Global perspectives – the Middle East: Egypt

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Summary
The Middle East region is characterised by the grouping of 20 countries with similar cultural traditions and religious concepts. The majority of the population of this region follows the religion of Islam, which considers all animals as important as humans, and others follow Christianity and Judaism. The majority of people dealing with animals have their own religious concepts, but most countries have no clear enforced official animal welfare regulations. Animal welfare activities in the Middle East region, as in Egypt for example, are carried out by various individuals, non-governmental organisations and the official Veterinary Services. The slaughter of animals for human consumption is in accordance with Islamic rites, which is the least painful method for the animals. Extensive production systems are the predominant systems in the region, and it is not common for animals in the region to suffer stress during production processes or slaughter. Although some success has been achieved in the area of animal welfare, as seen in improvements in health care, the development of modern abattoirs with proper facilities, and the establishment of policies for combating stray dogs, there are still major constraints to the implementation of effective animal welfare measures, including those for wildlife. These constraints include the lack of finances and the absence of effective legislative measures to prevent the trapping and/or hunting of wild animals for pleasure or illegal trade.

Keywords

Introduction
The Middle East region includes Afghanistan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Israel, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. This group of 20 countries have more or less the same cultural traditions and religious concepts as well as similar geographical and climatic conditions.

The majority of the population of this region follows the religion of Islam and others follow Christianity and Judaism. Although there are several religious and social regulations for animal welfare, most countries have no clear enforced official regulations and activities in this respect. Consequently, this paper focuses on Egypt, as it is the first country in the Middle East region to enforce regulations concerning animal welfare.

For a long time, until recently, the majority of the farm animal owners in the Middle East region, especially in Egypt, were smallholders with one to five animals. Animal husbandry is a major activity for all Egyptian families in rural areas. Cattle, buffalo, sheep, and goats are reared with great care on the farm and within the rural household. There are a limited number of modern large farms in the region. Smallholders own more than 70% of the total animal population in the region.

This system of rearing leads to close association between the farmers and their animals. In addition, the farmers show respect, care and kindness for all the animals with which they share their lives.

The area of land that is desert in the Middle East region is higher than that which is cultivated and inhabited; therefore, the establishment of large modern farms for semi-intensive or intensive production systems is rare.
(except in poultry production, where it is widely practised). The quality of animal welfare is inversely proportional with the shift towards intensive production systems; consequently, because most animal production in the Middle East takes place on smallholdings, it is not common for animals in the region to suffer stress.

Extensive production systems predominate in the region, where smallholders constitute the majority of animal owners and the production of milk does not exceed between 1 and 6 kg/day.

The economic income of the smallholders depends mainly on the production of their own animals, therefore they put every effort into maintaining their animals in what they believe to be the optimum conditions for obtaining maximum production levels.

Animal welfare issues

The main problems that face animal welfare in the Middle East region are as follows:

- lack of finance for the establishment of modern abattoirs with the proper handling facilities; the lack of these facilities leads to aggressive handling of animals by butchers or attendants to control animals before slaughter
- lack of suitable vehicles for transportation and facilities for loading and unloading animals
- primitive methods for combating the stray dog population due to lack of finances; occasional contribution is made by local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) towards these activities, but it is not enough, and this situation hinders the long-term application of spay and neuter programmes
- absence of effective legislative measures to prevent the trapping and/or hunting of wild animals for pleasure or illegal trade.

Ethical regulations for animal welfare

All traditional religions in the region include instructions to treat animals with care. Because Islam is the predominant religion in the Middle East, regulations in each country are based on the Islamic religious instructions. Islam considers all animals as important as humans and this is clearly mentioned in the Holy Quran.

El Azhar El Sharef, the largest organisation in the Middle East region dealing with Muslim affairs, established an animal welfare centre five years ago to expand animal welfare awareness and to support the crucial and positive steps taken by governments or animal welfare societies towards developing guidelines on animal welfare.

The Holy Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him [pbuh]) of Islam spoke about the welfare of animals and some of these sayings (Hadiths) are worth noting here (4, 6):

- the Prophet (pbuh) not only preached that people should show kindness to one another, but also to all living creatures. He forbade the practice of cutting the tails and manes of horses, branding animals at any soft spot and keeping horses unnecessarily saddled
- when the Prophet (pbuh) saw any animal overburdened or ill-fed he would pull up alongside the owner and say ‘fear God in your treatment of animals’
- a companion to the Prophet (pbuh) came to him carrying baby chicks in his clothing and mentioned that the mother bird had hovered over them ever since he had taken the chicks. He was directed to return the chicks back to the bush from where they were taken
- during a journey, a person travelling with the Prophet (pbuh) gathered some bird’s eggs from the nest. The mother bird’s painful cries and commotion attracted the attention of the Prophet (pbuh) who asked the man to return the eggs to the nest
- the Prophet (pbuh) forbade people from capturing baby birds, burning ant hills and cruelly whipping animals. He stopped the people from doing these things for fun. The Prophet (pbuh) pointed out that it was not fun for the animals
- on being told about a woman who starved her pet cat to death the Prophet (pbuh) said that ‘she would be tormented by that cat on judgment day by way of revenge’
- the Prophet (pbuh) said that any part cut off a living animal is dead flesh and is unlawful to eat. The implication of this is that living animals must not be mutilated
- the Prophet (pbuh) said, ‘if a person unjustly kills a sparrow or even a smaller bird (for other than food) he will be held responsible for it. No person is allowed to kill an animal for the sake of fun or game’
- the Prophet (pbuh) said, ‘show kindness and give good treatment to an animal’. He praised a man who offered water to a thirsty dog and said that a person would be punished if he did not feed and water an animal or let it free so it could feed itself
- the Prophet (pbuh) forbade shooting arrows at any animal that is tied or held up and also forbade hitting or marking the animal on its face.
It is also worth noting that El Azhar El Sharef has declared bullfighting a sinful activity. It also recognised that attending or encouraging this sport was sinful, and banned eating the meat of these bulls as they were not killed according to Islamic rites.

In addition to the national regulations for animal welfare (if present) in countries in the Middle East, the majority of people dealing with animals have their own religious concepts which require that animals be treated with kindness in all aspects of life such as housing, feeding, treatment and work.

**Official decrees relevant to animal welfare in Egypt**

**Decree of the Minister of Agriculture No. 27 (1967)**

This decree enforces concern for animal welfare by prohibiting the following activities (1):

– animals intended for riding and draught purpose should not be overloaded. The load should be compatible to the age and condition of the animals. Use of sick or injured animals for work is prohibited

– torture or imprisonment of animals and improper feeding, watering and ventilation is prohibited

– using animals for fighting and entertainment is prohibited

– tethering and shooting animals is prohibited

– compelling animals to perform specific acts by frightening or torturing them is also prohibited

– the animals to eat or drink beyond their capacity for fattening for food is prohibited

– animals should be well fed and well looked after. Animals should not be starved at the point of slaughter

– no animal should be slaughtered in front of another animal. Separation between the abattoir and slaughter area is recommended to ensure that animals awaiting slaughter do not see other animals being bled

– the knife should not be sharpened in front of the animal

**Slaughtering of animals for human consumption**

The Islamic method of slaughtering (Halal method) is the least painful method of slaughter and it is not a traumatic experience for the animals. In order for the slaughtering to be lawful, several measures must be taken by the one performing the slaughter. This is to ensure the highest benefit to both the animal and the consumer. In this regard, the Prophet of Islam said, ‘God has prescribed the most suitable way of doing every thing …do it well, when you slaughter an animal for sacrifice, you should sharpen your knife, give comfort to the animal, slaughter it in such a way that its life departs quickly and it is not left to suffer for a long time’.

There are two methods of Halal slaughter. The first of these is Dabh, which involves severing the trachea, oesophagus and jugular veins of the animal. This method is used for sheep, goats, cows and buffaloes. The other method, Nahr, involves cutting the blood vessels at the base of the neck. This method is used for camels and also for cows and buffaloes.

Animals permitted for consumption are:

– all cloven-footed animals

– poultry and other birds

– fish

– locust, crustacean, molluscs and other sea food.

Halal slaughter prescribes several measures for the welfare of animals, as follows:

a) before slaughtering

– pre-slaughter rest

– animals should be well fed and well looked after. Animals should not be starved at the point of slaughter

– no animal should be slaughtered in front of another animal. Separation between the lair and slaughter area is recommended to ensure that animals awaiting slaughter do not see other animals being bled

– the knife should not be sharpened in front of the animal

b) slaughtering technique

– the slaughtering knife should be sharpened before slaughtering

– the knife must not be depressed down vertically but drawn horizontally across the neck

– the cut should not be close to the chest or too near the head and should be a clean cut without laceration or tearing of tissues
– camels must be slaughtered as quickly as possible with the knife under the base of the neck
– slaughtering of birds, sheep, goats, buffalo and cattle should be done by cutting the trachea, the oesophagus and jugular vein without severing the head from the body
– the person slaughtering the animals should hold the knife in the right hand and the left hand should be used to hold the animal's head and restrain the animal
– slaughtering must be performed in one single cut, i.e. cutting should be continuous, uninterrupted and accomplished before the knife is withdrawn
– repeating the cutting process is forbidden when slaughtering

(c) after slaughter
– slaughtered animals should be provided with enough time to bleed completely
– further preparation and dressing of the carcass must be delayed until all signs of life and cerebral reflex have disappeared.

Violating any of these instructions and recommended procedures leads to the slaughter being rendered non-Halal.

Islam prohibits the consumption of:
– pork
– strangled animals
– animals devoured by wild beasts
– blood
– carrion
– fatally beaten animals
– horn-butted animals
– animals sacrificed to idols
– animals slaughtered by people other than people of the scriptures (Christians and Jews)
– animals dedicated to other than God.

**Efficacy of Halal slaughter**

An experiment was conducted by Professor Schultz and Dr Hazim (7) of Hanover University in Germany, using an electro-encephalograph (EEG) and an electrocardiogram (ECG) to demonstrate that Islamic slaughter was a very humane method of slaughter. The results of the experiment have surprised many people.

The experiment involved several electrodes which were surgically implanted at various points of the skull of each animal used in the experiment, touching the surface of the brain. The animals were allowed to recover from this surgery. One group of animals was slaughtered by the Halal method and the second by using a captive bolt. During the experiment, EEG and ECG measurements were performed on all animals to record the condition of the brain and heart during the course of slaughter.

This experiment concluded that:
– during the first 3 s of Islamic slaughter the EEG did not show any change in brain activity, thus indicating that the animal did not feel any pain during or immediately after the incision
– 3 s later the EEG recorded a condition of deep sleep: unconsciousness. This is due to a large quantity of blood gushing out from the body
– after the above-mentioned 6 s, the EEG recorded no brain activity, indicating that the animal was feeling no pain at all
– as the brain messages dropped to zero level, the heart was still beating and the body convulsing vigorously (a reflex action of the spinal cord) driving maximum blood from the body, resulting in hygienic meat for the consumer.

**Compliance with animal welfare in Halal slaughter**

The swift cutting of the vessels of the neck during Halal slaughter causes ischemia of the brain and makes the animal insensitive to pain. This method results in the rapid gush of blood which drains out from the animal’s body. If the spinal cord is cut, the nerve fibres to the heart might be damaged, leading to cardiac arrest and stagnation of blood in the blood vessels. Bleeding ensures that the meat is of good quality.

**Animal welfare activities in the Middle East**

Animal welfare activities in the Middle East region are carried out by various individuals, NGOs and the official Veterinary Services. The outcomes of these efforts are not well-known because of the lack of coordination between these organisations. Due to the lack of published and/or official data about animal welfare issues in Middle East countries, data from Egypt has been used here as an example for the Middle East region.

From 1990 onwards the number of veterinary clinics started to increase and a new system for the development of abattoir facilities was implemented, but before that time animal welfare activities in Egypt were limited to health care, treatment, vaccination, feeding and housing; there
was little animal welfare regulation in the areas of transportation and pre-slaughter. The lack of rural abattoirs and veterinary services meant that animals had to trek long distances for slaughter and for veterinary aid. Similarly, the lack of efficient animal control equipment forced some butchers to push animals onto the slaughter platform by prodding them with sharp objects, striking them or cutting the Achilles tendon. The previous methods for combating stray dogs and cats were poisoning with strychnine sulphate or shooting. Though these methods were usually unacceptable to the National Animal Welfare Society, lack of finances and expertise to enforce other methods, such as neutering and humane killing, hindered the replacement of these methods.

**Veterinary treatment**

At present there is a very efficient animal health system in practice in Egypt. There are about 1,500 official Government veterinary clinics distributed all over the country. These clinics play an important role in the rapid intervention and treatment of diseased animals and are a vital component in the early warning system. Anthelmintic treatment for parasites and mandatory vaccinations against foot and mouth disease, Rift Valley fever, lumpy skin disease and haemorrhagic septicaemia are provided free of charge.

The Egyptian veterinary hospital is one of the oldest veterinary establishments in the region and it is one of the major veterinary hospitals for companion animals and equines. A new department has been established for boarding animals, especially companion animals and equines, when their owners go away. All requirements of animal welfare including housing, feeding, watering and medical supervision are taken care of in this establishment.

The National Veterinary Services are also responsible for the registration of national and private zoos. To ensure that animal welfare standards are maintained, the registration instructions require the presence of suitable space, environment and shelter according to the type and number of animals.

**Stray dog control**

The Egyptian Veterinary Services established a pilot project for the control of the stray dog population with the help of the World Society for the Protection of Animals (2). The aim of the project was to set up a demonstration dog population birth control programme in the district of Giza within the Cairo Metropolis. The objectives of the programme were as follows:

- to catch and sterilise the animals and then return them to the place from where they were taken
- to screen the health of the sterilised dogs and vaccinate them against rabies, thereby reducing the threat of zoonoses
- to humanely euthanize terminally sick dogs.

This pilot project has demonstrated that the sterilisation of dogs has considerably reduced the stray dog population of the Giza district and it is hoped that the other districts will consider the programme as a means of controlling the dog population in their areas (3).

**Recent improvements in animal welfare**

As Egypt imports large numbers of livestock from Australia, it is working closely with Australia to improve animal welfare in Egypt. Livestock handling facilities in ports, feedlots and abattoirs have been upgraded with special advice as regards animal handling, training and training programmes organised by the Egyptian Veterinary Services.

There has been considerable improvement in the standards of animal welfare at slaughterhouses (5). The Basateen abattoir in Cairo has been upgraded with the help and assistance of Australia. This has included a major overhaul of one slaughter-hall – including upgrades to flooring and the electric and water networks, plus the installation of a ritual casting pen to restrain cattle for slaughter (Fig. 1a). Improved livestock delivery facilities have been designed and modified to bring animals from arrival trucks, through the quarantine pens and up to the slaughter-hall in less stressful conditions than previously experienced (Fig. 1b). Modern livestock handling facilities and abattoirs have also been developed with special advice, training programmes and general veterinary support from Government Veterinary Services to train animal handlers and butchers. As a result of the ongoing collaboration with Australia, the slaughter hall will shortly incorporate improved practices of animal handling, meat production and food hygiene to establish a benchmark of standards to be adopted in the whole country.

Egyptian ports have been improved to handle the large number of animals that arrive on vessels, e.g. special handling equipment has been introduced.

Feedlots with modern handling facilities have been constructed for imported stock. Specialist advice has been provided to assist with health measures and to improve feeding practices using local feedstuffs in a very economical way.
Future activities

In addition to the continuing improvement of current animal welfare activities, attention will be directed towards raising public awareness of animal welfare with the help of national, regional and international animal welfare societies. Upgrading animal welfare measures in zoos is a priority.

The illegal wildlife trade is often encountered in the Middle East region and many cases violating the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) involving live wild animals and wildlife products have been encountered. The Veterinary Services in the region are regularly addressing the problems by securing the release of captive live animals and rehabilitating them in their natural habitat as well as confiscating stuffed wild animals (taxidermy) and prosecuting the offenders. Both government and non-governmental animal welfare organisations are taking action to increase public understanding of CITES regulations and raise awareness to prevent hunting and killing for trade. Similarly, existing zoos are being modernised to shift the animals from cages to open parks to minimise animal suffering. As always, financial constraints are a major source of concern for animal welfare in these cases.

The General Organization for Veterinary Services in Egypt has undertaken a National Project of Registration and Identification of Cattle and Buffaloes. The first phase has already been completed in the districts of Sharkia, Behera and Menofia. The second phase will be implemented in six other districts, namely, Giza, Cairo, Kalubia, Dakahlia, Kafr Elsheikh and Gharbia. At the end of this project, only identified animals will be allowed to be transported for slaughter through other farming areas or territories in approved vehicles to ensure that all animal welfare regulations are strictly adhered to.

The role of non-governmental animal welfare organisations

There are several non-governmental animal welfare organisations in the region, mainly situated in the North African and Mediterranean parts of the Middle East region. These organisations focus their activities on companion animals and wildlife. They establish shelters, undertake spaying, neutering and re-homing programmes and raise public awareness through the websites on the Internet. Close cooperation exists between the national Veterinary Services and these animal welfare organisations.

In Egypt, there are 13 animal welfare organisations presently registered, besides a number of environmental societies. The main mission of the animal welfare organisations is to increase public awareness of animal welfare issues for all animals in Egypt, and to help abandoned and stray animals. Their activities include:

- the establishment of shelters that cater for adoption, especially for cats
- the establishment of resting places with watering facilities for equines in various regions
- the publication of booklets on animal welfare, including animal care.

The NGOs are presently in the process of establishing a Council of Animal Welfare in Egypt in order to combine their efforts to increase awareness on animal welfare issues.
Perspectivas mundiales – Oriente Medio: Egipto

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Resumen
La región de Oriente Medio corresponde al agrupamiento de 20 países que guardan más o menos similitud desde el punto de vista de su tradición cultural e idiosincrasia religiosa. La población es mayoritariamente musulmana, credo que otorga a todos los animales tanta importancia como el ser humano, aunque también hay sectores que profesan el cristianismo o el judaísmo. La mayoría de las personas que tratan con animales tienen sus propias concepciones religiosas, pero casi ningún país está aplicando normas oficiales claras en materia de bienestar animal. Las actividades de protección de los animales en la región de Oriente Medio, por ejemplo en Egipto, corren a cargo de personas físicas, organizaciones no gubernamentales y Servicios Veterinarios oficiales. El sacrificio de animales para el consumo humano se realiza con arreglo a los ritos islámicos, y representa el método menos doloroso para el animal. En la
region predominan los sistemas de producción extensiva, por lo que el ganado no suele sufrir estrés durante los procesos productivos o de sacrificio. Pese a ciertos éxitos en el terreno del bienestar animal, (como demuestran las mejoras en la atención zoosanitaria, la creación de mataderos modernos con instalaciones adecuadas o la institución de programas de lucha contra los perros callejeros), subsisten grandes dificultades para poner en marcha acciones eficaces en la materia, entre otras las destinadas a la fauna salvaje. Entre los principales obstáculos cabe citar la falta de fondos y la ausencia de medidas legislativas para impedir la caza de animales salvajes, ya sea con trampas o armas de fuego, con fines de ocio o comercio ilegal.

**Palabras clave**

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**References**


