



Building Community Resilience – The Crucial Role of Working Equids

People and organisations from around the world came together last Friday (25th February 2022) at a virtual event to demonstrate the crucial role of working animals at the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. The side event, hosted by the International Coalition for Working Equids (ICWE), demonstrated how working animals, particularly equids (horses, mules and donkeys), contribute to building community resilience and highlighted the need to include them in planning for the future, as they have central roles in development and coping with the effects of climate change.

Working animals support the livelihoods of more than one billion people and provide a significant contribution towards the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by ensuring access to education, mitigating the effects of climate change, strengthening community resilience, tackling gender inequalities, allowing water security and facilitating interlinkages between the various SDGs.

Dr Lawrence Dinginya, OIE Animal Welfare Focal Point for Zimbabwe, Acting Deputy Director Veterinary Public Health in the Department of Veterinary Services in Zimbabwe who moderated the event, introduced the session to the complexity of the relationship between climate change and the effects on working equids, saying: “There is a close link between animal welfare and the wellbeing of people and the sustainability of socio-economic and ecological systems.” He also highlighted that “...it is crucial to recognise the role of working equids in providing sustainable solutions to address community and climate resilience. Advocacy, training and education are all vital for ensuring animal welfare.”

Sonigitu Ekpe, Director, Environmental Multilateral Support and Cooperation at the Ministry of Environment, Calabar – Cross River State in Nigeria built on this by pointing out that heat stress in animals will have significant knock-on effects for both the health and welfare of the animals themselves and the communities they serve. He said: “The situation is very complex and the welfare of these animals is important. Socioeconomic and social measures are crucial to provide working animals and the people that rely on them a healthier and better environment.” Fredred Valdivia, Brooke Regional Director for Latin America expanded on these themes and gave examples from Latin America. He argued that working equids can contribute to all the SDGs and the focus of his presentation was the use of equids in disaster planning. “These animals are often considered the ambulances of the communities after disaster strikes. It is a big mistake if they are not included in disaster plans, and some important progress has been made.”

Finally, Ian Cawsey, Chair of ICWE and Director of Advocacy and Campaigns at The Donkey Sanctuary said: “We need to work together to push this agenda. Collaborations make positive change. Working animals support the livelihoods of more than 1 billion people around the world and, in disasters, they are integral in increasing the speed of recovery. Why are they not already a significant part of disaster planning? Countries with healthy working animals benefit from a more sustainable approach. You can’t have a sustainable world for humans that isn’t sustainable for animals.” Ian noted the UN has now acknowledged all of this and working animals were beginning to take their place in planning.

ICWE has worked for the last four years with people and organisations around the world, anywhere that working animals are crucial to their communities and in his last week as ICWE chair, Ian stressed that the momentum that was building needed to continue.

ICWE are keen to continue to develop relationships and conversations with those interested in integrating working animal welfare into their practice and policies. Please contact us at icwe@worldhorsewelfare.org, head to our website: www.icweworkingequids.org where you can find out more, along with the speakers responses to all questions asked during our session.