

Drivers for animal welfare policies in the Middle East

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Summary

Religion, ethics and culture are an important group of drivers for animal welfare policies in the Middle East. In many countries of the region the understanding of animal welfare is expressed more in terms of religious precepts and humane ethics than via regulations and legislation. In fact, regulatory and legislated animal welfare standards are still not well implemented and many animal welfare issues require attention. The Qur'an provides considerable support for conscientiously attending to animal welfare. For example, the Islamic rules on the process of slaughter were intended to provide a quick, humane and relatively painless death. Current practices that are not in accordance with these religious teachings may cause great suffering to animals. Although these rules have been in place for 1,400 years or more, now, in the 21st Century, they are found to closely correspond to the related standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). The OIE plays an important role in improving animal welfare by developing global animal welfare standards. These should assist countries in two important ways: first, by helping them to establish new, or to refine existing, animal welfare legislation, and second, at the OIE regional level, by facilitating interactions between Member Countries as they develop and refine a strategic plan for the advancement of animal welfare. As the OIE standards are compatible with the requirements of Islamic law, issuing animal welfare legislation referring to those standards and implementing them at a national level is highly recommended. A dialogue between the OIE and the Veterinary Services and religious leaders in the region should therefore start with the objective of improving animal welfare.

Keywords

Animal welfare – Driver – Halal slaughter – Islamic slaughter – Middle East – OIE – Religion – World Organisation for Animal Health.

Introduction and principal findings

Animals have played important roles in the history and development of the Middle East, and they continue to have economic importance, both as sources of food, fibre and other products, and in providing livelihoods.

Extensive, as opposed to intensive, production systems predominate in the region, as smallholders own more than 70% of the total animal population (1). The relationship between people and animals in the Middle East is almost always characterised by a direct and personal connection on an individual level. Such close contact with animals reflects

the style of life, culture and social background of the people. Also, the farmers usually show respect, care and kindness for all the animals with which they share their lives, so that it is not common for animals in the region to suffer stress during production (1).

Generally, until now, in many countries of the region, the understanding of animal welfare has been expressed more in terms of religious precepts and humane ethics than via regulations and legislation. However, some countries have developed animal welfare standards, but as yet these have not been well implemented.

However, many animal welfare issues require attention. Some improvements may be achieved by implementing

specific standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). For example, with regard to slaughter for human consumption, the facilities in most abattoirs need improvement, and training of personnel is often lacking. Likewise, standards should be implemented in the areas of animal transport, stray dog control and the management and use of laboratory animals. Moreover, there is a need for standards for working animals, particularly in relation to feeding and resting in the difficult environments of their work.

Unfortunately, animal welfare is not a political priority in many countries in the region, so governmental engagement is limited. Moreover, activities of non-governmental animal advocacy organisations are limited and consumer pressure is almost entirely absent.

Religious, ethical and cultural drivers

Religion, ethics and culture are an important group of drivers in the Middle East region. Religion underpins the personal values that guide most people, regardless of which religion they adhere to. The majority follow Islam and others follow Christianity and Judaism (1). Religion is the foundation and major source of the culture and ethics in the region, and most people believe it is the main driver of all the aspects of their lives. For example, Muslims believe that Islam provides guidance on food, culture, ethics, economics, compassion, kindness, humanity, traditions, societal mores, customs and many other important values.

The actual practices and attitudes of Muslims have always been shaped by Islamic teachings in combination with cultural influences. Islamic teachings tend to be embodied in authoritative texts, while cultural influences are often not (2).

One of the major components of Islamic thinking is consideration for non-human animals. As humans are considered to be speaking animals, we can understand how animals are highly esteemed in Islam. Islam provides considerable support for conscientiously attending to animal welfare. The Qur'an is explicit with regard to the relationship between animals and humans; for example, verse 6 of the sixth chapter (surrat Al-Anam ['the Cattle']) states that, 'There is not a moving (living) creature on earth, or a bird that flies with its two wings, but are communities like you. We have neglected nothing in the Book, then unto their Lord they (all) shall be gathered.' Similarly, while non-human creation is subjugated to human needs, the proper human role is that of conscientious steward and not exploiter (surrat Al-Anaam verse 11). In addition, surrat

Al-Anaam verse 12 states that the earth was not created for humans alone: 'And the earth has He spread out for all living beings' (3).

For example, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him [pbuh]) condemned the beating of animals and forbade striking, branding, or marking them on the face. He cursed and chastised those who mistreated animals and gave praise to those who showed kindness. He also instituted a radical change by prohibiting the common practice of cutting off the tails and humps of living animals for food (3).

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:

- 'There is no man who kills a sparrow or anything beyond that, without its deserving it, but God will ask him about it'
- 'when one of you slaughters, let him complete it', meaning that one should sharpen the knife well and feed, water, and soothe the animal before killing it.

The animal compassion and welfare component of Islam is apparent in the rules laid down for humane slaughter, which include the following:

- animals should have a pre-slaughter rest, be well fed and well looked after at the point of slaughter, and must be alive or deemed to be alive at the time of slaughter
- animals that are slaughtered should be securely restrained, particularly the head and neck, before the throat is cut, and restraining equipment should be comfortable for the animal
- operator competence is of great importance for carrying out satisfactory Halal slaughter
- the knife must be razor sharp and without blemishes or damage
- the animal's carotid arteries, jugular veins, trachea and oesophagus must be severed so as to induce immediate and massive haemorrhage; the spinal cord should not be cut and the head not severed completely
- slaughtering must be done once only, i.e. the slaughtering implement must not be lifted off the animal during slaughtering; multiple acts of slaughter on one animal are prohibited
- slaughtering the animal must be done in such a way that its life departs quickly and it is not left to suffer; bleeding must be spontaneous and complete
- animals should not be shackled and hoisted before bleeding and losing consciousness; furthermore, preparation and dressing of the carcass must be delayed until all signs of life and cerebral reflexes have disappeared.

It is clear that these rules on the process of slaughter were intended to provide a quick, humane, and relatively painless death. Although these rules have been in place for 1,400 years or more, now, in the 21st Century, they are found to closely correspond to the related OIE standards.

However, many current practices that are not in accordance with these teachings may cause great suffering to animals. Unfortunately, many Muslims and Islamic religious leaders are not aware of the suffering that is inflicted on animals during handling, transport, lairage and slaughter itself.

The World Organisation for Animal Health

The initiatives of the OIE represent important drivers for animal welfare globally, including the Middle East region. They include:

- the development of the OIE animal welfare standards (4), which have been accepted and recognised globally and which support and facilitate the intention of countries to establish or modify animal welfare legislation
- the OIE global animal welfare conferences and workshops, which deal explicitly with animal welfare and which encourage and support countries to implement the OIE standards
- other OIE global conferences and Animal Welfare events, which emphasise that consideration of animal welfare is an important component of, for example, veterinary education, understanding the impact of animal diseases, the humane slaughter of livestock, rabies control and the standards for controlling dog populations
- the regular regional workshops for Animal Welfare Focal Points in OIE Member Countries, which support the dissemination of information from the international community to countries in the region, and *vice versa*, as well as communication and exchange of information at regional and national levels.

Perhaps the most important OIE animal welfare initiative in the region is the Regional Animal Welfare Strategy (RAWS) for the Middle East. This action plan, which was developed jointly by the OIE Regional Representation and Member Countries in the region, includes the standards that Member Countries consider to be necessary to improve animal welfare in the region. The strategy recognises the intimate connections that exist between animal welfare and animal health, animal production, increasing consumer

concerns and commercial success. The Member Countries selected a Board to be responsible for regional coordination and for monitoring, and advising on, progress with the implementation of the plan. The strategy, which is based on animal welfare standards, represents a shared vision between the government and the private sector, built upon collaboration between interested parties, and recognises that the Competent Authority should share the responsibilities and cooperate with all stakeholders, including producers, industries, non-governmental organisations, religious leaders, livestock traders and others. The RAWS supports the development of national programmes for raising awareness of animal welfare and educating key players, particularly veterinarians, livestock owners, animal handlers, religious and community leaders and other key groups, such as schoolchildren and women. In the near future, the Board will be a key driving force for improving animal welfare standards in the region.

Conclusions

- The OIE standards are compatible with the requirements of Islamic law, which calls for the protection of animals against cruel practices and makes specific provisions for humane slaughter
- the main drivers that could improve animal welfare in the Middle East are religion, including ethics and culture, as well as the activities of the OIE and the Member Countries involved in developing and implementing the RAWS
- a dialogue between the OIE, Veterinary Services and religious leaders in the region should start with the objective of improving animal welfare
- there is an urgent need to sensitise all persons to the teachings on animal welfare in the Qur'an and the Hadiths
- issuing animal welfare legislation referring to OIE standards and their implementation at the national level is strongly recommended.



Les moteurs des politiques du bien-être animal au Moyen-Orient

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Résumé

Dans la région Moyen-Orient de l'Organisation mondiale de la santé animale (OIE), l'ensemble des valeurs religieuses, éthiques et culturelles constitue un élément moteur important pour la société. Dans nombre de pays de la région, les conceptions en matière de bien-être animal s'expriment davantage en termes de préceptes religieux et d'une éthique de la compassion qu'à travers des réglementations et une législation. En réalité, les normes relatives au bien-être animal n'ont pas encore de cadre réglementaire ou législatif bien établi et il reste bien des problèmes à résoudre dans ce domaine. La prise en compte attentionnée du bien-être des animaux est clairement affirmée dans le Coran. Par exemple, les règles islamiques relatives à l'abattage des animaux sont motivées par le souci d'une mise à mort rapide, exempte de cruauté et relativement indolore. Les souffrances que subissent actuellement les animaux lors de pratiques d'abattage non conformes à cet enseignement religieux peuvent être considérables. Force est de constater en ce ^{xxi}^e siècle que des règles datant de plus de 1400 ans semblent très proches des normes élaborées par l'OIE en la matière. L'OIE joue un rôle important en faveur du bien-être animal par le biais des normes internationales qu'il prépare sur le sujet. Ces normes peuvent apporter aux pays une aide précieuse sous deux aspects : d'une part, en les aidant à concevoir une législation sur le bien-être animal ou, le cas échéant, à améliorer celles qui existent ; d'autre part, en facilitant les interactions entre les Pays Membres d'une région lors de la conception et l'amélioration d'un plan stratégique régional destiné à promouvoir le bien-être animal. Les normes de l'OIE étant compatibles avec les préceptes de la loi islamique, les législations portant sur le bien-être animal devraient se référer à ces normes et en assurer la mise en œuvre au plan national. Il est donc souhaitable que l'OIE, les Services vétérinaires et les autorités religieuses de la région commencent à travailler ensemble dans le but d'améliorer le bien-être animal.

Mots-clés

Abattage halal – Abattage islamique – Bien-être animal – Moteur – Moyen-Orient – OIE – Organisation mondiale de la santé animale – Religion.



Motores de las políticas de bienestar animal en Oriente Medio

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Resumen

En la región de Oriente Medio de la Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal (OIE), religión, ética y cultura forman un grupo de factores que ejercen gran influencia. En muchos países de la región la idea de bienestar animal se expresa más en forma de preceptos religiosos y valores éticos de «compasión» que a través de reglamentos y leyes. De hecho, los textos reglamentarios y legislativos en la

materia aún no se aplican debidamente y hay numerosos problemas de bienestar animal por resolver. El Corán alienta no poco al creyente a preocuparse por el bienestar de los animales. Las reglas islámicas sobre el proceso de sacrificio, por ejemplo, aspiraban a dar al animal una muerte rápida, incruenta y relativamente indolora. Las prácticas actuales que se apartan de esas enseñanzas religiosas pueden causar gran sufrimiento a los animales. Aunque dichas reglas tienen como mínimo 1.400 años de existencia, ahora, en el siglo XXI, se observa que concuerdan estrechamente con las correspondientes normas de la OIE. Este organismo cumple una importante función de fomento del bienestar animal, formulando normas mundiales en la materia que deberían ser útiles a los países en dos importantes sentidos: en primer lugar, ayudándolos a establecer nuevos textos legislativos sobre bienestar animal o a perfeccionar los ya existentes; y en segundo lugar, a la escala de las regiones de la OIE, facilitando las relaciones entre Países Miembros en su labor de elaboración y perfeccionamiento de un plan estratégico para fomentar el bienestar animal. Puesto que las normas de la OIE son compatibles con los preceptos del derecho islámico, es muy recomendable promulgar y aplicar a escala nacional leyes en la materia que remitan a dichas normas. En este sentido, convendría instaurar un diálogo entre la OIE y los Servicios Veterinarios y dirigentes religiosos de la región encaminado a mejorar el bienestar de los animales.

Palabras clave

Bienestar animal – Motor – OIE – Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal – Oriente Medio – Religión – Sacrificio halal – Sacrificio islámico.



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