regional, and global platforms, we hope to encourage more support for downstream implementation science.

Case 4: Policy influence at the national level

Many ICARS-supported projects have influenced policy and processes at the national level. In Kyrgyzstan, an ICARS supported project aims to improve the diagnosis and treatment of respiratory tract infections in children. By introducing a quick, bed-side test (C-Reactive Protein CRP) which indicates how severe a child's infection is, and analysing how health care workers feel about using the test, the project aims to improve diagnosis and treatment of respiratory tract infections (RTIs) in children, while ensuring the appropriate use of antibiotics. The use of the CRP test for treating children with RTIs in Primary Care facilities, has now been integrated into the National guidelines.

Meanwhile, in Georgia, an ICARS-supported project developed context-specific surgical antibiotic prophylaxis (SAP) guidelines, the national implementation and evaluation of which have since been included as a priority action in the new AMR National Action Plan.



Looking ahead

The new declaration on AMR provides a critical opportunity to channel renewed energy and momentum into implementing sustainable solutions to address the significant burden of AMR. With a growing portfolio of supported projects in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, and an extensive network of committed partners, ICARS strives to continue bridging the science policy gap in LMICs, and demonstrating actionable solutions that deliver meaningful change.