

Animal Welfare in the Developing Countries

Marwan Abdulhaleem*

Small Animals Veterinary Surgeon, Alexandria, Egypt

***Corresponding Author:** Marwan Abdulhaleem, Small Animals Veterinary Surgeon, Alexandria, Egypt.

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Abstract

There's a big gap in animal welfare conditions between the developed countries and the developing countries especially in Africa and Asia, due to many factors like the economic conditions in these countries, the cultural predispositions regarding how animals should be treated and the nature of their relationship with humans, and the religious beliefs that impact how certain animals are viewed and treated. Till this day working animals are malnourished, overworked and mistreated in many countries around the world. Production animals are mass farmed in small areas, with not much freedom to move and express their normal behavior and are mistreated and abused during slaughter. Wild and captive animals are also farmed in some countries, or abused and mistreated for human entertainment, and many of the organizations working to save these animals lack the resources to make a difference. Stray dog populations are mass murdered in horrible ways across the streets in many countries while people watch. In Egypt, many movements have been made to implement laws to improve the animal welfare status in the country but with very minimal results. The key to improving the animal welfare status in the developing countries lies in the education and awareness of the masses which should go hand in hand with implementing the laws, as the laws alone won't be significant as long as the people don't believe in their value and are not concerned with animal welfare.

Keywords: Animal Welfare; Animal Rights; Developing Countries; Egypt

Introduction

Animal welfare is one of the most important topics regarding the veterinary practice, and the public work and service in general. But first and foremost, we must distinguish between two terms, animal rights and animal welfare. Animal rights activists and organizations believe that animals shouldn't be farmed, hunted, eaten or used in any way by humans and should be kept in the wild. The dilemma of this approach is that the species of domestic animals we have today were bred through hundreds of generations for a certain purpose, whether to produce more milk, meat, or improve a certain ability like the sense of smell, and these species are accustomed to their life in farms and human homes and won't survive in the wild on their own; because of their weak immune systems compared to that of wild animals for instance. On the other hand, animal welfare activists and organizations believe that animals can

be owned and used, as long as we treat them humanely and give them their famous five freedoms (the freedom from discomfort, freedom to express normal behavior, freedom from fear, freedom from pain and freedom from hunger and thirst). In this article I'm reviewing the animal welfare status in the developing countries, highlighting the factors contributing to the poor welfare conditions, classifying those conditions according to the animal species, and giving some attention to the animal welfare status in Egypt.

Factors affecting animal welfare in developing countries

Economics

Many challenges face the developing countries like political instability, food insecurity and various priorities [1]. Because of these factors alone it's difficult to focus on animal welfare. In regions such as Africa and Asia, in which animals contribute greatly

to the economy, animal welfare is mainly viewed in relation to its economic benefit [2]. This perspective can limit the animal welfare movement unless it has an economical benefit [3]. Also, many developing countries don't have the resources to provide high standard care for animals. In many developing countries, animals are transported on foot to market or slaughterhouses due to poor roads and lack of specialized trucks [4]. Animals may walk for days without enough rest, water or food, all of which may decrease their welfare and makes them prone to lots of diseases. Some countries still rely on animal power (horses and donkeys) to transport goods, and such animals don't get the food, water, rest and the medical care they need [5]. These examples can't be generalized to all the developing countries, but they clarify the economic struggles that lead to poor animal welfare.

Culture

Animals can gain significance through their association with culturally defining rituals. In some parts of Africa and Asia animals can be viewed as a sign of wealth and are sometimes affiliated with a bride's worth in some marriage ceremonies [6,7], or as a source of conflict via cattle raids between ethnic groups [8]. In some African rural communities, livestock provide food through meat, milk and blood [9]. Their hides, wool and nails can be used to make clothes, beddings and accessories [9]. Other products such as urine can be used to make medicine [9]. The cultural significance of animals in a certain country can impact greatly how these animals are viewed and how much care and attention they are provided.

Religion

In many developing countries religious beliefs can significantly impact how certain animal species are treated [10]. The idea that cows are sacred among the Hindus of India [11], and that pigs are considered unclean in Islamic cultures [12] provide examples of how religious beliefs can affect how animals are viewed in society. There might be an assumption that those that are 'Deeply Religious' are keener on caring for animals than others. However, research has shown that there is an inversely proportional relationship between animal welfare and 'Deeply Religious' societies [10,14]. One study, for example, showed that some Christian groups that stick to the bible show less support for animal rights than others [13]. This could be partly due to preoccupation with human concerns over animal-welfare issues as seen in the New Testament of the Bible [15], and a utilitarian view of animals as being created solely for

human benefit. A survey on students in Iran showed a low concern for animal welfare, presumably because the concern must come from the Quran and are not believed to be an important public matter [15]. As clarified by these examples religious beliefs can play a huge role in how animals are viewed and treated in such societies.

Animal welfare classification

Welfare of work animals

Since the beginning of civilization work animals have had a great importance. They carry goods on their back, pull heavy carts, or are ridden themselves [16]. It is unfortunate that these animals are not cared for properly in most developing countries. In many places in India for examples, many work animals suffer from malnutrition and bad treatment. Millions suffer neck injuries and are bruised due to whipping and hot iron branding. Even shoeing and castration are done in primitive methods which may cause needless suffering [17-19]. Also, the materials used to attach them to the carts can be inefficient and painful.

Welfare of production animals

In many countries, animal cruelty happens at many stages during slaughter. In India, five to eight million calves are killed immediately after birth. And at slaughter, animals watch other animals being killed while awaiting their turn, and sharp sticks are stuck into the anus or vagina to force them on to the slaughter platforms. Also, the front legs of young buffaloes are broken and swung around the neck to restrain them. Thousands of animals are transported both legally and illegally across borders by trucks and trains in the most inhumane way [20].

In some developing countries, hens are kept in battery wire cages so small that the hens can't flap their wings and so restricting that the bones become brittle and snap easily.

Welfare of companion animals

Stray dogs remain a cause of concern in the developing countries. Catching and killing of stray dogs continue to occur in the most horrific methods, from poisoning to gun shots.

Welfare of wild and captive animals.

In countries like China and Japan, bears are farmed for their bile, where bears can be kept in small cages for up to 10 years [21,22]. In India, elephants are kept semi starved and work for very long

hours. Animals in circuses also face cruel inhumane conditions, and when they are rescued by some organizations they don't find the proper care and live in overcrowded conditions due to lack of resources in these organizations.

Animal welfare in developing countries: The case of Egypt

In Egypt, animal welfare remains a matter of concern to many activists, mainly due to the same reasons why there's poor animal welfare conditions in the developing countries in general. Egypt has also had its share of economic challenges, the various cultural diversity, and the extreme religious beliefs by certain groups. Donkeys are mistreated in the streets, overworked and abused with whips and sticks in addition to being malnourished. In the Alexandria zoo, animals are abused and live in tight quarters according to many reports. In February 2015, two men entered the zoo and beat-up baboons with sticks while many zoo goers watched and laughed [23]. Regarding the stray dogs population, there has been several occasions where authorities and civilians contributed to killing the dogs by poisoning or gun fires. In 2016, Egyptian poet Fatma Naoot was convicted of 'contempt of religion' and sentenced to three years in jail, for criticising the mass killing of lambs and sheep in the streets during Eid (an Islamic celebration) [24]. In addition, a lot of Egyptians think of pigs as filthy animals not worthy of living because of religious reasons.

Many animal rights and welfare organizations work actively to improve this situation. There's Brooke action for working horses, which improves the lives of working horses and donkeys, the Egyptian Mau Rescue Organization (EMRO) which encourages cat adoption, and many other organizations. Also, there are several animal shelters like the Egyptian Society for Mercy to Animals (ESMA). But despite their enormous efforts, they can't seem to make a significant difference nation wise, and any talk about animal welfare to the average Egyptian seems so foreign and unnecessary, due to the lack of awareness, cultural and religious predispositions and the economic status.

Many movements have been made by activists, organizations and several members of the Egyptian parliament to implement laws that improve the welfare of animals in Egypt, but there's still a long way to go, as laws would never make a difference without the people believing in these laws and being aware and concerned with the importance of animal welfare.

Conclusion

Animal welfare in the developing countries still have a long way to go in order to achieve sensible results, despite the enormous efforts done by organizations and individuals, due to the various economic and cultural issues in these countries. And without proper awareness and education to the masses, implementing laws won't make a significant difference on how animals are treated in these countries whether they are working animals, farm animals or companioning animals.

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