

Case study

Safeguarding and stabilising livelihoods: the role of good equine welfare

Problem:

Poor equine welfare causes animal suffering and endangers human livelihoods

With more than 90 million working equines in the world, horses and donkeys constitute a significant source of income. Equines transport people, move goods and deliver food and water. In some countries, up to six people are dependent on a single animal for survival.



Overworked, underfed. A lack of knowledge and resources results in exhausted and injured equines.

In Nicaragua, one pony owner told WSPA field staff that he must often choose between feeding his children or his pony. Sometimes the children go hungry, as without the income that the pony provides, the whole family will starve.

This means that in many of the world's poorest regions, human welfare is inextricably linked to the welfare of working equines. A healthier horse or donkey enables its owners to increase their income and improve living conditions.

While traditional working equine welfare programmes have had some success in improving welfare and alleviating poverty, they have significant drawbacks:

- providing veterinary or farriery care is costly, has little preventative value, can lead to a culture of dependency and often fails to reach all members of a community
- outreach education work can increase awareness but does not always lead to the behavioural changes needed for sustainable animal welfare and stable incomes.

Equines, relied on by so many, too often fall victim to preventable illnesses and injuries.

Solution:

Affordable, community-led change to improve the welfare of working equines

In 2008, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) piloted a new approach that combines aspects of participatory rural appraisal (used by humanitarian NGOs) with social marketing techniques.

Over a course of two workshops, run by WSPA and a local partner organisation, representatives from the horse owning communities are encouraged to work together to examine their shared needs and problems. [Cont](#) ❖



Owning solutions. Community representatives map and consider horse welfare problems.

World Society for the Protection of Animals

❖ The workshops allow these local facilitators, chosen by their peers, to discuss horse welfare issues in an open forum and enable them to find and test their own locally relevant solutions.

The facilitators then repeat these activities within their communities, sharing the thinking that leads to changes in human behaviour and to healthier horses, not just issuing instructions. It is this crucial concept of ownership that ultimately results in long-term behaviour change.

With this new knowledge and understanding, communities become a resilient workforce, capable of responding to changing situations. Horse owners discover the value of collective action and gain access to support networks.

In Nicaragua: In 2008 WSPA piloted a human behaviour change project in partnership with a local veterinary faculty. The workshops proved a successful launch for the project: the facilitators returned to their communities and repeated the exercises with other horse and donkey owners, exploring the need to sustain the animals' health and how this might be achieved.

In Cambodia: WSPA then launched the programme in Asia. Partner organisation the Cambodian Pony Welfare Organisation (CPWO) is using behaviour change activities to help rural communities prevent equine welfare problems before they arise.

In 2009 WSPA will work on similar projects in Uruguay and the Palestinian Territories.

Conclusion:

Where animal welfare is strong, human livelihoods grow

Developing communities that rely on working equines can benefit hugely from the improved standards of living delivered by simple, effective programmes that promote animal welfare at community level.

With a new or better understanding of the needs of their horses, donkeys or mules, people are empowered to change their behaviours and sustainably increase their income. This contributes to any developing community's ultimate goal: a movement out of poverty.

Impact:

Long-term equine welfare enabling sustainable incomes

To date, more than 250 Nicaraguan and Cambodian horse and pony owners have been involved in community discussions about equine care. While it is early days for the projects, many participants have changed the way they look after their animals after just the first workshop:

- horses and ponies are given clean drinking water more regularly
- more opportunities are given for animals to rest in the shade
- owners are looking at group buying to purchase better quality feed at a cheaper rate
- new routes are being planned to avoid poor road surfaces.

These actions improve equine welfare immediately and have a direct impact on how reliable a family's income is. In the long term, the design of the project will ensure that more and more working equine owners will be reached.

For horse and pony workers, the worst case scenario is the disabling or death of their animal; buying another will cost three months salary and impact on their ability to buy food and other necessities in the meantime. But simple measures, owned by the community and becoming second nature, will ensure that current and future generations know far fewer equine welfare problems and costs and can rely on a stable – or even growing – income.



Mutually reliant. Better horse welfare means a stable income for families.