Recognised by the UN Committee of Food Security in 2016 as 'working livestock', equids – donkeys, horses and mules – are critical to the livelihoods and resilience of millions of families throughout the developing world. Despite their critical value, these animals are often overlooked in national and regional livestock planning and policy framing. This brief provides a fuller picture of the contribution of working livestock, identifies the challenges and threats of poor welfare, and makes the urgent case for their protection and support in line with guidelines such as OIE standards.

Their contributions enhance resilience through:

• Poverty reduction and income security
• Better access to nutrition and water
• Continuity of agricultural supply chains

By recognising the critical role of working equids as livestock in programming, and supporting them through policy, regulators can better support their own national economies.

Brooke works within the 'One Welfare' framework which sees human and animal welfare as inextricably linked: in a development context, working animals are central to supporting the livelihoods, well-being, and resilience of communities who depend on them.

"Livestock are an engine for the development of the agricultural sector as a whole."
ROLE OF WOMEN

Research across Ethiopia, Kenya, India and Pakistan shows that women depend on working livestock to support their households. Our programmes in India, for example, enable women’s voices to be heard at government level through community savings groups. In Africa, working livestock are a critical asset to their owners because they help to meet the growing demand for food. This will require policy and infrastructure integration to help smallholders access critical inputs and services, for example drought resilient fodder and healthcare services. Working livestock play a central role in agriculture and food production, including in soil tillage, producing manure fertilizer, transport of feed and water for livestock and households, transporting goods to market and transporting livestock to health providers. They also support the transport of perishable farm produce from inaccessible areas, thereby saving on post-harvest losses. This contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 2 as working equines support enhanced food security, nutrition and sustainable agricultural development.

Equines also act as water service providers for communities where government water services have yet to reach. Studies of water use must take into account the impact that equids have in enabling communities to have access to water. This contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 6.

Working animals also provide women with relief from time-consuming domestic tasks such as fetching water and firewood. Having a working animal further enables women to participate in, and contribute to social events. This can result in increased status and recognition for women within their communities. The income from working animals helps women pay for essentials. Lucy a participant in Brooke’s HEA from Kenya said “If my baby could speak, she would tell her life as a child of a donkey. The maternity fees I paid while I was pregnant came from income earned by my donkey. When I delivered my daughter, I was able to pay for the Statutory National Health Insurance Fund through money earned by my donkey, which catered for all the delivery fees. My child eats, dresses and lives off income from my donkey.”

As Lucy makes clear, working equids contribute significantly to Sustainable Development Goal 5.

ACESS TO WATER

Working equids are critical to providing access to water for communities and to all food producing animals, agriculture accounts for 70% of world water usage. Management of this critical resource must take into account the contributions of equids. Lucy further expands on how owners of equids benefit from easier access to water for crucial tasks. “The donkey affects each and every aspect of my life as a woman. On a typical day the donkey fetches water, which I use to do the laundry, to do the dishes, to clean the house and for bathing.”

Given the importance of smallholders in supplying the market with increased productivity and production is essential to meet the growing demand for food. This will require policy and infrastructure integration to help smallholders access critical inputs and services, for example drought resilient fodder and healthcare services. Working livestock play a central role in agriculture and food production, including in soil tillage, producing manure fertilizer, transport of feed and water for livestock and households, transporting goods to market and transporting livestock to health providers. They also support the transport of perishable farm produce from inaccessible areas, thereby saving on post-harvest losses. This contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 2 as working equines support enhanced food security, nutrition and sustainable agricultural development.

Empowering Communities: To make the best decisions for their families and for their animals’ welfare.
RECOMMENDATIONS

WE ADVOCATE FOR:

- Recognition of working livestock within livestock policy definitions, censuses, databases and their inclusion in animal health strategies and services

- Technical capacity building to ensure national level implementation of the OIE Standards for the Welfare of Working Equids

- Consideration of draught power within livelihoods and development programming, sectoral value chain analysis and livelihoods baselines

- Inclusion of working livestock considerations in disaster risk reduction and emergency response planning, including in the roll out of Livestock Emergency Guidelines

- Protection of citizens from the theft of their donkeys in response to the unregulated and growing demand for their hides. Brooke specifically calls for;

  - Evidence based research on the impact of donkey theft on community resilience, that is shared, publicised and reflected in policy and programming decision making

  - A coordinated multi-disciplinary network combining efforts to tackle the growing threats to livelihoods of this trade

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