



WorldHorseWelfare



**THE DONKEY
SANCTUARY**



**WORKING ANIMALS, CLIMATE
CHANGE, HEALTH CRISES AND
VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS**

INTRODUCTION

Climate change refers to the long-term changes in weather patterns associated with an increase in global average temperatures. It is generally agreed we are in a climate crisis: negative effects are being seen across the globe and action is required now to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and help vulnerable communities to build adaptation strategies. Alongside the climate change-related crisis, we have recently experienced a marked increase in the occurrence and spread of infectious diseases, caused by both environmental and demographic changes. The impact is unprecedented in terms of capacity and extent. Well-cared for donkeys, mules and horses have a positive role within climate change and disease spread mitigation solutions. The work of The Donkey Sanctuary and World Horse Welfare allows them to fulfil this role.

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS (VNRs) AND WORKING ANIMALS

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages United Nations (UN) member states to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven”.¹

The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) aim at recording and monitoring progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These reports provide a foundation for the reviews conducted during the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) meeting under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) which is the main platform for the follow-up and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda.

Worldwide, working animals facilitate income generation, enable resource provision and promote social growth, in particular within poorer

communities. As agricultural resources, working animals facilitate farming and transportation; pulling ploughs and carts, bringing goods to market and collecting water. Urban construction, refuse collection and transport also demonstrate the variability of this valuable workforce. Enabling and empowering people to participate in work, working animals boost economic capability, increase the opportunity to access other services including education, healthcare, and social financing, and can facilitate gender equality by enabling women to be financially independent. Moreover, working animals present the potential for a more sustainable approach to agricultural and industrial operations, and transportation of people and goods; when compared to machinery, they bring considerable benefits in energy and cost efficiency and have a significantly lower ecological impact.



The current national reporting guidelines do not contain any language regarding the contribution of working animals in delivering the targets of the SDGs. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was one of the few governments whose VNRs referred to working livestock as a critical issue for the economy of the country². The Donkey Sanctuary and World Horse Welfare are now developing some suggestions that provide an evidence-based structure member states can refer to when preparing their VNRs.

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH WORKING ANIMAL WELFARE

Both humans and animals are encountering new challenges and experience the same serious consequences due to the devastating impact of climate change. When disasters such as heatwaves, storms, drought and floods occur, animals are severely harmed and the lives of the people who heavily rely on them are critically undermined. As such situations worsen, the poorest communities across the world will be worst affected, and more and more individuals will be pushed into poverty. The Ethiopian VNRs for instance refers to the negative impact of drought on livestock.²

The United Nations define resilience as “*the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions*”³.

Strong working animals can play a crucial role in building resilience. They often represent the most valuable asset people own but also the largest expense in case they need to be replaced. Protection of working animals is therefore a key consideration within disaster preparedness and implementation plans. Donkeys and mules, in particular, are suited to arid zones and support livelihoods to adapt to climate change. Animal traction has been gradually acknowledged as a progressive solution to decrease the excessively industrialised agriculture sector as well as a valid method to reduce carbon emissions.



In recent years, donkey populations in some parts of the world have experienced a dramatic decrease in numbers due to an unprecedented demand for donkey skins used to produce a product called ejiao.⁴ This global trade in donkey-derived products has had a negative impact on donkey welfare and the livelihoods of people who depend on them. The value of the animals has increased dramatically: the cost of buying a donkey in Egypt for example has risen from £17 to £170.⁴ In April 2019, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) issued an important statement regarding the excessive extraction of resources and its negative effect on the environment, referring to donkeys as a carbon-neutral means of transport: “*The unsustainable extraction of a resource, whether it’s donkeys, plants, trees or minerals, can have adverse effects on the environment and communities in distant lands. In the case of donkeys, a valuable mode of all-weather, carbon neutral transport is removed from those most in need of transport in remote rural settings*”⁵ Donkey owners are experiencing serious financial issues and theft is more and more common. This is leaving communities without their working animals, which are productive assets to be protected under UN GA Resolution 68/211.⁶ Countries that rely on working animals to build sustainable livelihoods will benefit from the development of dedicated equine strategies to safeguard national working animal populations.

SUGGESTED AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Suggested reporting areas would highlight successes as well as gaps that might be filled in the next period up to the mid-term review of the SDGs. Countries might consider reporting on:

- The number of working animals;
- Number of communities/families relying on working animals;
- The number of qualified vets and para-vets trained in working animal welfare;
- Groups involved in the sector and active in country supporting working animal welfare;
- National policies and provisions regarding working animal welfare;
- Potential risks affecting national herds;
- Benefits from the development of a national working animal strategy to protect animal populations;
- Case studies of where working animals are helping to deliver better livelihoods;
- Gender: how many women and girls rely on working animals to perform daily essential tasks;
- Case studies on the impact of shifting water transportation from women to equids;
- Case studies on the impact of adding a working animal to a family's livelihood;
- Case studies on the use of working animals in disaster mitigation plans;
- Number of interventions to respond to shocks stemming from climate change;
- Renewable energy projects such as efficient cook stoves, biogas and boreholes in communities dependent on working animals for the collection and transportation of materials;
- Saving scheme participation – thanks to the extra income generated by working animals;
- Water: data on water collected by working animals and timing;
- Carbon emissions: use of working animals instead of machines in agriculture and transportation.



CONCLUSION

Working animals are essential to the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the poorest communities around the world. However, these animals are not taken into consideration within relief plans and operations. By reporting on how working animals are engaged in delivering the SDG targets and by including provisions on

working animal welfare and indicators regarding its impact on people's lives in national policies and legislative frameworks, governments would efficiently manage and reduce the disruptions to livelihoods brought on by climate change effects and by pandemic diseases.



REFERENCES

- 1 United Nations. Voluntary National Reviews. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>
- 2 United Nations. The 2017 Voluntary National Reviews on SDGs of Ethiopia: Government Commitments, National Ownership and Performance Trends, 2017. Available at : <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16437Ethiopia.pdf>
- 3 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Terminology, Resilience. Available at: <https://www.undrr.org/terminology/resilience>
- 4 The Donkey Sanctuary. Under the Skin: What is ejiao. Available at: <https://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/what-we-do/issues/donkey-meat-skin-and-milk/what-is-ejiao>
- 5 United Nations Environment Programme. Warning: a sixth mass species extinction is on the cards. Available at: <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/warning-sixth-mass-species-extinction-cards>
- 6 United Nations. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 2013. 68/211. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/68/211>