

# MONDAY DEVELOPMENTS

The Latest Issues and Trends in International Development Assistance



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# Animal Welfare

**Sustainable development can benefit from partnership with animal-focused organizations.**

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**A**LTHOUGH WE TACKLE development and relief from different perspectives, the animal welfare community has much in common with the traditional humanitarian community, which is why we belong to InterAction. Indeed, neither can fully reach their potential without the other.

I first saw this in the 1980s while serving in the Sinai Peninsula on detached duty from the Department of State. It was my third time living in Egypt. During my first stay in the 1950s, I learned to ride camels from a police brigade near my home in Maida and since the camels followed me home regularly, the police decided I needed to learn how to wash and ride them. Years later while teaching desert survival and Bedouin culture, I realized that I hadn't ever been on a caravan longer than about twenty miles, so I joined one from Somalia into Cairo to learn how to herd. I also did it so that when I entered a Bedouin camp, I would have a better idea of what motivated the inhabitants.

One day in a market, a young camel became angry and protested loudly. He was beaten to the ground and burned alive! I can still smell the flesh and hear his screams. What I saw was great cruelty of course, but it was also a lesson in the interaction of development and animal welfare. Killing the camel meant a loss of investment for the herders. Further, the buyers lost a valuable asset needed to develop their farms. Everyone lost, including the camel, most horribly. For less and more dramatic ways that is why our communities need to collaborate more than we do.

Of the world's one billion very poorest people, over 650 million totally depend on animals for a living, according to the UN. Take away their animals and the people go from poverty to desperation.

Of course, many more hundreds of millions depend on animals for food, jobs and culture. Further, harming animals can spread disease, as we have seen through the bush meat trade. Harming animals also reduces productivity on the farm and in the slaughterhouse. Intensive farming hurts the climate and many poor farming practices damage the environment in general. To tackle those issues, like any responsible humanitarian NGO, The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is prepared to operate in any political or physical environment so long as effective animal welfare (in our case) can be produced and so long as the staff involved can operate in reasonable safety. After all, as with people, animals in greatest need often live in harsh environments like droughts or floods, and in conflicts or lands managed by governments or local bands with terrible human right records. The animals did not ask to live there and should not be left without assistance simply due to an accident of residence.

We have been doing our work since 1964, when we first established a reputation of which we are proud by sending an expert from Massachusetts named John Walsh and his volunteers to save thousands of animals in an 870-square mile area of dense rain forest in Suriname. A man-made flood related to the building of a dam prompted a large-scale human evacuation. The society took a moral stand that it could not passively sit by while animals died a terrible death due to rising lake water. That willingness to tackle such a crisis set the tone for four decades protecting animals: from floods in Europe and South America, to famine in India, earthquakes in Peru, abandoned animals in the 1974 Cyprus conflict (in partnership with the World Health



Organization), working and zoo animals in war-torn Afghanistan in 2004, and livestock harmed by the Myanmar cyclone in 2008 (in partnership with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization). In Myanmar, an operation I supported, we operated in a country with the very worst human rights record; but because without livestock the rice could not have been brought in, and because without rice, people would have starved, we went in. In 1992, WSPA was in war-struck Bosnia, providing assistance to stray dogs, cattle and zoo animals, which in turn helped people. We did the same in Gaza in 2009.

All these operations took place within the rubric of disaster management; but what is often misunderstood is that disaster management is really just a part of sustainable development. We also work with farm animals to reduce cruelty from poorly managed slaughterhouses, to foster better livestock care through model farms and protect wildlife, zoo and entertainment animals; all have a role in sustainable development. What that leads to is a need for collaboration between the animal welfare and development NGOs. After all, disaster management and development is more than simply putting people in shelters or about money. It is about fostering a sustainable recovery after an emergency and creating a society that can resist hazards turning into crises. This requires a holistic approach that benefits all parties. WSPA looks forward to working with its fellow InterAction members to that end.

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