



## Understanding animal welfare and ethics for a start in Nigeria: A review

<sup>1</sup>Akinyemi, P. I., <sup>2</sup>Akinwande, V. O and <sup>1\*</sup>Babayemi, O. J.

<sup>1</sup>Department of Animal Science, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun state, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Author: [ojyemi@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ojyemi@yahoo.co.uk); +2348023430684

### ABSTRACT

*This review highlights issues on animal welfare and ethics in Nigeria. While these concepts are well developed and practised in other parts of the world, it is yet to take off in Nigeria. The review indicates that animal welfare is a situation in which the animal is in complete psychological and physical health. Domesticated or captured animals should be provided with adequate feed and water regularly. Animals in custody of the handlers should be free from fear, beating, torture, pain, suffering and cruelty. Good housing and healthcare services for animals are expected to be proper. Well-being and comfort of animals on the farm, during transport, at market and in confinement are priority areas for animal welfare. Getting animals accustomed to people makes them calm and easier to handle.*

**Keywords:** Farm Animals, Ethics, Handling, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, it is observed that the practice of animal ethics is lacking or non-existent. Animal ethics and welfare issues are hardly taught in schools and rarely tabled for discussion at scientific workshops and conferences. The reason for this fragrant neglect is not known. Livestock farmers may be absolved of blame since they are generally ignorant of animal management and welfare issues (Babayemi and Bamikole, 2010). However, the concern of the populace towards animal ethical practices is a fast growing field in some developed countries of the world especially in the United States. This may be so due to its positive effects on the animal, their products and by-products for the use of man. In the enlightened societies, the right of livestock is considered. Animal welfare and ethical practices have been entrenched in developed nations as there are laws and principles to be followed. Babayemi and Bamikole (2010) reported that in Nigeria, ethical issues pertaining to farm animals and pets are rarely discussed in scientific meetings, seminars, conferences, workshop, and local associations of professionals and non-professionals, indicating that the awareness is low. Thus, many of the natural laws guiding ethical farm animal management are often disobeyed and neglected by animal handlers due to the high level of ignorance on the basic ethical practices expected to be given to the animal, thus subjecting the animals to untold pain, suffering, hardship and discomfort. It is noted that many of the livestock handlers are of the opinion that animals have no right and that they are just in existence merely for food and gain (Babayemi and Bamikole, 2010).

Erroneous ideologies of animals being unintelligent, stubborn, lacking souls, totally mortal, incorrigible, and difficult to handle are some reasons why some handlers express cruelty to animals. As a result of these erroneous believes, it was reported that cattle are made to walk long distances in search for pasture and water (Daodu *et al.*, 2008). Sometimes cattle are directed by thrashing them mercilessly with whips or hitting them with a rod called “*sanda*”. Some cattle handlers exercise cruelty to animals by sitting, standing or placing loads either heavy or light on them. In the developed countries, concern for welfare of animals and obeying rules and regulations guiding production and management are high.

In Nigeria, small and large animals are transported long hours and days to market without food and water and sufficient space to permit turning in the vehicle, such that animals defecate and urinate on each other. At times, when loading the animals, ropes are tied while the forelegs and the necks are deliberately turned aside in order to create space for more animals to be loaded. Animals being subjected to this condition suffer untold hardship and the meat quality may be low and unacceptable by the consumers. There are no loading or unloading facilities during animal transportation, such that animals are dragged and pulled into vehicles forcefully. Also, the weak, sick and injured cattle are carried with the use of locally made wooden wheel barrow called “*omolanke*” to the vehicle. The weak animals are also dragged into the vehicle with the use of rope, thus inflicting more pain on them. Ropes in some

cases are deliberately tied on the mouth and nose of some so called 'wicked' or 'uncontrollable' cattle. The animal is then pulled to facilitate the movement of the handlers to the desired destination. In other cases, the tail of the cattle could be folded upward in order to force the animal to move in the direction that the handler desires. All these inflict serious pain on the animal regardless of their condition and state of health. In some cases, cattle handlers subject the animals to unethical handling such as kicks, overriding, overloading, torture, infuriating, frustrating, harassment, beating without mercy. It has been observed that certain animals under confinement have been deprived of essential necessities as comfortable space and quality diet (Babayemi and Bamikole, 2010).

Some philosophers and animal right activists have fought for the rights of the animals and pushed for equal treatment of animals as humans. They demanded for moral concern for animals which they believe serve as a check on efficiency exacted at the cost of animal welfare. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), the oldest animal welfare organization in the world has worked through its campaigns' to turn public opinion against the ill-treatment of animals. The only animal right protection organization in Nigeria is the Nigeria Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA). The NSPCA could be said to be moribund as the activities of this organization are unknown in the society. The questions we need to ask as the case may be in Nigeria are

1. Do people know what to do with their animals?
2. Are the Animal Scientists aware of the need for accepting the proper implementation of animal rights?
3. Do animals have any right?
4. Can we equate animals with human beings?

Thus, the present review was undertaken to enlighten people that handle livestock issues relating to animal ethics and welfare.

## **BASIC IDEOLOGY OF ANIMAL ETHICS AND WELFARE**

Rollin (1995) defined ethics as "the set of rules, principles and belief about right and wrong, good and bad, justice and injustice, duty and obligation which governs people's behavior". It is an aspect of philosophy which investigates human conducts as far as such conducts to animal welfare make the relationship between the animals and their handlers important and cordial. Animal ethics essentially has to do with carrying out the right thing and doing the acceptable thing for the animals, oblige change in attitudes and

practices towards them. Ethics and animal welfare are not stumbling blocks for the production of livestock but to assist their proper management. It also showed that animals have sense organs and therefore feel pain and displeasure (Singer, 1990). Therefore, livestock producers and handlers have a duty to oppose inhumane treatment of farm animals at any stage of their life especially during handling, transport, housing, castration, dehorning, branding and slaughtering. Animal owners and handlers are in the best position to ensure the general well-being and the execution of humane practices on animals. Duncan and Dawkins (1983), described welfare as a condition in which animal is in complete mental and physical health. There are different ethical concerns that motivate the protection of animals.

## **Interaction between animal and humans**

Animals are described as sensitive creatures that exhibit long memories of activities. Humans are regularly in the presence of farm animals during feeding and other caretaking chores. Moreover, most animals have to be handled several times in their lifetime for procedures of a routine such as processing, moving to market, hoof-trimming and reproductive checks or emergency nature such as taking body temperature or drug administration. Stress associated with necessary procedures can be minimized if the animals are accustomed to having positive experiences with humans. Their productive performance reflects the level of fear or anxiety they experience when humans are close by. Grandin (2000) reported that excitability in animal can be reduced and the animal will be easier to drive if the producers walk through the pens every day. Direct human attention and gentle care produced calmer, less excitable animals (Grandin, 1998). Most animals spend only a fraction of their lifetime being transported from one place to another. These times often constitute the most stressful experience they have. The recall of being handled and transported can cause anxiety, fear and stress, making the animals more difficult to handle and thus tempting the handlers to become physically abusive. Livestock movement should be at a slow pace with handler movements keeping the animals moving in orderly manner.

## **Animal law or legislation**

Within recent decades, several comprehensive pieces of animal welfare legislation have been introduced in Europe, many of them constraining the intensive confinement of farm animals. Switzerland has some of the oldest and stringent animal welfare laws. The Swiss Federal Act on Animal Protection includes basic principles that animals should be treated in the manner

that best complies with their needs. Members of the European Union (EU) have increasingly regulated husbandry practices such as phasing out conventional battery cages for laying hens and gestation crates for sows and requiring group housing for veal calves after 8 week of age (Wilkins, 1997). The property section of the Canadian Criminal Code states that it is a federal offense to willfully cause or permit to be caused by being owner, unnecessary pain, suffering or injury to animals while they are being driven or conveyed. Sweden is a country with a particular progressive approach to animal protection that respects the creativity and individuality of producers while maintaining quality standards. It is important to note that animal protection is also receiving attention in developing countries (Favre and Hall, 2004), although the interpretation and enforcement of regulations may vary among countries. Taiwan Animal Protection Law was promulgated by the president in 1998 stipulating that persons owning or caring for animals must be 15 years of age or older. He must provide adequate food, water, sufficient space of activities and other appropriate care for the animals to prevent them from unnecessary suffering, mistreatment or hurt.

### **Animal health and welfare**

Maintaining high standards of animal health and welfare on the farm is essential for efficient production, establishing consumer confidence and managing risk of disease to both humans and animals. The farm animals are expected to be accorded freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury or disease, freedom to express normal behaviour and freedom from fear and distress. While these freedoms provide general guidelines to avoid suffering and other harms, the specific areas where guidance is essential are on-farm welfare, welfare in transport, welfare at market and welfare at slaughter (Defra, 2006)

### **On-farm welfare**

The Welfare of Farmed Animals, England (Regulations, 2007) detailed the minimum standards under which farm animals must be kept. Similar legislation exists in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The regulations require that anyone tending animals must be familiar with and have access to appropriate welfare codes. The codes are specific to each species of animal and aim to establish the highest standards of husbandry. They cover general requirements for stockmanship, health, feeding, breeding, accommodation and management. Animal health carries out welfare inspections which may be planned visits, spot checks or following up allegations of poor welfare. Notice can be served to

enforce regulations and where necessary, can initiate prosecutions for welfare offences. One of the regulation requirements applying to sheep welfare includes: staff competence, diet, inspections, protection from weather, breeding procedures, accommodation, tethering, ventilation, lighting, hygiene, bedding and lying areas. Defra (2006) also produced a series of management guides covering a range of issues including lameness, heat stress, condition scoring, improving lamb survival and feeding in late pregnancy.

### **Welfare in transport**

The Welfare of Animals Transport Order (2006) implemented Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transportation and related operations. This legislation covers the rules on transporting livestock, including requirements on vehicles, water, feed, rest, transporter competence and documentation. These include ensuring that they are not injured or unnecessarily suffered, they are fit to travel, those transporting and handling sheep and goats are trained and competent and that rules on journey times, resting, watering and feeding are observed (Defra, 2006). The law says that animals shall not be suspended by mechanical means nor lifted or dragged by the head, horns and tail. No person shall use excessive force to control animals. No person shall use any instrument which is capable of inflicting an electric shock to control any animal. No person should use any stick goad or other instrument or thing to hit or prod any cattle of six months or under. Animals shall be loaded and unloaded using suitable ramps, bridges, gangways or mechanical lifting gear so as to prevent injury or unnecessary suffering to any animals. The flooring of any loading equipment shall be constructed so as to prevent slipping. Ramps, bridges, gangways and any loading platforms shall be provided on each side with protection which is of sufficient strength, length, and height to prevent any animal using the equipment from falling or escaping, and positioned so that it will not result in injury. Any animal may be loaded or unloaded by means of manual lifting or carrying if the animal is of a size that it can be lifted by not more than two persons and the operation is carried out without causing injury or unnecessary suffering to the animal. Sound design of facilities and equipment as reported by Grandin (1993) is a critical factor in proper handling and transport.

Transportation of livestock is undoubtedly the most stressful and injurious stage in chain of operations between farm and slaughter house and contributes significantly to poor animal welfare and loss of

production (Van, 2001). It was reported by Galyean *et al.* (1981) that transport stress can lower rumen function in beef steers compared to subject to feed withdrawal.

### Housing and welfare of animals

Housing is one of the necessities of life and this is applicable to animals too. Housing serves as a place of abode and protects animals from being exposed to unfavourable or inclement weather conditions, predators and theft. Good animal welfare demands provision of an appropriate environment which include shelter (housing) and a comfortable resting place for the animals (FAWC, 2004). Cattle, sheep and goats are always kept in paddocks without shelter and buildings without roof. They are also found on the streets without protection. This exposes animals to danger of theft and harsh weather conditions such as cold and scorching heat of the sun. Local poultry birds are made to sleep on trees without minding the danger of predators. All these bring stress on animals and can reduce their performance. Fraser and Broom (1990) and Broom and Johnson (1993) reported that in order to maintain an acceptable or good welfare, the animals should be able to cope with its environment and must be able to satisfy the biological needs (Curtis, 1987; Hurnik and Lehman, 1988).

### Handling and welfare of animals

The first principle of animal handling is to avoid getting the animal excited. It takes up to 30 minutes for an animal to calm down and its heart rate to return to normal after rough handling (Stermer *et al.*, 1981). Calm animals move more easily and are less likely to bunch. Reducing stress on livestock during handling will help reduce sickness and enable cattle to go back on feed more quickly. Many detrimental effects of handling stressors on animal performance and health are likely due to fear. Making cattle accustomed to people will make it calm and easier to handle (Boivin *et al.*, 1992 and Hutson, 1985). An animal's first experience with a person or pieces of equipment should be made as positive as possible.

In Nigeria, cattle, sheep, goats and pigs are compelled to obey their handlers by being hit with rods and thrashed mercilessly with whips. They are also kicked along, dragged with rope on the neck or foot and beat without passion in order to comply with the command of their handlers. Such punishments are meted to animal from time to time when they disobey. Birds are lifted off the ground either by the base of both wings and legs with their heads turned upside down. In some cases birds are tied by both legs and wings. These inhumane handlings always result in wounds, bruises

and abrasions of skin which can serve as entrance for pathogenic disease organisms. They also reduce the skin quality of the animals. It should be noted that the injuries sustained by the animals during rough handling are accompanied with pains and the animals feel it. Welfare has to do with what animal experiences and feelings (Dawkins, 1990).

### CONCLUSION

This review, which was based on issues of animal welfare and ethics, showed there were laws and regulations expected to guide the operations and management of animals. It revealed that animals have emotion and feelings of hunger, pain and fear. Animals are to be cared for and should be accorded dignity by providing good housing and health services. Welfare on-farm, during transport, at market and accommodation are supposed to be the priority for animal welfare.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning this manuscript.

### REFERENCES

- Babayemi, O. J. and M. A. Bamikole. 2010. Ethics and Animal Welfare: Is it possible in Nigeria? *Proc. 35<sup>th</sup> Conf. Soc. For Anim. Prod.* 14 – 17 march, 2010. Univ. of Ibadan, Nigeria. Pp. 732 – 734.
- Boivin X., R. LeNeindre, J. M. Chupin, J. P. Garel, and G. Trillat. 1992. Influence of breed and early management on ease of handling and open-field behaviour of cattle. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 48:430.
- Broom, D. and K. Johnson. 1993. Stress and animal welfare. Chapman and Hall, London.
- Bryant, M. J. 1972. The social environment: behaviour and stress in housed livestock. *Vet. Rec.* 90 (22), 351 – 359.
- Curtis, S. E. 1987. Animal well-being and animal care. *Vet. Clin. N. Am. (Food Anim. Pract.)* 3(2), 369 – 382.
- Daodu, M. O., O. J. Babayemi and E. A. Iyayi. 2008. Herd composition and management practices of cattle production by pastoralists in Oyo area of Southwest Nigeria. *Livestock Research for Rural Development*. Volume 21, Article 66. Retrieved May3, 2009, from <http://www.irrd.org/irrd21/5/daod21066.htm>.
- Dawkins, M. S. 1990. From an animal's point of view. Motivation, fitness and animal welfare. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13:1 – 16.
- Duncan, I. J. H. 1993. Welfare is to do with what animals feel. *J. agric. Environ. Ethics*, 6(Suppl.2).

- Duncan, I. J. H. and M. S. Dawkins. 1983. The problem of accessing 'well-being' and 'suffering' in farm animals. In indicators relevant to farm animal welfare (D. Smidt, ed). Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 13 – 24.
- Favre, D. and C. F. Hall. 2004. Comparative National Animal Welfare Laws Michigan State University College of Law, Animal Legal and Historical Center, East Lansing, MI.
- Fraser, A. F. and D. M. Broom 1990. Farm animal behaviour and welfare 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Bailliere tindall, London.
- Grandin, T. 1993. Handling facilities and restraint of range cattle. In: T. Grandin (Ed.) Livestock Handling and Transport P43. CAB International, Ewalingford, Oxon, U.K.
- Grandin, T. 1998. Handling methods and facilities to reduce stress on cattle. *Veterinary Clinics of North America*, 14:325 – 341.
- Grandin, T. 2000. Effects of animal welfare audits of slaughter plants by a major fast food company on cattle handling and stunning practice. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* 216:848 – 851.
- Hurnik, J. F. and H. Lehman 1988. Ethics and farm animals welfare. *J. Agric. Ethics*, 1(4), 305 – 318.
- Hutson, G. D. 1985. The influence of barley food rewards on sheep movement through a handling system. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 14:263 – 273.
- Rollin, B. 1995. Farm animal welfare: Social, bioethical and research issues. Iowa
- Singer, P. 1990. Animal Liberation. Random House, New York, NY State University Press, Ames.
- Stermer, R. A., T. H. Camp, and D. G. Stevens. 1981. Feeder cattle stress during handling and transportation American Society of Agricultural Engineers Technical Paper No. 81 – 6001 St. Joseph, Michigan.
- The Welfare of Farm Animals (Transport) Regulations. 2000. Schedule 1 paragraphs 22-27.
- Van E. H. 2001. The biology of stress and its application to livestock housing and transportation assessment. *J. Anim. Sci.* 79 (E. Suppl.): E260 – E267.