



SHARING THE LOAD: A GUIDE TO IMPROVING THE WELFARE OF WORKING ANIMALS THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION

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Introduction

Over thousands of years working animals have supported the livelihoods of rural and urban families in the developing world. Draught and pack animals such as donkeys, horses, bullocks and camels play a vital role through (i) generation of income for the family unit, through direct use or hiring out to transport people and goods, (ii) supporting agricultural activities by transporting feed and water for livestock, cultivating crops and taking agricultural products to market, and (iii) reduction of the labour and drudgery of daily domestic household tasks such as collection of water and firewood, especially for women and the elderly.

Loss of a working animal, or meeting the costs of treatment in case of injury and disease, can put major stress on its owner's livelihood system. Assuring good welfare for working animals increases their owners' ability to cope and reduces household vulnerability. To improve and maintain animal welfare it is critical to work with communities, because owners and their families make the biggest long-term difference to their animals' lives. They are the primary decision-makers for the working animal and therefore have the strongest influence on its access to resources and services and on prevention of disease, injury and poor husbandry practices.

People working in the international development sector have developed processes, methods and tools to work with communities and facilitate action for change in health care, water and sanitation, agriculture and many other practices. Participatory tools have been used for improvement of health and husbandry of production livestock, where animal owners benefit directly in terms of a tangible increase in productivity. In the course of our own work to improve the welfare of working animals, we identified a gap in the availability of field-based tools and methods for understanding and creating a positive change in the welfare of working animals. Changing human behaviour is particularly challenging when the immediate benefit is for a third party (the animal). There may be short term costs in terms of effort, time, money or productivity in order to gain a longer-term change for animals and their owners.

Since 2005 the Brooke has been integrating animal welfare science with human development methodology. This aimed to create collective responsibility within communities for sustainable improvement in the welfare of their working animals, by developing participatory methods and tools specifically for this purpose. It resulted in identification and refinement of an animal-centred, group-based process in which the community itself identifies the signs of positive and negative animal welfare. Based on their welfare assessment, the group agrees on both individual and collective action to improve the welfare of all animals owned by group members and monitors its progress towards this goal.

The Brooke's experience of working with animal-owning communities has been documented in a field manual for community facilitators called ***"Sharing the Load: a guide to improving the welfare of working animals through collective action"***. The book helps the grassroot-level facilitator to develop an understanding of animal welfare through observational exercises in the field. It provides a broad explanation of strategies and approaches for improving welfare, looking at the specific context of different target populations in terms of welfare risks to working animals and the vulnerability of their owners' livelihoods. It provides guidance for collective action through practical examples and illustrations of the participatory process and tools developed, as well as discussing the use of mass media, radio and other outreach strategies.

This paper describes the process of developing "Sharing the Load" and provides an overview of its content.

Evolution of the process described in “Sharing the Load”

By 2005, Brooke programmes worldwide, and particularly the Brooke India programme, had identified a strong need for participatory tools and methods specifically for use in promoting animal welfare. A group of experts in the fields of animal welfare and veterinary science, social science and community development (from the Brooke UK, Brooke India, the University of Bristol and PRAXIS India) met to share their experiences of working with animal-owning communities and to discuss ways of integrating their knowledge and practices into participatory methods for improving the health and husbandry of working animals. The outcome of this meeting was the concept and outline of a manual to guide community facilitators on ways to integrate animal welfare science with participatory processes, based on the experiences of the Brooke India programme.

At that stage Brooke India had already employed community engagement staff with more than ten years' experience in the human development sector, who started to apply Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools in their programmes. This experience enabled them to start adapting existing PRA tools and to search for innovations which would bring animal issues out of the community discussions and keep the animal at the centre of analysis for community action. Between 2006 and 2010, ten District Equine Welfare Units - multidisciplinary teams including a veterinarian, experienced community facilitators, community mobilisers and animal health workers - tried and tested new PRA tools in over 350 villages. They were used with the men, women and children who own and care for working animals, creating collective action which led to improvement in the welfare of their working animals. The pilot project started in 40 villages, and involved about 650 animals. Each district unit designed a process and tested it together with communities in their area. At this stage the most important outcome they sought was community mobilisation and action, so district teams were given the freedom to test whatever their communities came up with. The teams met on a quarterly basis to share their progress and discuss successes and challenges. These meetings brought out an enormous amount of creativity and created motivation and inspiration for the teams to continue their challenging work with communities to find meaningful tools to improve animal welfare. The pilot project was gradually increased to cover 78 villages with 1335 animals. This development process led to the methods described in “Sharing the Load” and more than 140 adaptations and innovative uses of participatory tools.

Alongside the formal development process initiated by Brooke India, other Brooke programmes in Ethiopia, Pakistan and Egypt were also stimulated to be creative in the use of participatory tools for animal welfare. The Brooke organised an annual international forum for its community development managers and field staff in Asia, Africa and the Middle East to share experiences, present their innovations and foster cross-learning between countries. This enabled further innovative adaptations and ideas which are captured in “Sharing the Load”.

Sharing the Load content

“Sharing the Load” is written for community facilitators and anyone else who has direct contact with working (traction and transport) animals and their owners, including vets, community-based animal health workers, government extension workers and development workers. It can be used by animal welfare organisations with projects in the developing world who wish to be more effective in finding sustainable solutions to welfare issues. It is also written 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 has three sections. Section 1 provides an introduction to the welfare of working animals. Section 2 gives guidance on deciding where to focus the work of the implementing organisation and detailed steps for working with animal-owning communities. Section 3 presents a toolkit containing new participatory tools and adaptations of existing tools, which are used as part of the process described in Section 2.

In Section 1 (Chapters 1 and 2) facilitators learn about animal welfare, completing short field-based exercises designed to stimulate their thinking and draw on their previous experience with community facilitation and livestock or agricultural extension. These chapters explore the relationship of mutual dependency between working animals and people. They look at what

animal welfare means in terms of animal needs and feelings, as well as the behaviour used by animals to express their needs and feelings and how to observe and interpret this behaviour in order to hear the 'voice of the animal'.

Section 2 (Chapters 3 to 5) contains the guide for facilitating collective action to improve working animal welfare. Chapter 3 looks at the planning process before starting to work with animal-owning communities. It describes how to identify the populations of working animals that are most in need of welfare improvement and how to decide which interventions are most appropriate for different groups of animals and owners.

Chapter 4 describes the process for facilitating collective action by animal-owning communities to improve the welfare of their working animals. This participatory process consists of six phases (see text box) along with their sub-steps, each explained in detail with its purpose and the recommended PRA tools to use. The core of this chapter is a description of 'Participatory Welfare Needs Assessment', in which the community group identifies the physical signs and behaviour of working animals which relate to their physical and mental welfare. Participants generate a list of indicators and a scoring system for animal-related resources, management practices and animal outcomes, in a format that enables the group to carry out its own welfare assessment. The group of animal owners visits each homestead and assesses the welfare of each animal and its living conditions, keeping records and summarising the finding in a group meeting. Based on their findings, group members produce a time-bound plan for individual and collective action. The group implements the agreed action and repeats the welfare assessment at regular intervals to monitor progress.

Six phases of the collective action process

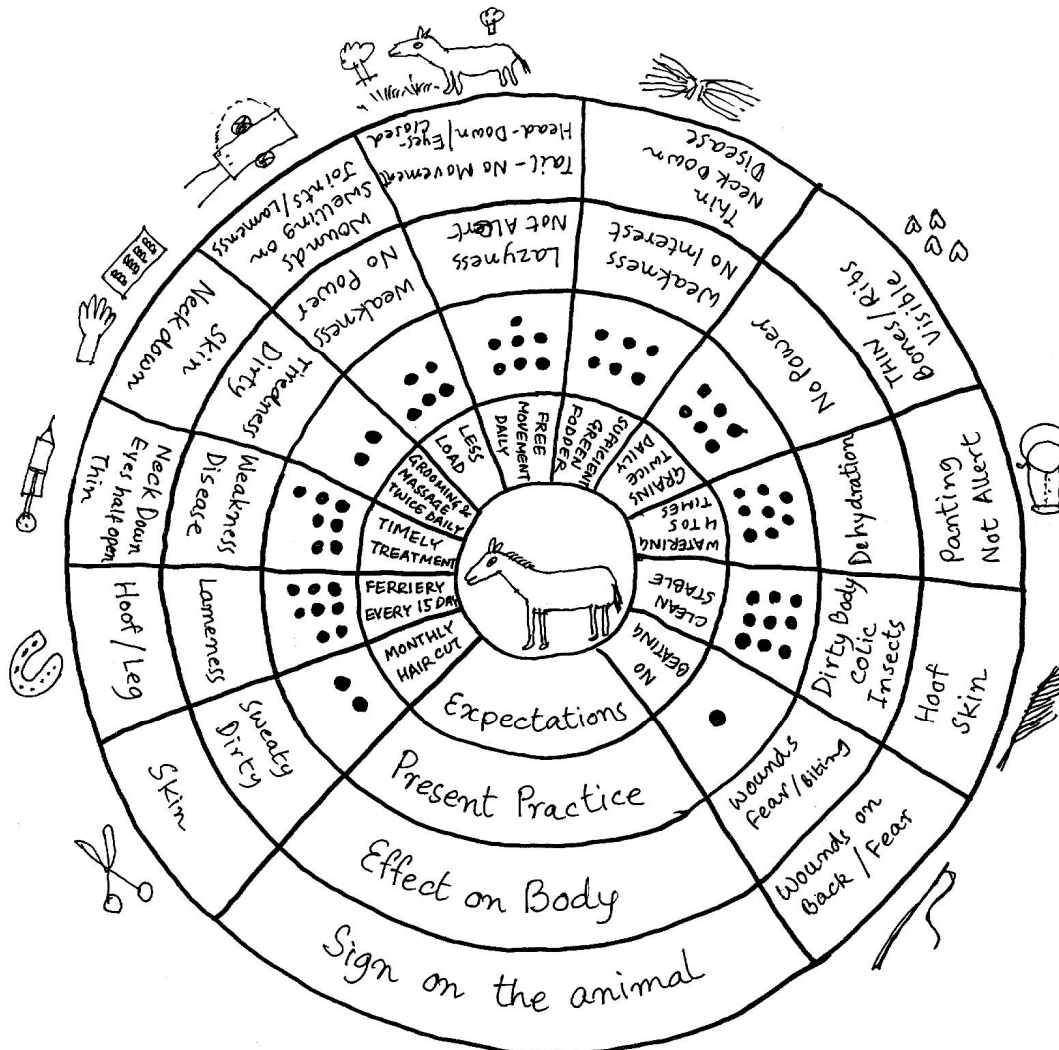
Phase 1	<i>Feeling the Pulse</i> Purpose: to understand the community better, gain trust in each other and build animal owners' confidence in their own ability to bring about positive change in their animals' lives by working together as a group.
Phase 2	<i>Shared Vision and Collective Perspective</i> Purpose: to identify welfare issues and common animal welfare goals within the group of animal owners.
Phase 3	<i>Participatory Animal Welfare Needs Assessment</i> Purpose: to look at the present welfare status of working animals, by bringing the animal to the centre of the group's analysis and visiting all the animals belonging to group members.
Phase 4	<i>Community Action Planning</i> Purpose: to move with the group from their new awareness of animal welfare issues, identified from the exercises carried out so far, towards individual and collective action for welfare improvement.
Phase 5	<i>Action and Reflection</i> Purpose: to facilitate the group to implement their Community Action Plan, monitor it regularly and reflect on their findings and experiences together.
Phase 6	<i>Self-evaluation and Gradual Withdrawal of Regular Support</i> Purpose: to assess the longer term impact of the group's efforts to improve the welfare of their working animals and agree how much support the group will need in the future.

Chapter 5 describes methods for outreach and delivering welfare messages to scattered or less accessible populations and for engaging with audiences who are not based around established community groups. It also builds on the formation of action-oriented community groups to discuss several ways in which collective action may be extended to reach larger groups of people and populations of working animals.

Section 3 is a toolkit of Participatory Action Tools for Animal Welfare (PATAW). Some were adapted from existing PRA tools and new tools were developed by Brooke India's community facilitators where no appropriate PRA tool existed, or where adapted versions did not work well when tested with communities. In the toolkit the most commonly-used versions are presented, as well as at least one alternative or variation per tool. It includes three tools specifically designed to put the animal and its welfare at the centre of community analysis and discussion:

- "If I Were A Horse": this tool is very popular in the communities where the Brooke works. It is used to identify animal welfare issues for intervention planning and monitoring (see Figure 1).
- *Animal Welfare Practice Gap Analysis*: a tool designed to explore current animal management practices and activities which prevent working animals from experiencing good welfare. It also identifies gaps in these practices and reasons for the gaps.
- *Animal Feelings Analysis*: a tool for helping people to consider the subjective experiences ('feelings') of their working animals, using equine behaviour observations which are then correlated to owners' equivalent experiences, such as thirst, pain, fear or discomfort.

Figure 1: "If I Were A Horse" diagram from Burana village, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, India, 2009. (Illustration © Amitabh Pandey)



Results and Discussion:

Development of the methods and tools in “Sharing the Load” was a process of experimentation with and by the community. It required enormous commitment, innovation and creativity from the community facilitators involved. The process builds on local people’s capabilities and the wisdom of owners is the basis of the method. This process is unique because it enables owners to assess the welfare status of their own working animals in the short term, provides a long-term monitoring tool when repeated over time, and this repetition drives an ongoing cycle of animal welfare action and reflection. Many communities use their main monitoring tool on a quarterly basis to see changing trends according to the season, workload and other factors in their living and working environment. It enables owners to recognise when animal welfare is at risk and to take action quickly, either as an individual or collectively. This mechanism for tracking changes in welfare status over time enables owners to have confidence in their ability to recognise negative changes in welfare, motivates the group to act quickly and provides peer pressure to improve animal management practices.

Using this process, the Brooke and the animal-owning communities have seen visible improvement in animal welfare in the short term (immediate to 3 months) and over longer periods of time (3 months to 3 years). Improvements such as an increase in body condition score, good coat health, reduction in hoof-related problems and reduction in harmful management practices are seen in all the communities using this process. We have seen dramatic reduction in chronic and recurrent saddle and harness wounds which had previously been very challenging to improve.

In 2009, Brooke India built on the success of this process by scaling it up to mainstream programmes and it is currently being used with 29,500 working equine animals in almost 1400 villages and brick kilns. In the villages which are ready for phasing out of facilitation, 80% of owners are members of an equine welfare group and meet regularly to monitor their animals and agree on action to improve welfare, with limited or no external support from Brooke India.

“Sharing the Load” provides guidelines to facilitate this process; it is not a blueprint approach for animal welfare activities with communities. It provides a framework, but the exact steps and tools will depend on the context and capacity of the specific community groups involved. There is potential for continuing creativity by field facilitators and we hope that they will continue to adapt and innovate in order to find the most effective ways to enable communities to improve animal welfare. The Participatory Action Tools for Animal Welfare have been developed and tested with owners of working horses, mules and donkeys, but we believe that they are useful for improving the welfare of working bullocks, buffalo, camels and yaks, because their working conditions and the livelihoods of their owners are similar to those of working horses and donkeys. We also believe that they can be adapted for improvement of the welfare of farm livestock and hope that some readers are motivated to develop them further for this purpose.

Conclusion

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 four years of field experimentation, integrating animal welfare science with human development methodology, are brought together in a practical manual for community facilitators called “Sharing the Load, a guide improving the welfare of working animals through collective action”, to be published by Practical Action Publishing in November 2010.