Sharing the load: Sustainable community action to improve the welfare of working animals in developing countries

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Introduction

Sustainable improvement in animal welfare in the developing world relies on prevention of disease, injury and poor husbandry practices. Poverty, restricted availability of resources and service providers and competing livelihood priorities, such as human health and sanitation, act as constraints on the owners of working animals. The Brooke Hospital for Animals (‘The Brooke’) is a UK charity, founded in 1934, to provide veterinary treatment for horses, mules and donkeys working in developing countries and to advise their owners on good management practices. Since 2005, The Brooke has undertaken in India a gradual transformation from primarily treatment-focused, veterinary service provision towards community-led action to improve preventive management and work practices. This is supported by capacity-building of local veterinary and animal health providers to manage emergency cases. The aim is collective responsibility of the community for sustainable improvement in the welfare of working animals.

Using principles adopted and adapted from the human development sector, we describe in this paper the process of community motivation for animal welfare, and current steps towards the production of a manual for community facilitators and other workers in this field.

Materials and methods

Since the 1970s, the human development sector has recognised that community participation and ownership of decision making that affects livelihoods are a pre-requisite for sustained social change (Kumar 2002).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, establishment of community-based animal health worker (CBAHW) networks in Africa and Asia have benefited from the application of an
Appropriate Technology approach. This emphasised selection of village veterinary workers from within animal-owning communities and built on local livestock and animal husbandry knowledge, rather than importing high-tech veterinary care from more developed regions (Catley et al. 2002). However, many prevalent welfare problems in working animals, such as dehydration, lameness and wounds (Pritchard et al. 2005) cannot be prevented by vaccination or other simple treatments. They require continuous good husbandry and management practices by their owners, along with appropriate treatment-seeking when needed. The Brooke, supported by Praxis India, the Institute for Participatory Practices, is currently field-testing adapted versions of existing community participation tools and developing new tools that would lead to improved husbandry, work patterns and treatment-seeking behaviour of horse-, mule- and donkey-owning communities.

Community programmes strategy and approach
The welfare situation of working animals varies depending on the livelihood situation in which they are used. Welfare problems are diverse and often very specific to the context in which the animal works, so a tailored approach is required in each situation. The intensity of involvement with a community that is needed to improve the welfare of its animals depends on the complexity and severity of risks for poor animal welfare and the livelihood vulnerability of owners. The target group for intervention can be animal owners and their families, animal users (in many countries animals are hired from the owner by a user who cannot afford his own) or service providers (the saddler, farrier, feed seller or local health provider who provides a service to the animal owner).

Three levels of intensity of engagement with animal-owning communities have been identified: intensive, semi-intensive and extensive. The intensive approach is used where risks for poor animal welfare are high, combined with a high animal density and high vulnerability of the socio-economic livelihood situation; for example the owners and animal working in industries such as brick kilns in India and Egypt. In the intensive approach, a community facilitator meets the target group directly with a high frequency of visits. The principle of this approach is to stimulate collective action by a group of owners or users to improve the welfare of their animals. The owners and facilitator work together to improve the quality, access and availability of existing service providers.

The semi–intensive approach is applicable to working animals in scattered populations surrounding or near to areas of intensive engagement. The animals are at high risk for
poor welfare and their owners' livelihoods are vulnerable, but there are practical or resource constraints preventing intensive engagement. The facilitator meets the target group directly but with a lower frequency of visits. The principle of the semi-intensive approach is to create opportunities for cross-learning between animal owners. In addition the owners in the semi-intensive areas are linked with the service providers with whom the facilitator is already working through the intensive approach.

In the extensive approach there may be a high or low animal density, however the risks to welfare and livelihood vulnerability are lower. Animals are usually used for less intensive farming or domestic tasks and often located in rural areas. The facilitator influences the target group indirectly through existing organisations in the area (for example women's groups, religious groups, unions, schools) and uses mass media such as radio, posters or billboards to convey welfare improvement messages. In Table 1 the three levels are described in more detail.
Table 1 Community programmes for working animal welfare: strategy and approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Approach per target group</th>
<th>Examples of activities per target group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intensive</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Owners and family (care givers)</strong></td>
<td>- Forming of Equine welfare village groups of men or women</td>
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<td><strong>Facilitators meet target group directly and with a high frequency.</strong></td>
<td>Welfare risk - high Vulnerability - high Animal density - high</td>
<td>• Community action</td>
<td>- ‘Happy donkey’ competitions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Users</td>
<td>- Organise local health providers’ forums</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer pressure of owners</td>
<td>- Skill enhancement of local health providers and other service providers.</td>
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<td>• Mass media and theatre for development</td>
<td>- Formation of networks for animal welfare advocacy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Service providers</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Welfare risk - high to medium Vulnerability - high to medium Animal density - high but scattered or resource constraints to intensive engagement.</td>
<td>• Collective action of service providers</td>
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<td>• Inclusion of service providers in owners’ groups</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Creation of forum or platform for sharing experiences and ideas</td>
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<td><strong>Service providers</strong></td>
<td>- Skill enhancement of local health providers and other service providers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Linking owners with service providers from intensive sites</td>
<td>- Formation of networks for animal welfare advocacy</td>
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<td>• Helpline emergency service</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Welfare risk – medium to low Vulnerability - low Animal density – high or low</td>
<td><strong>Focus on owners and family (care givers) as well as users</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Tapping into existing agencies with wide outreach (e.g. agricultural extension, health, education) and inserting elements of an animal welfare agenda</td>
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<td>• Tapping into opportunities for mass access e.g. during equine fairs and markets</td>
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<td>Welfare risk – medium to low Vulnerability - low Animal density – high or low</td>
<td>• School programmes</td>
<td>- Selection of animal friend</td>
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<td>• Mass media and theatre for development</td>
<td>- Songs and drama with existing schools and youth clubs</td>
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<td>Welfare risk – medium to low Vulnerability - low Animal density – high or low</td>
<td><strong>School programmes</strong></td>
<td>- Radio programme</td>
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<td><strong>School programmes</strong></td>
<td>- Billboard, poster and pamphlets</td>
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The Brooke is in the process of developing and piloting this community programme strategy and defining reliable measures of the level of risk to animal welfare conferred by different livelihoods situations and types of work carried out by the animal.
Community action for welfare improvement

In the intensive areas the principle of the approach is community action through a participatory intervention process. This participatory intervention process follows the phases in a standard development project cycle and consists of five steps:

1. **Preparedness for Action** is the entry phase where the supporting organisation aims to enter a community, build rapport and find out how the community is organised. The interested partners for action are mobilised. These include animal owners, users and carers, local organisations and influential members of society, such as the village chief or school teachers. During the entry phase the formation process of equine welfare groups is started through entry point activities, such as setting up of a savings group or group mobilisation for tetanus vaccination.

2. **Participatory Community Analysis** enables the equine welfare group to create a shared vision and instils confidence in its capacity to bring about positive change. Through using a set of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools, owners assess their own situation focusing on:
   - *Their livelihoods and working system*: through the use of social mapping the community identifies who has animals in the village, where they live, the livelihood systems, number and type of animals. They discuss the livelihood activities, types and distribution of works between the family members, daily and seasonal variations, and flow of income and expenditure.
   - *Understanding the animal’s life*: together with the community, build common understanding on feeding and watering practices, animal rest and working times, diseases and seasonal variations. Traditional practices and beliefs and their effects on animals are also analysed.
   - *Services and resources*: identification of animal-related services (people such as farriers, saddlers and harness-makers, cartwrights and animal health workers), frequency of availing such services and constraints being faced when using the service providers. The availability of animal-related resources (inputs such as feed, water, housing) and the seasonal variation, quality etc are also discussed.

3. **Participatory Animal Welfare Needs Assessment** encourages the equine welfare group to identify, clarify and prioritise its animal welfare interests and common objectives for improvement, using a combination of resource-based and animal-based observations (attempting to evaluate these from the animal’s point of view).
4. **Root Cause Analysis and Planning for Action** aim to search for solutions to the problems or needs identified in steps two and three, and to develop a community action plan. The action plan states concrete actions by the group to improve welfare with clear responsibilities and accountability of group members. These actions may be taken on an individual basis, such as cleaning of the saddle padding on a weekly basis, cleaning of hooves or better grooming. Agreed actions may also be collective, such as establishment of a watering point or building of a communal shade shelter.

If the group cannot find a solution based on their collective knowledge, solutions from outside the community may be introduced and tested by the group, for example introduction of animal welfare research findings or successful practices from other areas.

5 **Implementation and Participatory Monitoring** is the last step of the process, in which the community implements and monitors their action plans. The equine welfare group monitors animal welfare improvement through sharing experiences, ideas and self-evaluation, as well as peer monitoring. Plans are adjusted if necessary and any problems occurring are addressed by the whole group. Animal owners collectively learn from practical experience and sharing information.

An example of this process is shown in Figure 1.
Figure 1 Example of intensive community engagement process leading to community action for improved animal welfare.

**Phase 1 Preparedness for Action**

- **Rapport building with animal-owning community**
- **Entry point activity and formation of local group**

**Phase 2 Participatory Community Analysis**

- **Participatory Community Analysis**
  - Social and resource mapping
  - Daily activity schedule of both owner and animal
  - Matrix scoring for stakeholder analysis
  - Animal well-being ranking

**Phase 3 Animal Welfare Needs Assessment**

- **“If I was a horse” exercise**
  1. If you are a horse what do you expect from your owner?
  2. How far those expectations are fulfilled in your community?
  3. What are the effects (results) when the expectations are not met?
  4. How those things would be seen on the animal’s body or in its behaviour?

- **List of output (animal-based) welfare parameters**
  (based on health and behaviour observations generated in part 4. of “If I was a horse” exercise)

- **Observation through transect walk**
  Observation of all animals in the community by the equine welfare group and scoring of individual animals according to whether they meet the agreed animal-based welfare parameters

**Phase 4 Root cause analysis and planning**

- **Root cause analysis**
  Find reasons for low scoring of certain welfare observations.

- **Community Action Plan**
  Based both on input (resource) and output (animal-based) welfare indicators

**Phase 5 Implementation and monitoring**

- **Regular collective monitoring of individual animals’ welfare**
The role of the facilitator in this process is vital for success. He/she facilitates the process of group formation, in-depth situational analysis by the community members themselves, community action planning and collective learning. The facilitator supports the community in finding effective animal welfare improvement solutions that are acceptable to the community, within reach and owned by the community. The facilitator can provide his/her welfare knowledge and introduce appropriate technology once the animal owners become aware of the welfare problems and the root causes of the problems. A skilled facilitator will be able to sensitize on most of the welfare issues by using PRA tools for animal welfare.

Standard tools for PRA in the human development sector have been adapted to focus on the environment, work patterns and their particular welfare needs of draft and pack animals. Where gaps were identified, novel tools have been developed. These include:

- “If I was a horse”, a tool for assessment of welfare using a combination of resource-based and animal-based observations, developed by owners based on their own observations and judgements (see Figure 1).
- Tools for cost-benefit analysis of activities to improve welfare.
- Tools to analyse extent of dependency on outsiders and finding options towards reducing such dependencies.
- Tools for monitoring welfare improvement through structured animal-based observations, implemented as part of the community action plan.

In addition, a tool for helping people to consider the subjective experiences (‘feelings’) of their working animals is being field-tested in India, using equine behaviour observations which are then correlated to owners’ equivalent experiences, such as thirst, pain, fear or discomfort.

Sharing the load
The Brooke, Praxis India and the University of Bristol are in the process of producing a resource manual to document the practical implementation of this community programme strategy for improvement of animal welfare. Production of the manual is progressing through a series of workshops to integrate the human development and animal welfare science perspectives into a practical field manual. It is intended for grassroots-level facilitators from animal welfare organisations with projects in the developing world, who wish to be more effective in finding sustainable solutions, and for development organisations that promote the use of animals to improve human livelihoods and need specialist information to manage the welfare implications of their programmes.
The manual aims to bring understanding of welfare to the grassroots-level facilitator through equine observational exercises. It will provide a broad explanation of the possible strategies and approach to improve welfare, looking at the specific context (welfare risk and livelihood vulnerability) of different target groups. Through practical examples and visualisations it will provide guidance for collective action by equine welfare groups as well as for an extensive approach through mass media, radio and school programmes.

**Results and Discussion**

The process of integrating animal welfare science with human development methodology has generated many learning points and interesting challenges for all three experienced institutions involved in this project. The participatory intervention process and the PRA tools used within it are based on the principle that communities know what is best for themselves, taking into account their own capacities and constraints (Hagmann et al. 1999). However, issues and decisions relating to a third party, such as a working animal, are more complex to analyse and to solve than those affecting the self. At the start of the process, communities often assess animal disease, injury or suffering in terms of loss of work efficiency or productivity rather than welfare. Developing the ability to see and analyse these issues from the animal’s point of view requires specialist knowledge on the part of the facilitator. Some solutions, such as adequate rest or good nutrition for a working animal, may conflict with the owner’s need to earn a living and provide for the family. Addressing human needs first, or in parallel with those of animals, is often a necessary ‘entry point’ to mobilise communities and therefore a pre-requisite for improved animal welfare. This can be challenging to traditionally animal-focused organisations for many reasons. Firstly, significant resources are needed to employ experienced facilitators or social mobilisers and train them to take an additional animal welfare perspective, or vice versa. Secondly, the long time-scales involved in participatory intervention require creative strategies for continued fund-raising and motivation. Thirdly, there is a need to work with extensive networks of participants in organised community groups and in partnership with other local organisations, rather than the more familiar approach of simply ‘educating’ or advising animal owners, because approaches that rely solely on providing information often have little or no effect on changing human behaviour (McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999).
Conclusions
Achieving sustainable improvement in the welfare of working animals in developing countries requires long-term commitment from both animal-owning communities and the organisations that support them. Experiences from the Brooke, Praxis India and the University of Bristol will be brought together into a guidebook for facilitators in this field, called ‘Sharing the Load’, to be published in 2009.

References


