



Review

Helping working Equidae and their owners in developing countries: Monitoring and evaluation of evidence-based interventions



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 28 September 2013

Keywords:

Working equid
Developing country
Monitoring
Evaluation
Impact assessment

ABSTRACT

There are an estimated 112 million Equidae (horses, donkeys, mules) in the developing world, providing essential resources for their owners' livelihoods and well-being. The impoverished situation of their owners and the often harsh conditions in which they work mean that the animals' welfare is a cause for concern. A number of equine non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operate within working equid communities providing veterinary care, education and training programmes aimed at improving equine welfare. However, there is little published information available that describes monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of such interventions using objective outcome-based indicators and where baseline data are available. The aim of this paper is to summarise the peer-reviewed reports of M&E in this sector and identify the key issues which need to be addressed in ensuring that such evaluations provide useful information on the work of these organisations.

A rigorous evidence base for designing future interventions will provide an opportunity for enhancing the effectiveness of working equid NGO operations. Increased availability of M&E reports in the peer-reviewed literature will enable NGOs to learn from one another and disseminate to a wider audience information on the role of working Equidae and the issues they face.

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Introduction

Working animals provide an essential resource for owners who live in poverty as defined by World Health Organization (WHO) indices (Perry et al., 2002; Thornton et al., 2002). Traction and transport animals are found in a broad range of environments, undertaking a wide variety of economic, labour reducing and social roles (Pritchard, 2010).

After cattle, the main working animals worldwide are Equidae (Starkey, 2000) and there are an estimated 112 million horses, donkeys and mules in the developing world (FAOSTAT, 2011). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating within communities that use working Equidae consider that these animals make a substantial socioeconomic contribution to their communities² but published scientific evidence is scarce (Chang et al., 2010; Admassu and Shiferaw, 2011; Velazquez-Beltran et al., 2011).

Each of the small number of NGOs operating in the working equid sector defines objectives for the interventions undertaken with Equidae and their owners according to the chosen modus

operandi of their organisation. An effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is required to ensure that the organisation is able to identify whether these objectives are being achieved. The humanitarian NGO sector sources funding from a range of governmental, institutional and individual donors. Over the past two decades many institutional donors have increasingly defined the types of evaluation required as a condition of their support. Equine welfare NGOs typically draw most (if not all) of their funding from individual donors and have therefore not been subject to such demands. There is no generic requirement for the results of an NGO's evaluation to be made public.

The aim of this paper is to summarise the available peer-reviewed literature relating to M&E of interventions in the overseas animal health and welfare sector, in particular in working Equidae. The paper identifies key challenges facing NGOs operating in this sector in evaluating their work and makes recommendations which could enable more of these evaluations to be disseminated to a wider audience.

Defining the health and welfare issues affecting working Equidae in developing countries

The impoverished situation of the owners of working Equidae and the fact that these animals often work in harsh environmental and/or climatic conditions and/or terrains mean that animal

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² See: http://www.thebrooke.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/47787/INGO_Supporter_Conference_Report1.pdf (accessed 30 July 2011).

welfare is a cause for concern (Pritchard et al., 2005). Access to facilities to address basic animal husbandry and primary health-care needs is often limited by educational, financial or logistical constraints and in remote rural areas access to veterinary services is usually poor (Letsoalo et al., 2000; Heffernan, 2001; Martin Curran et al., 2005).

The limited peer-reviewed literature indicates some common themes. These include availability, affordability and owner knowledge constraints relating to feed and nutrition; water and hydration; sustainable equine working capacity; effective disease prevention and equine healthcare management, and the need for ancillary services such as farriery and saddlery/harness making. The only published large scale study of working equid health and welfare issues reported that the prevalence and severity of key issues varied between countries, work types and equid species (Pritchard et al., 2005). Subsequent small scale studies have indicated that each combination of work type, equine species and location is associated with a unique set of root causes of equine welfare issues.

A complex combination of social convention, economic constraints, perceptions of relative efficacy and/or lack of access to appropriate advice and products underlies how owners treat their working Equidae. Establishing what people do and why they do it is difficult, yet without this information, any intervention will be based on incomplete and/or inaccurate knowledge of local reality (Poore, 2010). Animal owners' perceptions of whether certain treatments or preventive measures are possible, effective and/or economic also need to be identified. Such perceptions directly influence how health- and welfare-related interventions should be designed and implemented, and their likelihood of success. For example, studies investigating health issues affecting donkeys often note that owners believe that donkeys do not get sick (Jones, 2010). In addition to determining key health and welfare issues, it is therefore essential to review existing knowledge, activities, attitudes and perceptions, economic circumstances and access to facilities constraining owners. Appropriate topics in which to target activities and suitable methodological approaches to facilitate improvement in husbandry and primary healthcare can then be identified.

Such research requires a culturally sensitive approach and the inherent reticence of animal owners to discuss local practices with an outsider may hinder the process. Bias in answers due to respondents trying to anticipate what the researcher wishes to hear, or led by a desire to obtain free products which they assume are available must also be recognised. Issues in approach to health management, such as the distinction between prevention and cure, also need to be identified and discussed (Heffernan, 2001). This can be time-consuming and likely to require both traditional epidemiological and participatory techniques, which can elicit complementary types of evidence to inform decisions on the most appropriate type and structure of an intervention (Upjohn et al., 2013).

Addressing the health and welfare needs of working Equidae

NGOs operating in the field of equine health and welfare face a challenging and complex working environment. Clearly defined objectives for the NGO programme, based on a structured needs assessment, a robust theory of change and agreement of relevant priorities with the local community, are all essential prerequisites.

In comparison with the large number of NGOs working in the field of human health, relatively few NGOs focus on activities to improve the health and welfare of working animals. The modus operandi of these organisations and the types of intervention undertaken vary according to the size of the organisation, the countries in which they operate and the extent of their own and

other in-country infrastructure, and their source of funding. During the latter stages of the 20th century, developing country government funding arrangements put increasing emphasis on privatisation of veterinary services (FAO, 1997). Consequently many NGO projects have involved livestock-related activities which support the training of community animal health workers (CAHWs), typically covering a range of animal species (FAO, 1997). This is particularly true in remote and/or insecure areas where it can be difficult if not impossible to achieve veterinary coverage (Catley, 2006).

There are a small number of UK-based NGOs that specifically address health and welfare issues relating to working Equidae. In addition, there are some smaller, independently funded organisations which work in a single country. Traditionally, such operations have provided veterinary care from fixed or mobile clinics. Services include preventive care (vaccinations and anthelmintic administration), services for acute problems (e.g. wounds and colic) and advice and palliative treatment for chronic problems such as lameness.^{3,4,5} Some of these organisations have started to review their approach to equine health and welfare interventions as a result of concerns about the sustainability of purely veterinary interventions and the creation of a culture of dependency (Guha et al., 2010; Rogers, 2010).

There is increased interest in the application of evidence-based methods to identify priority issues and causal pathways as well as in employing community mobilisation techniques to develop owner understanding of prevention-based strategies (Pritchard et al., 2005; Guha et al., 2010; Rogers, 2010; Upjohn et al., 2010b; Van Dijk and Pritchard, 2010; Stringer et al., 2011). The changing focus of the equine NGOs' work away from reactive activities towards proactive interventions needs to be reflected in the M&E systems adopted.

Assessing the effectiveness of interventions in developing countries

NGOs in all sectors assume that their activities make a positive difference to the community in which they operate. The application of formalised M&E has risen up the NGO development agenda in recent years (Wallace, 2010), and, as outlined in *The P Process* from Johns Hopkins University Centre for Communications, programmes that are not evaluated waste time and money because they have little impact on future development.⁶

Monitoring involves an ongoing process of gathering information to show whether objectives within the control of management are being achieved. Evaluation explores, as a periodic process, whether the achievement of immediate project objectives leads to the desired goals (Poate, 1993; Martin, 2001). Where resources are scarce, M&E enables the organisation to identify the most effective allocation of those resources in terms of benefit achieved. It also allows the organisation to see where resources appear to be less effective, identifying obstacles to successful operations. This facilitates organisational learning and development.

Guidelines and more general literature on effective M&E activities are publicly available (Roche, 1999; Davies, 2001; World Bank, 2004). In 2012, the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) published a working paper that was commissioned to investigate the potential for broadening the range of

³ See: <https://spana.org/files/spana/2011-12%20Annual%20Review%20FINAL.pdf> (accessed 04 August 2013).

⁴ See: http://www.thebrooke.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/96524/AR2012_AW7.pdf (accessed 04 August 2013).

⁵ See: <http://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/files/donkeys/AnnualReview-2012.pdf> (accessed 04 August 2013).

⁶ See: <http://www.jhuccp.org/hcp/pubs/tools/participationguide.pdf> (accessed 01 July 2011).

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