

Global Conference on Animal Welfare: an OIE initiative

TOPIC: Setting the scene

TITLE: Animal welfare: a perspective from developing countries

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ABSTRACT:

Developing countries of the world, especially in Asia, have high human and livestock populations mostly rural and agricultural based and limited land which leads to less pasture available for animals. Out of 100 million bullocks and buffaloes, 7 million are in urban areas. These draught animals are still the backbone of agriculture and mechanisation is insignificant.

Developing countries with a rich heritage of cultural and religious traditions have not sheltered livestock from abuse. In quantitative terms, the present effort of animal welfare organizations is only a tiny fraction of what needs to be done to improve animal welfare.

Livestock undergo major sufferings due to malnutrition, overloading of work animals and ill-treatment of meat animals. Draught animals work beyond their capacity. Even shoeing and castration are done in primitive ways inflicting needless suffering. Due to paucity of pasture and commercial feed, livestock are in semi-starved conditions (except high yielding milk animals and draught animals while at work). More than hundred million draught animals are idle in India for 200 days a year during which period they are ill-fed and become weak reducing there draught capability. This leads to ill treatment to goad them for work beyond their capacity and health. While at work, they are overworked, underfed, and maltreated. Millions suffer neck injuries. The implements and carts to which they are hitched are inefficient, crude and painful. Improving the design of agricultural implements and carts will avoid this cruelty. Animal Welfare Organisations largely concern themselves with pet animals and wild life and very little attention is paid to livestock.

Cruelty to animals takes place at every stage during slaughter especially in India. Five to eight million buffalo calves are killed immediately after birth. Eighty million large animals work for 7-10 years before becoming available for slaughter. Over 120 million meat animals and 500 million poultry also undergo significant sufferings from the time they are dispatched for slaughter till they die. Transport and handling methods are primitive and crude. Slaughter animals are made to walk long distances or transported in overcrowded trucks and trains. At the slaughter itself animals are

handled roughly and animals awaiting their turn watch other animals being killed. Due to misinterpretation of religious injunctions and continued resistance to stunning, unnecessary suffering is inflicted.

Cruelty to other animals such as elephants, horses, donkeys, bears, and circus animals has largely been prevented through the efforts of animal welfare organisations. Prevention of killing of stray dogs through inefficient methods has been prevented by the use of alternatives to euthanasia such as animal birth control programmes.

Governments have taken initiatives to establish Animal Welfare Boards and enact laws for the prevention of cruelty to animals, but their efforts are far too limited to be of any significance. Financial constraints and lack of personnel inhibit the implementation of these rules.

Though the legislation and acts to prevent cruelty to animals have been in place for decades, strict implementation is often negligible. However, efforts are being made to make the public aware and bring in concepts of animal welfare into the veterinary curricula to sensitise veterinarians on all animal welfare issues including animal experimentation in teaching and research.