



## The Role of Animal Welfare in Veterinary Practice in Zambia

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Animal welfare as I have observed, is perceived by some, if not most Zambians (both veterinary practitioners and non-vets), to be basically a foreign concept, particularly of the western world. It is regarded as a concern for only the rich and the modern thus, inappropriate and/or unapplicable to the local African (Zambian) traditional context.

This perception may seem to be the case when consideration is made of evidence such as the legislation [1] pertaining to animal welfare which was instituted in the 1920s (prior to Zambia's national independence and so, with minimal indigenous participation). One could even argue that after 1964, welfare efforts still seem (ed) to be largely led (at least, formally) by foreign associates as seen in (the only?) 3 welfare organisations (LAWS-Lusaka Animal Welfare Society, Kitwe Animal Welfare Society and ZAWS-Zambezi Animal Welfare Services) formed in 1993, 2010 and 2014 respectively [2-4]. However, is this true? What would be the implications?

Remember, correlation is not causation because while causation implies the former, correlation does not necessarily imply the latter [5]. All this is to make the point that there is much confusion and /or misunderstanding regarding "animal welfare" in and of itself, long before the question of its role can be addressed and appreciated. This role is inextricably a product of what it (animal welfare) is; for like a personal adaptation of a common scientific theme [6,7] goes, structure (what it is) determines function (how it is) and this rightly understood, gives insight into The Purpose (why it is). This essay's focus to the degree possible, will be narrowed to the relationship between the animal, its welfare and the veterinarian especially, in Zambia. An animal as ostensibly understood and/or used in Zambia can be defined from [1] inference and

personal experience, as any "valuable" non-human creature; with a bias towards larger and more closely related ones (i.e., commonly in contact with/"owned" by, humans and/or having characteristics easily identified as similar to humans like sentience and physique). These are mainly mammals (foregut fermenters like ruminants and pseudo-ruminants or hindgut fermenters like equids and porcine), birds (domestic, like chicken or wild, like ostrich) and fish (loosely used for most aquatic creatures).

Reptiles, amphibians and other classes (including some mammals like rodents) are not usually regarded, with the possible exception of domesticated individuals (and /or pets?). Consequently, the value attributed to the non-human species is greatly, influenced by the direct benefit(s) conferred upon Human Beings such as the socio-economic gain.

Their true value nevertheless, transcends this meagre notion.

Animals in general, have been in existence for a while even earlier than man 8 [8-10] and this conclusion may be reached from both (all?) worldviews (i.e., Godless evolutionary and Loving-Creator God). They are key to Humanity's very existence on multiple levels. Interactions go back thousands of years (suggesting a short chronology?) and have a strong (and necessary) association with spirituality especially, with regards to domestication [10,11]. Africa and Zambia in particular, has a rich history of interaction with animals. The earliest modern tribal inhabitants [12] such as the Tonga people remain animal handlers until now and by it, have not only survived but thrived which is an indication (at least, in part) of their welfare. Because the animal is, its welfare (to whatever extent) is inherent as they are valuable in and of themselves much

like Humans. Welfare is “the general state of health or degree of success of a person, business, country, etc.” [13] Hence, animal welfare would be simply described as, the state of non-human animals as it relates to and/or copes with, the condition (s) in which they live, encompassing nutrition, environment, behaviour, mental state and health. This means it can either be good or bad depending on the factors and these have been divided into 3 overlapping categories [14]. The first is concentrated on physical aspects like health, growth and production; the second is more mental, involving feelings or affective experiences; and the third, is at the level of natural expression implying, behaviours both individual and social types. Each category is indispensable and co-dependent on the other because the lack or depravity of one, negatively affects the others and eventually renders all deprived or lacking. Therefore, an integration of each category is necessary to optimise animal welfare. This involves an appreciation for “human like” characteristics (anthropomorphism) which serves as a precursor to a more complete understanding and application.

Animal welfare practices in Zambia seem to be chiefly, grounded on the first category. This may be due to a lack of knowledge, cost implications, limited resources, a lack of consented efforts and deferment of responsibility. For instance, Zambian small ruminant traders in interviews [15] shared that the primary concern was animal size for it was understood to be a sign of health. They defined health as being the nonappearance of clinical signs. They also, did not consider the animal’s health (welfare) a responsibility of Traders but to be that of Veterinarians.

From either worldview [8-10], Humanity is an indirect sequel of animal as either or both a co-product and co-producer of animals. Without animals, man wouldn’t Be and vice versa. Each depend on the other and the most refined expression of Humanity’s contribution to animals (in the very least) is, the Veterinarian. The animal exists and because of that, so does its welfare but in order to continue to be, its welfare must be maintained and/or improved yet to do this, Man (Humanity) must Be. This Man culminates into the Veterinarian who him/herself is mandated principally, to preserve the wholistic health(welfare) of non-human animals. They have the subjective and practical knowledge that is scientifically sound enabling the use of different methods for prevention, diagnosis as well as treatment of animals.

Formally organised veterinary practice appears to stretch far back to the 18th century in 1762, France; but only institutionally,

came to Zambia in 1983 [16]. Prior to these dates, the practice may have been carried out during 3400-3000 BC [17] and the 1900s [1] in France and Zambia, respectively. Despite being a relatively young field of practice, it has made a number of contributions to both directly and indirectly improve the welfare of animals. An example would be the ground breaking work done on bovine dermatophilosis [19] famously known as “senkobo disease”, a name derived from the affected area. The disease affected more than one quarter of the nation’s cattle and to further draw the much-needed attention (and so, intervention), the economic impact was also documented [20]. The conservative estimation was K6.9 million (US\$3 million) back then and may actually have been 1.8 times more.

Veterinary practice helps to ensure, restore and improve animal welfare which in turn, helps to improve and ensure that, the veterinarian’s choice of practice method(s) may yield the best results possible in given situations. Animal welfare prompts the asking of questions that inform us about how to best take care of the animals beyond current veterinary practices. It provides data/evidence on how animals behave, how their brains and bodies interplay; giving insight into mental and emotional health as well as how they cope under human care. If the scientific facts show that certain conditions or situations do not allow an animal to be free from pain and suffering or to have a good quality of life; this informs the decisions and /or actions to be made.

Even if a procedure has been practiced historically, newer and/or better methods may take their place if animal welfare demands so. One case that shows this point, is the discouragement of the use of manual rapture (historical) for the treatment of cystic ovaries in cattle [21]. This is because of the danger of trauma (suffering?) and haemorrhage (pain?) which may lead to a compromised quality of life if further complicated. Therefore, hormonal therapy is encouraged instead.

Because of the involvement of other parties, veterinary interventions must produce outcomes that are not only beneficial to the animal (welfare) but also other parties (like “owners”). Fortunately, the rewards or benefits of the parties are not mutually exclusive. Society utilises animals in numerous ways to support its own interests and wellbeing (welfare). Animal welfare up to a certain threshold held by the majority is considered a ‘public good’ - a benefit that state (s) have a responsibility to ensure. Levels beyond this threshold are appreciated by a minority and the attached economic value can be seen as a private good that government has no responsibility to provide [22].

In order to function as a society with flawed foundations, we must strike the temporal balance of what is feasible to achieve whilst attempting to minimise or eliminate pain and suffering and preferably to provide opportunities for animals to experience a good life (with as many freedoms as possible). That is what animal welfare is, it is the middle road between utopia and dystopia, a realistic solution to where we find ourselves today and where we can be tomorrow.

Animal welfare is the goal to which veterinary medicine aims to achieve, being the means. Practitioners strive to not only to reach and maintain this goal, standard or ideal but also, to advance it. The welfare of the animal is the welfare of the practitioners. Animal welfare is a bridge to Good, not just of animals but Humanity and all Created Life on the Planet (s).

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