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## Assessment of the gaps between the new OIE standard on the welfare of working equids and common practices in Kenya

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### Keywords

Animal welfare – Kenya – World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) – working equid.

In May 2016, the OIE adopted a new Chapter of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (the *Terrestrial Code*) dealing with the welfare of working equids, which includes horses, donkeys and mules used for traction, transport and income generation. This paper focuses on the welfare of donkeys as a proxy for all working equids in Kenya.





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The range of welfare standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) includes working equids, i.e. horses, mules and donkeys which are used for traction and transport and for income generation as well as domestic use (non-commercial work). Equids used in sports, leisure riding, biopharmaceutical production and research are excluded.

In developing countries, working equids used for transport and traction have a direct or indirect impact on the livelihoods of communities. They contribute to agricultural production and food security by transporting water and fodder for other livestock, firewood and other daily needs for the homestead, and agricultural products to the market [1]. They also provide draught power for ploughing, harrowing, seeding and weeding. Working equids may also generate income through the production of manure, by being rented out or through involvement in commercial activities such as taxi services, construction or tourism. They may strengthen social relationships within extended families and communities through the sharing of working animals in times of need, for example during ploughing and harvesting seasons. In very remote areas where transport is a problem, working equids may be used to transport people and form an important part of weddings and other ceremonial occasions [2].

In Kenya, working equids include horses, mules and donkeys but, according to data from the East Africa Representation of Brooke, donkeys appear to be the most frequently used. This paper therefore focuses on the welfare of donkeys as a proxy for all working equids. According to the 2009 Kenyan livestock census report, there are over 1.8 million donkeys, which is a considerable (threefold) increase from an estimated 600,000 donkeys ten years earlier (Kenya livestock census, 2009) [3].

### OIE standard on animal welfare of working equids

The OIE defines *animal welfare* as the manner in which the animal copes with the conditions in which it lives [1]. 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 it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter/killing.

In May 2016, the OIE World Assembly of Delegates unanimously adopted a new Chapter (7.12.) of the *Terrestrial Code* dealing with the welfare of working equids, which includes horses, donkeys and mules used for traction, transport and income generation [1].

The new OIE Chapter highlights the importance, role and responsibilities of the different organisations





which are linked to the implementation of this standard and also provide services that improve the welfare of working equids.

To assess the welfare of these animals, several outcome-based criteria, or measurables, were identified such as behavioural changes, morbidity and responses to handling. These indicators can be used as good indicators of the welfare of working equids and are linked to the recommendations further developed in the Chapter.

In the last part of the Chapter, it is recommended that working equids should be fed fibre-based diets with proteins, minerals and vitamins to be supplemented. Water should be safe and palatable, given regularly, in sufficient amounts. Shelter should be provided both at rest and in working environments to protect the animals against heat and cold stress and from predators. Diseases and injuries should be managed promptly to reduce mortality and morbidity rates. The personnel involved in driving and handling working equids should be trained so as to acquire good management skills. Animal handlers should be familiar with normal and abnormal behaviour in order to interpret the welfare implications. The end of the working life should be considered and abandonment discouraged because it causes suffering. Such equids should be slaughtered or euthanased humanely. Animals should work for at most six hours a day and given one to two full days of rest from work each week. Mares should not be worked for three months both before and after foaling. Sick and injured animals should not work at all. Hooves should be

checked, cleaned and trimmed regularly. The harness should be well fitting and comfortable, to avoid causing wounds.

### Animal welfare stakeholders in Kenya

Whether local, national or international, there are numerous organisations in Kenya today that work with the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) to support the improvement of many aspects of animal welfare.

National organisations that deal with donkey welfare specifically include

- the Kenya Veterinary Association (KVA)
- the Donkey Sanctuary Kenya
- Animal Welfare for Public Health (AWAPH)
- the Kenya Network for Dissemination of Agricultural Technologies (KENDAT)
- the Kenya Society for Protection and Care for Animals (KSPCA).

The international or regional animal welfare stakeholders include:

- the OIE Representation for Eastern and the Horn of Africa
- the East Africa Representation of Brooke (Action for Working Horses and Donkeys)
- Africa Network for Animal Welfare (ANAW)
- The Donkey Sanctuary
- World Animal Protection (WAP)
- Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad (SPANNA).



## Assessing the compliance of common practices in Kenya with the new OIE international standard

Between June and October 2016, a questionnaire survey was carried out, targeting donkey owners and some of the donkey welfare stakeholders in Kenya. The OIE animal welfare standard for working equids was used as reference in designing the questionnaire. The survey was conducted in Meru County, and completed by a survey during the Nairobi International Trade Fair (NITF) held at Jamhuri Park, between 3 and 9 October 2016, in which respondents from various counties in Kenya participated. This generated a total of 100 completed questionnaires (Table I), with 64% of the respondents being male and 78% of respondents claiming to be handlers of donkeys, and only 28% claiming to be owners (Table II).

The processing of these questionnaires indicates a considerable gap in compliance with the OIE welfare standard for working equids. Since these standards were only approved in May 2016, one explanation for this gap is of course the lack of awareness of these international standards for working equids.

**Table I**  
County of origin of the respondents

County	Number of respondents
Isiolo	7
Kiambu	18
Machakos	6
Meru	33
Murang'a	5
Nairobi	2
Nakuru	11
Narok	8
Nyeri	8
Vihiga	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source of the data: 2016 Nairobi International Trade Fair (NITF)

**Table II**  
Respondents' profile

Gender		Donkey ownership	
Male	Female	Owner	Handler
64	36	28	78

When looking at the aforementioned welfare issues that are covered by the OIE standard, it would appear that most of the respondents do not provide a balanced diet to their donkeys, simply because they feel they don't gain anything in return, e.g. milk. Also, the irregular provision of water is often attributed to the scarcity of water itself. A small proportion provides shelter for their donkeys: 15% in Meru County and 39% of those interviewed during the NITF.



None of the handlers (including drivers of carts) has received any formal training in handling equids. A large proportion of these handlers, more than 77%, use whips to make the animals move during work, while many (also) use threatening sounds to make the animals move. Despite the lack of formal training, signs of ill health that animal handlers do know include droopy head, coughing, standing hair coat, anorexia, reluctance to work, abnormal discharges, presence of wounds and isolation from the others during grazing or resting. If any is used, the most frequently reported types of treatment are wound management and deworming. Treatment is usually done by the owners and to some extent by veterinarians (Table III).

Most respondents work their animals for 5 to 12 hours a day for seven days a week without rest, unless there is no work. According to the OIE standard, animals should work for a maximum of six hours a day and be given a full day of rest once or twice a week.

The OIE also recommends that sick or injured animals should not work, and that any animal that has been under veterinary treatment should not be returned to work until advised by a veterinarian. Indeed, according to this survey, sick animals are usually not expected to work, though this is not applied by 9% and 2% of respondents in Meru and at the NITF, respectively.

Most respondents do not know when mares should resume work after foaling, because this depends, they claim, on the strength of the mare. The OIE standard

indicates that mares should not be ridden or worked for three months both before and after foaling.

The OIE also recommends that equids should start working at three years of age or more, and certainly not less than two years of age. In Kenya, 34% of respondents in Meru County and 19% of those interviewed at the NITF start involving their donkeys in work at the age of one year. Most others do not recall the exact age, because they use physical size, rather than age, to judge readiness for work (Table IV).

In addition, the concept of retirement of donkeys seems to be alien to handlers and owners, none of the respondents having a specific age in mind at which they ought to retire their donkeys from work. More than 82% of respondents work donkeys until they die, or eventually abandon them, with a small minority selling them off, a very challenging undertaking in terms of marketing. According to the OIE standard, abandonment at the end of the productive phase should be discouraged. Animals should be kept, without working, or – if it is unavoidable – euthanased/ slaughtered humanely to avoid prolonged suffering.

Finally, the assessment of management measures, such as hoof trimming and the use of appropriate harnesses, showed that most respondents seem to neglect these aspects. Only very few respondents check and trim the hooves of their donkeys, and this is often performed by unqualified personnel. Manila ropes, when used as harness material, cause wounds and

Table III

## Management of injuries and disease control

Survey*	Treatment type		Personnel involved in treatment		
	Wound dressing	Deworming	Owner	Para-vet	Veterinarian
Meru	51%	7%	61%	32%	7%
NITF 2016	48%	24%	49%	19%	32%

Table IV

## Working age and appropriate workload

Survey*	Sick donkeys	Duration of work per day (in hours)			Age at start of work		Treatment at age of retirement		Work resumption after foaling	
	Continue to work	1–5	5–8	8–12	1 year	No specific age	Continue to work	Sold	No specific time	Do not know
Meru	9%	22%	36%	42%	34%	66%	82%	18%	51%	49%
NITF 2016	2%	21%	24%	55%	19%	81%	98%	2%	33%	67%

Table V

## Farriery and harnessing

Survey*	Frequency of hoof trimming			Trimming personnel		Harnessing material	
	Once per year	Rarely	Never	Veterinarian	Owner	Clothes/rags	Manila ropes
Meru	6%	64%	30%	39%	16%	75%	15%
NITF 2016	15%	51%	34%	24%	7%	72%	28%

\* The survey was conducted in Meru County, and completed by a survey during the Nairobi International Trade Fair (NITF) held at Jamhuri Park, Nairobi, between 3 and 9 October 2016, in which respondents from various counties in Kenya participated.

should be discouraged. They are nonetheless still used by between 15% and 28% of respondents (Table V).

Whereas an appreciable portion of the respondents (approximately one quarter) was aware of the existence of the OIE, none of them was aware of the welfare standards on working equids.

## Conclusion

In 2016, the OIE published a new animal welfare standard for working equids. It is clear from this survey that there is an important shortfall in terms of compliance with the standard among donkey owners and handlers in Kenya. There is an overall negative perception of donkey welfare and lack of awareness of the existence of the OIE welfare standard for working equids.

There is, therefore, a pressing need for donkey owners, handlers, and the public in general, to be informed, educated and sensitised on matters pertaining to the welfare of working equids. This can be achieved through

community engagement, training, workshops and communication, and in schools.

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