



# INVISIBLE LIVESTOCK



The crucial role of working livestock  
in sustainable development





# WORKING LIVESTOCK: THE INVISIBLE ENABLERS

The livestock sector is key to the livelihoods and food security of billions of people across the globe, accounting for a third of global agricultural gross production value (FAOSTAT 2013).<sup>1</sup> The High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) describes them as "an engine for the development of the agriculture sector as a whole".<sup>2</sup> Yet, livestock policy and programming often overlooks the full picture by focusing solely on livestock's food production functions. In doing so, it ignores the vital draught power contribution of working livestock in facilitating food production and distribution, and powering global economies while contributing to the Agenda 2030. Working livestock need to be included in sustainable development, agricultural and animal health related projects because of their contribution to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 13**.<sup>3</sup>



## LIVELIHOODS

Working livestock, such as horses, donkeys and mules, provide direct income to support people's livelihoods across a wide range of sectors including agriculture, construction and brick kilns, tourism, mining, and transport. In addition to their vital contribution to the household incomes of their owners and users, they also generate significant economic savings in the transportation of people or goods. In this way, they represent an important asset of the poor and help to keep those that benefit from their labour out of poverty, thereby contributing to SDG 1 (No Poverty).

income they generate, working livestock therefore make a substantial contribution to meeting SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), by promoting enhanced food security and nutrition and sustainable agricultural development in low- and middle-income countries, as well as enabling communities to access water that would otherwise be out of reach.<sup>5</sup>



## RESILIENCE

Working livestock represent an important social protection mechanism, boosting community resilience in the face of disasters and climate. They enable communities to collect water or food from great distances, boost community resilience against climate change impacts like land degradation, and help families to relocate or rebuild homes and infrastructure when needed. The loss of a working animal can be detrimental to those who depend on it. For example, the reduction in household income and the need to pay for transport that was previously free, forces families to switch to less nutritious foods, leave young children unattended to collect water, wood or forage by foot, and take children out of school due to the prohibitive cost of fees, books, transport or uniforms. Lack of manure impacts on harvests and as other livestock are not as well fed, animal-sourced food outputs are also reduced. Overall, working livestock play a key role towards community resilience, contributing to SDGs 1, 2 and 6, as well as 13 (Climate Action).



AGRICULTURE

## MONEY EARNING and SAVING ROLES OF WORKING LIVESTOCK



CONSTRUCTION



TOURISM



MINING



TRANSPORT OF PEOPLE & GOODS



## FOOD SYSTEMS

Working livestock play a fundamental role in agriculture and food systems. They provide draught powered soil tillage and manure for fertiliser. Crucially, they transport feed and water for other livestock, such as cows, buffalos, chickens, sheep and goats, as well as food, water and firewood for households themselves. They are also used to transport sick livestock to animal health posts, helping people to access animal health services. Working horses and donkeys then transport agricultural and livestock produce to markets and milk cooperatives, providing a crucial linkage in the "first mile" of the value chain,<sup>4</sup> between the point of production and all-weather roads that can be easily accessed by other vehicles. Combined with the food-purchasing power provided by the



## WOMEN LIVESTOCK KEEPERS

Our research in Ethiopia, Kenya, India and Pakistan showed us that women prioritise the ownership and use of working animals as a strategy for income generation, relief from domestic burdens and increased status and recognition within their communities, often ranking them above their other animals due to their crucial role in livestock raising contributing to SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

The health of humans, animals, and ecosystems are interlinked. Strong well-resourced animal health systems are pivotal to the realisation of several SDGs, including SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and the implementation of One Health (an approach that aims to balance and optimise the health of people, animals and ecosystems). Through the Action for Animal Health coalition, Brooke calls for stronger animal health systems to operationalise One Health, and also to achieve several SDGs, including 1, 2 and 3.

# FOOD SECURITY

## Roles of working livestock

### THE THREAT OF THE DONKEY SKIN TRADE

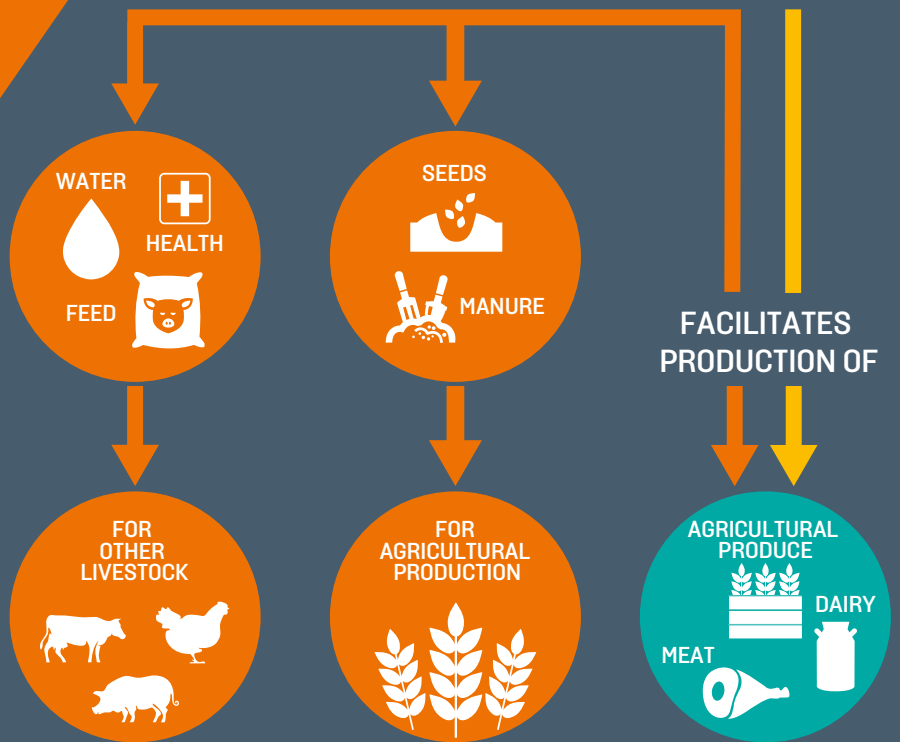
Donkeys are critical to the livelihoods of millions of people in low-and-middle-income countries, and yet their population is under severe threat due to the growing demand for their skins, which are used to produce a traditional Chinese medicine called ejiao. The trade is a threat to animal welfare and to those communities who rely on their donkey for income generation through agriculture and construction (SDG 1, 2, 6). Brooke calls for a ban on the donkey skin trade and engages with stakeholders to stop cross border illegal activity fuelled by the trade, to protect donkeys and livelihoods. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to the impact of losing their donkey to the skin trade. Without their donkey they face a significant increase to their domestic labour and unpaid care work.



CARRY



PLOUGH



EARN MONEY FOR THE OWNER



MARKETS

CARRY

HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS

of people depend on the labour and income their working animals provide for their livelihoods and food security

FACILITATES DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS TO



OWNER BUYS FOOD



FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

## THE CHALLENGE

Despite their indispensable contributions, working livestock remain largely invisible in the eyes of decision and policy makers and are often excluded from definitions of "livestock" as non-food-production animals. The knock-on effect is that they are also then excluded from animal health related initiatives, emergency livestock feeding programmes, agricultural extension services and other livestock programming, depriving communities of the additional benefits these animals could bring. This is reflected in livestock and agricultural censuses, where working livestock are rarely considered and included in key data for policy planning and making.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### BROOKE CALLS FOR:

- Consideration of draught power within livelihoods, sustainable development, agricultural and climate programming
- Appropriate investment to ensure access to suitable services for animal owners, enabling livestock keepers to make better use of their livestock and improve welfare
- Investment in animal health systems more broadly – including upskilling the animal health workforce, securing access to animal medicines and vaccines, and improving surveillance – for sustainable development and to operationalise One Health
- Technical capacity building to implement relevant global policies such as the World Organisation for Animal Health's (WOAH) Standards for the Welfare of Working Equids at national level
- Visibility in economic and market analysis of the contribution of draught power and in livelihoods assessments, to highlight the overlooked role of working animals in these systems
- Inclusion of working livestock in disaster risk reduction and emergency response planning, including in the roll out of Livestock Emergency Guidelines
- Banning damaging trades that impact livelihoods and animal welfare such as the donkey skin trade, cracking down on associated illegal activity that fuels the trade and pooling evidence and research to strengthen regional positions
- Inclusion and enhanced protection of working livestock within livestock policy definitions, censuses and databases with disaggregated data including working animals (more details in the brief "Working Equids in Numbers: Why Data Matters for Policy").

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### Invisible Workers International Report

Through compelling quantitative and qualitative evidence, including Household Economy Approach (HEA) baselines carried out by Brooke with the Food Economy Group (FEG) in India, Pakistan and Kenya, this 2015 report shows the critical and multiple economic contributions that working equine animals make to people's livelihoods.

English, French and Spanish reports available at: [thebrooke.org/invisible-workers](http://thebrooke.org/invisible-workers)

### The Donkey Skin Trade: Challenges and Opportunities for Policy Change

The use of animal derivatives in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) dates back more than 5000 years. Donkey skins are one such animal derivative, the skins are used to produce ejiao, which is a luxury product and believed by some to have a variety of health benefits. The increasing demand for ejiao is putting the global donkey population at risk. This paper published by Brooke in 2022 explores the need for policy change to be bottom up, with local bans in countries where the trade is most damaging and coordinated enforcement of legislation, including the tackling of illegal cross border trade, and underlining how partnership across non-governmental organisations, agencies and government is essential.

Paper available at: [doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13072](https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13072)

### Donkey Skin Trade Policy Brief

Growing demand for ejiao – a gelatin produced from donkey skin and used in traditional Chinese medicine and beauty products – is putting global donkey populations at risk and threatening the livelihoods of millions of people that depend on them. While Africa remains the primary source of both legally and illegally-sourced donkey skins to China, the trade is spreading across the globe. This brief by Brooke explores the global impact of the donkey skin trade. With a spotlight on Kenya – where the donkey population has depleted to critically low levels – it calls for policymakers and influencers to address this urgent issue that is destroying lives and livelihoods across the globe.

Brief available at: [thebrooke.org/file/brooke-donkey-skin-policy-brief](http://thebrooke.org/file/brooke-donkey-skin-policy-brief)

### Voices from Women Research Project

This research project was initiated in 2013 to give women who live and work with draught animals a voice and a platform to express their personal experiences and opinions. Based on research carried out in Ethiopia, Kenya, India and Pakistan, the Invisible Helpers report shows the extent to which women rely on working livestock to fulfil household and community roles.

English and French reports available at: [thebrooke.org/voices-from-women](http://thebrooke.org/voices-from-women)

### Action for Animal Health

In 2021, Brooke joined the Action for Animal Health (A4AH) coalition, advocating for the prioritisation of strong animal health systems by governments and international agencies, through 5 pillars of action: support community engagement and equitable access to animal health services; increase the numbers and improve the skills of the animal health workforce; close the veterinary medicines and vaccines gap; improve animal disease surveillance; enhance collaboration on One Health.

The case for investing in animal health to support One Health' available at: [actionforanimalhealth.org](http://actionforanimalhealth.org)

### Working Equids in Numbers: Why Data Matters for Policy

Policy makers need reliable data to make informed decisions to better support working animals' welfare and their communities' livelihoods. Data is also essential for disease surveillance and epidemiological research, as well as responding to wider threats like climate change, water access and food insecurity. This policy brief showcases the results of the report "A Landscaping Analysis of Working Equid Population Numbers in LMICs, with Policy Recommendations" commissioned by Brooke and published in 2021.

Report available at: [thebrooke.org/landscaping-analysis-working-equid](http://thebrooke.org/landscaping-analysis-working-equid)  
Policy brief available at: [thebrooke.org/our-work/data-working-equids](http://thebrooke.org/our-work/data-working-equids)

### Brooke - FEG Livelihoods Baseline Proposal

This brief, produced together with the Food Economy Group (FEG), presents a proposal for the systematic inclusion of working equine animals in livelihood baseline assessments, which are often the basis for development and disaster programming, using the HEA methodology.

Proposal available at: [thebrooke.org/livelihoods-baseline](http://thebrooke.org/livelihoods-baseline)

### FAO - Brooke Experts Meeting Report

"The Role, Impact and Welfare of Working (Traction and Transport) Animals" details the findings of the 2011 expert meeting hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and Brooke on the roles of working livestock in human development.

Report available at: [fao.org/3/a-i3381e.pdf](http://fao.org/3/a-i3381e.pdf)



Learn more about Brooke's External Affairs team here

- 1 FAOSTAT (2013). Available at: <http://faostat3.fao.org/home/E>
- 2 HLPE (2016). *Sustainable agricultural development for food security and nutrition: what roles for livestock?* A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome. Available at: [www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe](http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe)
- 3 / 5 United Nations (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>
- 4 AFCAP (2013). *Agricultural Value Chains: An Illustrated Booklet*. Available at: [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a3640f0b652dd000606/AFCAP-GEN-060-D-agricultural-market-demands-Illustrated-Booklet.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a3640f0b652dd000606/AFCAP-GEN-060-D-agricultural-market-demands-Illustrated-Booklet.pdf)





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