Sector collaboration supports development and implementation of the OIE standard on the welfare of working equids

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Globally, an estimated 100 million working equids are used for transport and traction, contributing to households’ livelihoods and food security. They are key components in farming systems and critical livestock assets.

Maintenance of these assets (and supporting livelihoods) requires the development and implementation of health and welfare programmes with the involvement of stakeholders including veterinary authorities, educational institutions, private veterinarians and other service providers (e.g. farriers and saddlers), as well as owners and users of the animals.

The OIE working equine welfare standard, adopted in 2016, represents a crucial milestone for this sector, because these animals were frequently invisible to policy makers and their health and welfare needs often neglected in national animal health and disease programmes. With 180 OIE member states now acknowledging the importance of the working horse, donkey and mule, the time is now for coordinated action to implement the standard across the globe.

Four international animal welfare non-governmental organisations (Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad, The Donkey Sanctuary, World Horse Welfare and Brooke – Action for Working Horses and Donkeys) with a wealth of expertise in improving the welfare of working equids are coming together to support that implementation.

With the experience of working with communities, service providers and policy makers, and with understanding differing working equine contexts, possibilities and challenges, this coming together of organisations multiplies their individual skill sets. These include: assessing welfare; building capacity in equine owning communities; equipping service providers (including farriers, saddlers and vets) with the skills and tools required to provide affordable quality services. It supports universities in curriculum development, and postgraduate vets with continuing professional development; as well as raising awareness of the importance of working equids to human livelihoods with policy makers.

Through sharing and building on the inherent strengths of each organisation the partnership is positioned to facilitate and support building knowledge, skills, motivation and access to resources, aiding OIE in implementing the standard.

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