How partnering with a local NGO can lead to more sustainable and long term animal welfare in a fast growing and multicultural community in Mexico

Erika Flores Reynoso¹, Joaquin de la Torre Ponce¹ & Kate Nattrass Atema²

¹ International Fund for Animal Welfare, Monte Daro 29 SM 61 Mz 28, Col. Bosque Real, Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo 77710, México
E-mail: eflores@ifaw.org; katema@ifaw.org , jdelatorre@ifaw.org

² International Fund for Animal Welfare, 290 Summer Street, Yarmouth Port, Massachusetts 02675, United States of America
E-mail: katema@ifaw.org

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) leads projects that seek to empower local communities in addressing the animal welfare and human safety problems associated with roaming dogs and cats. A triumvirate of change in attitude, acquisition of knowledge, and availability of resources are necessary to bring about the changes in human behaviour that may carry a community to a tipping point of collective responsibility. We have been working with a local animal welfare organization in Playa del Carmen, Mexico this being one of the fastest growing cities in the world, located in the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, with tourism as the main source of income.

Our local partner Coco’s Animal Welfare, offers low cost and free spay and neuter services for any community member, including shelters. They also had, since their beginnings, a rescued cat program which offers free and low cost services for any person that recently rescued and/or adopted a cat in need. Recently, a new program was added to their services: low cost veterinary service for rescued dogs.

Through this program, when community members spot an animal in distress, they are encouraged and more likely to actively engage in caring for it, look for the owners if lost, sterilize, vaccinate and deworm the animal before rehoming. With this, we improve the animal’s welfare and they engage greater changing behaviours towards roaming animals in need and pass the word to other community members achieving collective responsibility.

Community members want to help dogs and cats in need but are aware of the expense and responsibility this involves. If help is offered but the responsibility remains in the community member, they actively engage, comply with veterinary standards of care and very often even care for the individual animal until a permanent home is found.

These community based programs have been improving the community’s attitudes, perceptions and behaviours toward dogs and cats through encouraging and engaging people to help a roaming dog or cat with the support they receive from the low-cost clinic. These community members also experience the feeling of belonging to a fast-growing community, by being able to take care of animals they find in distress at a reachable cost and benefiting from the emotional reward this also brings.

The program, has also contributed to bringing the community in line with OIE standards on a sustainable basis. Access to these veterinary services has been a key aspect to the success and sustainability of the project. The empowerment of these individuals has resulted in a substantial increase of assisted animals from 2,677 in 2012, to 11,218 in 2015.

Key words: behaviour change – community members – roaming – sterilize – veterinary services.