

A New Chapter in NIEHS-WHO Collaboration (3-part series)

Dr. Luis Augusto Galvao, PAHO (Part 3)

Anne Johnson: This is Global Environmental Health Chat, the podcast that explores environmental health issues that transcend national boundaries. I'm your host Anne Johnson, and this podcast is produced by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Welcome to the third podcast in our series celebrating the launch of the NIEHS-WHO Collaborating Center for Environmental Health Sciences. The center offers both NIEHS and the World Health Organization new opportunities to improve health around the world.

We're joined by Dr. Luiz Augusto Galvao, Chief of the special program on sustainable development and health equity at the Pan American Health Organization, which is the WHO's regional office for the Americas. He says he's excited about the new collaborating center because of the unique strengths WHO and NIEHS each bring to the table.

Luis Augusto Galvao: WHO is not a research institute. We are a secretariat for the ministers of health. So our biggest strength is the relationship we have with the ministries of health, the access we have, the possibility of bringing people together and discuss issues and implement it. What I think complements that is the biggest strength of NIEHS, is being a research institute with a very practical oriented view where it's looking not only for the base research, but also for the public use the result for public health programs. So I think this is the biggest complementary we have, so NIEHS can give us the up-to-date information, so that we can facilitate the interactions with countries to make it available for countries.

Johnson: He said the partnership comes at a crucial time in the evolution of the field of environmental health. Not only will the partnership help both organizations more effectively address specific global health issues, but they can together propel a new overarching vision of the environmental determinants of health.

Galvao: One thing that is important is this new understanding of the relationship between the physical environment and social environment. Particularly in developing countries, it's not only the challenge of air pollution, but it's who is in the pressure of air pollution. It's normally poor people or the people who have less access for housing or energy, so that new relationship between physical and social environment need to reshape our understanding between public health and the environment. And I think NIEHS is in a very good condition to help us on that task.

Johnson: He says the new collaboration can have a real impact on health policy around the world. One specific way is by helping to inform the UN's post-2015 sustainable development agenda. If you're a regular listener of our podcast, you heard this topic discussed in our interview with Sir Andrew Haines. Dr. Galvao says NIEHS can help inform key health indicators that leaders can use to set goals and measure progress for the new framework.

Galvao: If you don't have how to measure progress, it will be very hard to get anything in the framework. People only want to adopt, think they can be measure; so this is a very important

contribution. I know NIEHS is moving on that, and that is something very important, very urgent, very immediate, and very specific.

Johnson: He added that NIEHS is a valuable partner for WHO because it has close access to world-class researchers in institutions across the United States, and because of its efforts to disseminate environmental health research findings through its journal, Environmental Health Perspectives, and other outreach mechanisms.

It's also well positioned to lead training and capacity building initiatives that will benefit researchers and policy makers in less developed countries.

Galvao: NIEHS has enormous capacity for training people or for collaborating or make an interchange on the technical and scientist collaboration with laboratories and the services division. I see that another immediate importance, specific thing we can do, is working together in toxicology or environmental epidemiology, building capacity in countries, or building capacity regionally, so that people can perform better the tasks they have at hand.

Johnson: Those tasks include enormous challenges both at a national and a global scale. Tackling global environmental health problems will require sustained commitment from NIEHS, WHO, and other organizations as they work together to conduct and translate environmental health research.

Thanks to Dr. Luiz Galvao for joining us for this podcast, and to all the leaders at NIEHS and WHO who worked to build this collaborative effort. Please visit our website to stay up-to-date on the activities of the new collaborating center at niehs.nih.gov/geh.

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