Promoting animal welfare agenda in Africa

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In recent years, Animal welfare has become an issue of increasing concern in a number of countries worldwide, including Africa. It is linked to the achievement of human livelihood priorities, improved food security, increased community resilience and poverty eradication. However, human welfare challenges that grapple African countries notably diseases, natural disasters, poverty, inadequate resources and low levels of awareness cause animal welfare issues to be relegated. As such, AW practices are constrained by inadequate awareness among stakeholders, socio-cultural limitations, lack of coordination, poor production systems/facilities, poor handling practices, poor transport methods, inhumane slaughter practices/facilities, abuse/misuse during sports and deliberate and inhumane termination of an animal’s life at the end of useful production or due to terminal illness.

However, improving animal welfare practices on the continent is imperative to promote animal performance and productivity, quality of products as well as access to markets for Africa’s animal produce and products and most importantly the wellbeing of its citizens.

Though animal welfare is not formally part of the agreements of the World Trade Organization, globally, compliance with AW standards has been included in trade agreements making it important to promote the agenda in the continent. It is essential to invest in developing and adopting a comprehensive holistic strategy for the animal resources sector. The strategy should seek to raise awareness, create an enabling policy environment, and establish stakeholder-driven structures and capabilities to drive the AW agenda forward for sustainable development. This requires formulation and effective enforcement of conducive public policies as a pre-requisite for effective AW practices. This should encompass broad based enforcement of regulations to increase the chances of transforming public perceptions, attitudes and practices that are essential for change at all levels.

Moreover, animal welfare agenda should be integrated into policy and legislation and entrenched at the community level. The related policies need to offer win-win solutions for local communities who are the animal resource custodians of animals, but are often not the beneficiaries of policies that tend to benefit big businesses and government interests over community needs and interests.

This paper focuses on promoting the animal welfare agenda in Africa with particular reference to areas of humane and sustainable agriculture, working livestock, wildlife, dog population management and disaster management. It analyses inadequate political attention to animal welfare issues and recommends mitigation measures such as increased advocacy, awareness creation among stakeholders; addressing socio-cultural limitations, enhanced coordination and improved livestock handling facilities.

Key words: animal welfare – food security –livelihoods – livestock – productivity –policy – standards.