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‘One Welfare’: a framework to support the implementation of OIE animal welfare standards

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Keywords

Animal welfare – global sustainable development – ‘One World, One Health’ – ‘One Welfare’ – standard.

Summary

The ‘One Welfare’ concept emphasises the link between animal welfare, human wellbeing, biodiversity and the environment. It builds upon and complements the development of the ‘One World, One Health’ concept to achieve fully comprehensive approaches in support of global sustainable development.

Background

Animal welfare (Box 1) is a complex and multifaceted issue involving scientific, ethical, economic, cultural, social, religious and political dimensions [1]. This shows how animal welfare is interconnected with human wellbeing, biodiversity and the environment at the different levels of society.

Just as ‘human health and animal health are interdependent and bound to the health of the ecosystems in which they exist’ [2], preserving and improving animal welfare has various direct and indirect connections with human wellbeing and environmental issues. These cover a number of areas that sometimes overlap with those covered by the ‘One World, One Health’ strategic framework and the 12 Manhattan Principles (Box 2).

Box 1

Definition of animal welfare and human wellbeing

Animal welfare is defined in Article 7.1.1. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* – it means ‘how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress.

Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and appropriate veterinary treatment, shelter, management and nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter or killing.

Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal; the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.’

In this paper **‘human wellbeing’** is used as an equivalent term for humans.

1. Recognize the essential link between human, domestic animal and wildlife health and the threat disease poses to people, their food supplies and economies, and the biodiversity essential to maintaining the healthy environments and functioning ecosystems we all require.
2. Recognize that decisions regarding land and water use have real implications for health. Alterations in the resilience of ecosystems and shifts in patterns of disease emergence and spread manifest themselves when we fail to recognize this relationship.
3. Include wildlife health science as an essential component of global disease prevention, surveillance, monitoring, control and mitigation.
4. Recognize that public health programs can greatly contribute to conservation efforts.
5. Devise adaptive, holistic and forward-looking approaches to the prevention, surveillance, monitoring, control and mitigation of emerging and resurging diseases that take the complex interconnections among species into full account.
6. Seek opportunities to fully integrate biodiversity conservation perspectives and human needs (including those related to domestic animal health) when developing solutions to infectious disease threats.
7. Reduce the demand for and better regulate the international live wildlife and bush meat trade not only to protect wildlife populations but also to lessen the risks of disease movement, cross-species transmission, and the development of novel pathogen-host relationships. The costs of this worldwide trade in terms of impacts on public health, agriculture and conservation are enormous, and the global community must address this trade as the real threat it is to global socio-economic security.
8. Restrict the mass culling of free-ranging wildlife species for disease control to situations where there is a multidisciplinary, international scientific consensus that a wildlife population poses an urgent, significant threat to public health, food security, or wildlife health more broadly.
9. Increase investment in the global human and animal health infrastructure commensurate with the serious nature of emerging and resurging disease threats to people, domestic animals and wildlife. Enhanced capacity for global human and animal health surveillance and for clear, timely information-sharing (that takes language barriers into account) can only help improve coordination of responses among governmental and non-governmental agencies, public and animal health institutions, vaccine or pharmaceutical manufacturers, and other stakeholders.
10. Form collaborative relationships among governments, local people, and the private and public (i.e. non-profit) sectors to meet the challenges of global health and biodiversity conservation.
11. Provide adequate resources and support for global wildlife health surveillance networks that exchange disease information with the public health and agricultural animal health communities as part of early warning systems for the emergence and resurgence of disease threats.
12. Invest in educating and raising awareness among the world's people and in influencing the policy process to increase recognition that we must better understand the relationships between health and ecosystem integrity to succeed in improving prospects for a healthier planet.

'One Welfare' is not intended as a replacement for 'animal welfare' but as a tool to mainstream animal welfare more effectively into wider policy frameworks and projects globally to help improve communication, coordination and collaboration. Integrating 'One Welfare' with 'One World, One Health' can strengthen and help to better integrate stakeholder liaison by capturing all relevant issues involving animals and our society in a holistic way.

The Fourth OIE Global Welfare Conference included two full plenary sessions focusing on the 'One Welfare' concept. Many of the speakers highlighted the relevance of this concept as a complement to 'One Health' and the importance of recognising the interconnections between animal welfare and other disciplines in support of global sustainable development. A One Welfare approach is consistent with the United Nations Sustainable

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Development Goals in animal-related areas by helping to 'build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection' [4]. Speakers also highlighted the benefits of a One Welfare approach as a tool for increasing engagement and communication among different stakeholder groups in relevant areas [5]. Together, all this supports the implementation of OIE standards.

Given the complex interconnections at different levels, One Welfare is a very broad concept, making it necessary to define a set of areas or categories to provide a conceptual framework. Once the categories are established, it will be easier to gather and order the available evidence. It will also allow stakeholders from relevant disciplines to work together towards a common goal for improving animal welfare, human wellbeing, biodiversity and the environment.

Developing the One Welfare framework: approaches in practice

Whilst progress has been made in recent decades to establish and implement animal welfare standards, many challenges remain for the sustainable improvement of animal welfare. One

of the key reasons might be that animal welfare is often considered and worked upon in isolation, rather than integrating it with other relevant areas in a given field. Integrating animal welfare and increasing collaboration and communication among different players could lead to more effective and efficient ways of working.

Many publications and projects have already highlighted the connection between animal welfare and a number of other areas relevant to human wellbeing and the environment. A report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2014 suggested that global organisations 'could proactively include animal welfare as a basic element of their projects, integrated with, and contributing to, other goals such as food safety and security, human and animal health, environmental sustainability, worker safety, rural development, gender equality, and social justice' [6]. Since then, a number of projects have begun to integrate animal welfare into a One Welfare approach. This has brought additional benefits to ongoing projects.

Incorporating the One Welfare concept into projects makes it possible to increase recognition and gather evidence on the direct and indirect benefits of integrating animal welfare with other disciplines.



Examples presented at the Fourth OIE Global Welfare Conference include [5]:

- reminders of the links between animal welfare and productivity (i.e. ‘well-managed animals are more profitable; healthy farm animals reduce farming costs; improved animal handling results in increased meat yields’);
- evidence from ongoing studies into conventional pasture and silvopastoral farming systems (i.e. trees, shrubs and pasture) points at improved animal welfare (i.e. more affiliative behaviour and less foraging during the hottest and wettest periods) alongside more sustainable farming (i.e. greater biodiversity and more ecosystem services), when compared to a monoculture system;
- the role of animals in supporting human livelihoods, where animals are a source of food, income, social status and cultural identity, as well as companionship and security;
- the role of improved animal welfare within the World Food Security agenda¹;
- the importance of responsible dog ownership and following a ‘One Health, One Welfare’ approach

by combining the animal health and community aspects within dog population control programmes as a means of achieving more effective results.

There are many other examples and, from the brief summary above, it is clear that the disciplines involved fall naturally to different stakeholder groups and policy areas. Therefore, to aid clarity and implementation of a One Welfare approach it is advisable to develop and define a conceptual framework where relevant stakeholders and policies can be ordered according to the different One Welfare outputs. A recent publication described and enumerated a number of areas that could benefit (or are already benefiting) from a One Welfare approach [7]. The outcomes described can now be used as the basis for developing a conceptual framework². Defining categories under the broader concept of One Welfare will help to define in greater detail what One Welfare encompasses and will provide a mechanism to support more efficient and organised collaboration and evidence-gathering at global level (Box 3).

1. Details about the World Food Security agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals can be found at: www.fao.org/cfs/en/

2. A public consultation to define a One Welfare conceptual framework was held during the first quarter of 2017 on the website www.onewelfareworld.org

Box 3

Proposed areas within a One Welfare conceptual framework [6]

1. **Reduction in animal and human abuse** – covers all aspects of the link between animal abuse, family and social violence. It supports reduction of incidence of crime and violence internationally, in particular domestic violence and abuse of elderly people and children.
2. **Improved animal welfare and social aspects** – covers cases involving animal welfare, socioeconomic indicators and offences in other areas mainly taking place within inner city areas or troubled communities. Improvements in animal welfare at this level support interventions tackling other social issues within inner cities. (i.e. homelessness, hoarding, dog fighting, separation anxiety, etc.). It overlaps with One Health where mental health issues are involved.
3. **Improved animal welfare** – addressing poverty and local community support – covers the connection between poor states of human welfare and poor states of animal welfare. Promoting the integration of animal welfare as part of general livelihood improvement programmes is seen as a key to success.
4. **Improved animal welfare and food safety** – covers all aspects of links between animal welfare and food safety. Improvements in animal welfare support better food safety.
5. **Improved animal and farmer welfare – improved farming productivity** – includes elements linking farmer wellbeing with animal welfare. This extends to the farming environment and sustainable production practices.
6. **Improved animal welfare and improved food security and sustainability** – covers work focusing on the beneficial aspects of animal welfare improvements to wider areas of societal concern such as climate change, farming sustainability and disaster management.
7. **More efficient multidisciplinary approaches** – a more joined-up and multidisciplinary approach could be more efficient and effective. For example, animal welfare indicators can be used as a sign of a farmer being successful or failing to cope and could be used to detect poor farmer health/wellbeing. Equally, poor farmer wellbeing detected by a medical practitioner could indicate a risk of poor animal welfare on the farm. Different professionals could all play a part in improving both farm animal welfare and farmer wellbeing.
8. **Mutual rescue, improved life chances** – comprises animal assisted interventions and paired human rehabilitation and animal rehoming programmes which can be beneficial both to the people and the animals involved.
9. **Improved biodiversity conservation, environmental aspects and human wellbeing** – comprises the links between environmental and conservation issues and animal welfare/ human wellbeing.

Conclusions

Applying a One Welfare approach can serve to 'improve animal welfare to improve human welfare (and vice versa); coordinate actions between veterinary and other services and protect the environment as a fundamental step for both human and animal welfare' [8].

Recognising the links between animal welfare, human wellbeing and the environment represents a step forward in the implementation of animal welfare standards and policies, with the aim of integrating animal welfare with other relevant areas for the benefit of all.

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‘One Welfare’: towards sustainable

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Keywords

Animal welfare – OIE Collaborating Centre – ‘One Welfare’ – sustainability – World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

