Zimbabwe has a donkey population of about half a million, mostly in the drier, less habitable, rural areas of the country. For many poor subsistence farmers, donkeys are kept solely as working animals — providing draught power for pulling ploughs and ploughs, which are often overloaded and too heavy. Major welfare problems include the use of wooden yokes which cause chronic wounds on the briskets and necks, infectious diseases, malnutrition, internal and external parasites, hoof problems, poor shelter, overcrowding and abandonment on completion of their working life. Most of these transgressions are due to ignorance and/or neglect by their owners.

The Department of Livestock and Veterinary Services and Veterinarians for Animal Welfare Zimbabwe have formed a strategic partnership with the objective of raising animal welfare awareness through education and training, using the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) standards as defined in Chapter 7/12, Welfare of Working Equids, of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code, as a baseline. The partnership delivers outreach programmes and animal welfare work through Department of Livestock and Veterinary Services countrywide network of 501 offices. Teams travel to targeted areas where wooden yokes are replaced with harnesses, veterinary checkups and treatment are administered, and education pamphlets explaining the welfare standards are distributed.

This project has been running for the past four years and there is a noticeable improvement in the quality of life of donkeys where the partnership teams have been. Moreover, the owners have become more aware of animal welfare issues concerning their donkeys and other animals. On going plans include increasing the number of workshops to educate more veterinary staff, community leaders, school children and other stakeholders on animal welfare standards and practices, thus being able to disseminate information across the greater part of Zimbabwe both more efficiently and more effectively.

**Key words:** yokes, malnutrition, transgression, abandonment, husbandry, welfare

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**ACTIVITIES**

- Training and Education — targeting schools, communities, veterinary staff
- Distributing pamphlets
- Replacing wooden yokes with harnesses
- Providing veterinary treatment - diseases, de-worming, wounds
- Attending to road traffic accident victims
- Humane disposal of sick/diseased/injured animals
- Raising awareness of animal welfare issues with enforcement agencies
- Halting painful husbandry procedures — ear clipping/branding
- Prosecuting for cruelty — beating and whipping, excessive draught injuries
- Ensuring care on completion of working life

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**CONCLUSION**

The programme has yielded many positive results to date — a noticeable difference has been made to the lives of not only the donkeys, but of many other animals as well. Owners are now more aware of their animals' welfare needs and practices where possible in a difficult environment. Future plans include expanding our areas of operation through the training of more veterinary personnel, community leaders and communities on animal welfare standards and practices.