

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS AND SENTIENT BEINGS

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Abstract

In many economically developed countries around the world the protection and enhancement of farm animal welfare has become an increasingly important component of livestock systems and animal-based food supply chains. Contemporary global livestock production, animal welfare science and animal welfare policy, make an increasingly important component of a sustainable ecosystem. There is a need to find new ways of entering global debates over food security and sustainability. Today, the most widely used framework for community development and human well-being is the United Nations Agenda 2030, also known as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals were agreed by all 193 United Nations member states and set international priorities for sustainable human development. But, unfortunately welfare of other sentient beings is totally overlooked. Animals are essential to human well-being, from supporting local communities through ecotourism to establishing important ecosystem services such as pest control and pollination. However, animal welfare and the protection of wild species often take a backseat to human development efforts. When designing and implementing public policy, the value of animals is often completely ignored or undervalued. Although the SDGs are certainly broader than purely economic measures of progress such as gross domestic product (GDP), they have a narrow focus on the value of the natural world.

Keywords

United Nations Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Animal Welfare (AW), Livestock, sentient beings.

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Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, presents a common plan for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future. The focus is on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent an urgent call for action in a global partnership by all countries, both developed and developing.

It is believed that ending poverty and other disadvantages must be accompanied by policies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and stimulate economic growth, while combating climate change and protecting oceans and forests.¹ Sustainable development is defined as “A system or procedure is sustainable if it is acceptable now and if its effects will be acceptable in future, in particular in relation to resource availability, consequences of functioning and morality of action”.² Despite the wide scope of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the role of our domesticated animals as well as wild animals, and their welfare is not mentioned at all.

Decline in Biodiversity

The largest and most significant attack on biodiversity comes from human activity. The very existence of many species and ecosystems is seriously threatened by habitat loss, pollution, climate change, and habitat fragmentation caused by human clearance of native habitats. There is a real risk that these magnificent species, who have long coexisted on our planet, will vanish from it forever. The World Animal Net acknowledges the positive impact of robust, healthy ecosystems that safeguard, conserve, and improve natural wildlife habitat and also greatly respects the existence of wildlife and acknowledges that animals are sentient entities.³ It is their opinion that development cannot be genuinely sustainable if the welfare of all sentient beings is not considered equally. Just to name a few species that are rapidly declining and are at a threat of extinction, are; Great apes, lions, and rhinos.⁴

According to a UNESCO report, populations of all species of great apes, which share 98.4% of their DNA with humans, are “very low or in rapid decline”. Loss of suitable forest habitat due to road construction is the greatest threat to great apes. More than 5,000 lions are kept in captivity for canned hunting in South Africa, but only 2,000 live in the wild. Wild lions have declined by 80% over the past 20 years. The lion bone trade is said to be increasing and widespread in Asia, further threatening the world’s lion population.⁵ It is said that lion habitat has decreased by 75%. Rhino populations in Africa and Asia have declined dramatically, from 500,000 at the beginning of the 20th century to just 29,000 left in the wild today. Large-scale poaching is the main cause of rhino population decline.⁶

Activities that Threaten Wildlife Population

Undertaking of certain ventures creates a major threat to both humans and wildlife. These don't just threaten protection, the cumulative effects of wildlife trafficking, poaching, hunting, and other unsustainable practices (including habitat loss) result in increased and often fatal human-wildlife conflicts, and violations of local and international law, resulting in significant and unnecessary suffering to animals. They also threaten to destroy the cultural heritage that has preserved ancient respect and reverence for the ecosystem. If modern culture continues to view wild animals only as renewable economic resources, we will lose them for once and for all.⁷

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 proposed certain steps:-

- To set universal goals that address the urgent environmental, political, and economic challenges the world faces.
- A universal call to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030 was adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015 as “We envision a world where humans live in harmony with nature and where wild animals and other living organisms are protected.”¹

The World Organization for Animal Health defines animal welfare as “an animal's physical and “mental state” with surrounding conditions. World Animal Welfare defines animal welfare as “the quality of life experienced by an animal and includes how well the animal can cope with its current situation and environment. “In summary, animal welfare is the reduction of animal abuse and suffering. In addition, with the emergence of zoonotic diseases such as the new coronavirus infection, Ebola hemorrhagic fever, avian influenza, and SARS that have plagued the world in recent years, animal welfare has become a topic of high interest in policymaking and rights advocacy. Initiatives such as the Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW), the African Animal Welfare Strategy and the African Animal Welfare Platform (APAW) were therefore launched. The sound health approach can involve the collaborative effort of many sectors to achieve optimal health for humans, animals and the ‘environment’. The emergence of the One Health concept itself is the recognition that the health and well-being of humans, animals and ecosystems are interconnected. Through good animal welfare policies and practices, we will be able to reduce many zoonotic diseases.

Many species that share our planet are at risk of extinction. Our own existence as humans depends on the existence of these numerous species, so it is in our best

interest to ensure animal welfare. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are pathways that can be used to promote animal welfare and vice versa.

Prospective Links between AW and SDG

The majority of identified issues were related to animals raised for food production (farm or aquaculture) or livestock, but in some cases concern applied to all animal categories. One example is SDG 1, where related industries that serve livestock farmers can benefit from poverty reduction. This applies not only to farmers, but also to owners of all kinds of animals. Another example is SDG 4, which concerns educating children about animals in general. However, some links were specifically related to pet or wildlife protection. SDG 3 states that pet ownership leads to improved physical and mental health for owners. SDG 11 provides examples of the importance of urban wildlife management, and SDG 14 provides some examples related to wild fish.⁸

The livestock industry's dependence on edible foods as animal feed has increased food insecurity. Biodiversity is also affected as humans adapt to land use practices that involve clearing large areas of land for factory agriculture. Through appropriate animal protection measures, we can strike a balance between sustainable agricultural practices that reduce the destruction of biodiversity and over-reliance on food human achievement, which in turn will improve food security.

Communities can harness the potential of wild animals and domestic animals to generate income that allows them to provide better education for their children. Intact ecosystems provide our children with important learning opportunities for future generations. Through proper waste management, we avoid the scourge of marine plastic, creating opportunities for aquatic life and in doing so, providing better hygiene for humans. Animals play a role in conserving and replenishing water, for example, beavers that create wetlands to replenish our aquifers with fresh water. By reducing factory farming and encouraging small-scale sustainable livestock production, wealth will be distributed throughout the community to those who practice small-scale livestock farming. Ecotourism will provide sustainable employment for communities surrounding these areas. Globally, developing countries depend on ecotourism as a means of economic development through foreign exchange and as an industry that creates jobs for people and is therefore an asset. This contributes to job creation and poverty reduction, thereby reducing inequality between countries.⁹

Human dependence on animals may be less visible due to technological advances, industrialization, and urbanization, but it still exists. Sustainable cities require sustainable food supplies, and this can only be achieved by improving animal welfare. They need free fresh air, and this can only be achieved by ensuring that biodiversity thrives.

Animals also contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. However, they help regulate this through natural behavior. Oceans and tropical forests are the largest carbon sinks. Tropical trees that contribute to carbon storage rely on animals for seed dispersal and reproduction. 'Fish carbon' defines the ability of marine life to combat climate change and thereby prevent global biodiversity loss. Marine life not only provides food and subsistence economic activity for humans, but also helps regulate greenhouse gases in the environment. Marine debris in the oceans has reached alarming levels and is reported to be killing marine life. With good animal welfare policies, governments can manage fisheries to prevent overfishing and stop ocean pollution.¹⁰

It is therefore the responsibility of wildlife organizations to demonstrate to policymakers and their constituents that animal welfare and wildlife protection are necessary for people and communities.¹¹ That good health is central to good welfare is relatively uncontroversial.

Measures of biological health used by veterinarians and producers generally focus on disease, injury, and reproductive problems. Problems in biological functioning are clearly a welfare concern in many cases. For example, high rates of mortality are almost always associated with a poor quality of life for the animals.¹²

Conclusion

Recognizing that all species are connected through interactions is central to achieving the SDGs. Improving the protection and welfare of animals will contribute to achieving many of the goals and objectives of the 2030 Agenda. . Nevertheless, animals and their habitats are intertwined with the fate of people. All 4,444 species, large and small, endangered and ubiquitous, play an important role in building a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for people. A coordinated effort between WHO, OIE, FAO and UNEP that addresses cross-cutting issues including the nexus of animal welfare, human health and environmental protection, hence the One Health concept is a necessary and positive step in planning of a policy It would be a major step if the organizations participating in this partnership (WHO, OIE, FAO, UNEP) were to take the path of integrating animal welfare into their core missions, activities and projects.¹³

Raising animals provides better lives and livelihoods for billions of people. To achieve the SDGs, animals must be healthy. Sick animals require more water and food, and when livestock is lost to disease, other animals are raised elsewhere to meet market demand. Health for Animals members believe that healthy animals are more sustainable. There must be commitment to providing the tools needed to prevent, diagnose and treat animal diseases while further reducing our supply chain footprint.

To further strengthen this important link between animal welfare and global concerns related to human health, food security and a healthier environment, it is suggested to continue researching the SDGs.

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