

The Necessity of Developing National Animal Welfare Protocols in Bangladesh and Duties of Veterinarians - *M. Murshidul Ahsan*

The term welfare refers to multidimensional concept. It comprises both physical and mental health and includes several aspects, such as physical comfort, absence of hunger and disease, possibilities to perform motivated behaviour, and so on. Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the condition in which it lives. Now it is becoming an increasing concern around the world (Seng and Laporte, 2005). The importance attributed to different aspects of animal welfare may vary person to person.

Both failure to cope with the environment and difficulty in coping are indicators of poor welfare. Suffering and poor welfare often occur together, but welfare can be poor without suffering and welfare should not be defined solely in terms of subjective experiences. The indicators of poor welfare include the following: reduced life expectancy, impaired growth, impaired reproduction, body damage, disease, immunosuppression, adrenal activity, behaviour, anomalies, and self narcotisation. The health of the individual is an important part of its welfare (Broom and Fraser 2007). There is a critical relationship between animal health and animal welfare. **EU Animal Welfare Quality® Assessment Protocol** mentioned four main principles to identify animal welfare, such as good feeding, good housing, good health, and appropriate behaviour. The following four questions correspond the justification of above mentioned four principles:

Are the animals properly fed and supplied with water?

Are the animals properly housed?

Are the animals healthy?

Does the behavior of the animals reflect optimized emotional state?

Each principle comprises two to four criteria. Criteria are independent of each other and form an exhaustive but minimal list. The following table contains the summary of welfare principles and welfare criteria of **EU Welfare Quality® Assessment Protocol** with some major measuring parameters.

Welfare Principles	Welfare Criteria	Measure
Good Feeding	1. Absence of prolong hunger 2. Absence of prolong thirst	Feed supply, Water supply
Good Housing	3. Comfort around housing 4. Thermal comfort 5. Ease of movement	Flooring, bedding, slipping, falling, moving/turning around or backwards
Good Health	6. Absence of injuries 7. Absence of disease 8. Absence of pain induced by the management procedures	Lameness, bruises, absence of chronic or infectious disease, faulty management
Appropriate Behavior	9. Expression of social behavior 10. Expression of other behavior 11. Good human-animal relationship 12. Positive emotional state	Vocalization, coercion, struggling, kicking, jumping, moving/turning around or backwards

The measurement of these principles and criteria are applicable on farm, during transportation of animal and at slaughter houses of each species separately. The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) guiding some valuable principles of animal welfare in *OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code*. They mentioned internationally recognized ‘**five freedoms**’. These are freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition; freedom from fear and distress; freedom from physical and thermal discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; and freedom to express normal patterns of behavior.

Livestock is an integral component of the agricultural economy of Bangladesh performing a central role in the livelihoods of poor people. In the national census of 2001 total population of the Bangladesh estimated 129.25 million among them 23.39 % were urban people and 76.61% were rural people (BBS 2001). It is assumed that more than 75% people rely on livestock to some degree for their livelihood. Livestock provide a source for food, nutrition, income, savings, draft power, manure, transport, and a host of other social and cultural functions. In rural areas cow dung (manure) still plays an important role as fertilizer and fuel. In 2004, the share of livestock sub-sector in agricultural GDP was nearly 16% (GOB, 2004) and it is predicted by IFPRI that it will rise to 19.9% by the year 2020 (Delgado *et al.*, 1999). Indigenous livestock species are adapted to the harsh climate, poor nutrition, and they are easy to care. Most of the indigenous livestock are reared by backyard farming system and owners of these vast livestock are very poor. Though they love their animals very much but they are unable to provide proper nutrition to their animals, therefore those animals mostly suffer from malnutrition and parasitic infestations. Improvements in rural and farm animal welfare can often improve health condition of rural livestock in accordance with its productivity and hence lead to economic benefits and food safety.

Most of the people of Bangladesh are Muslims (88.3%) and Hindus (10.5%) (BBS, 1991). Beef and buffen are lawful/legal (Halal) to eat to Muslims. Cattle and buffalo are sacred animals to Hindus and cannot be slaughtered and eaten. Indians defy these animals like mother and in India, most of the states ban cattle and buffalo slaughtering. India has the world largest bovine population. DLS (2005) estimated that 26% of total meat production (0.78 million tons) of Bangladesh is beef and buffen meat and around 40% of slaughtered bovine are cross border traded from India. Another survey indicated that around 1.7 million cattle imported from India into Bangladesh each year. Some of these are used as draft animals for cultivation and the rest, about 1.5 million, are slaughtered per annum for meat production (Rahman, 2007). Transport and handling methods of imported bovine are at very primitive level. Animals are forced to walk long distances or transported in overcrowded vehicles without feeding, water and rest over harsh road. Frequently they must travel on foot for several days to reach the abattoir, which negatively affect the quality of the meat, especially if watering and feeding is absent during the travel. Ahsan *et al.*, 2014 conducted a study in the local slaughter houses of six representative districts in Bangladesh which shows that 21.52% animals were in very poor health condition, 21.19% animals were injured and 11.25% animals had other clinical signs. Among these animals most of the injured animal got injuries during transportation by the truck.



Figure: The slaughter area besides a city dump and human toilet in *Jautal*, Chittagong (Ahsan *et al.*, 2014) (Left) and Injured Cattle due to inhumane methods of transportation in Faridpur (Ahsan *et al.*, 2014) (Right).

Like most of the developing countries of the world, modern restraint devices are unavailable in local slaughter houses in Bangladesh. Stunning is fully absent due to lack of facilities. Only one modern meat industry facility is producing cattle and buffalo meat and additional 3-4 are on the process to launch (Sarder, 2011). Rope casting before slaughtering is extensively practiced in local slaughter houses of Bangladesh. The rope casting methods show some variation from region to region. The specific procedure of rope casting during slaughter without stunning creates welfare concerns due to stress of resisting restraint; prolonged restraint and bruising of the animal. The restraint should be kept as short as possible (OIE 2011). In Bangladesh, like some other Muslim countries, Muslim Scholars permit nonlethal methods of pre slaughter stunning during conditions that animals are alive at the time of slaying and must die of bleeding rather than blow or electrocutions (Chambers and Grandin 2001; IFB, 2000).

There are many “self-made” small field abattoirs in rural and urban areas, small towns and even in cities where slaughtering is carried out by unauthorized butchers in the fields, bushes, backyards or street corners. There is neither any pre-slaughter care nor ante-mortem examination nor any humane method of slaughtering nor cool chains for the meat. Sarder (2010) mentioned that only 15% of the slaughtered animals were butchered at abattoir in Dhaka City Corporation while the remaining were slaughtered in open places, beside the road sides and meat shops adjacent to the drains. Implementation of “**Animal Slaughter and Meat Control Act**” is fully absent. We know that every 1st class municipality requires at least one veterinarian to ensure food safety from slaughter houses. But in our country we found 1 or 2 veterinarians in four old city corporations (Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Chittagong) with very limited administrative power. Other than city corporations only Tongi Municipality have one veterinarian. Obviously these numbers are insufficient for these big cities. Ahsan *et al.* (2014) found that Dogs, Crows and Chickens easily entered at the slaughtered area and some slaughter houses situated at dwelling houses and in vicinity human toilets, drain and public road side. Thus public health concern and risk of zoonotic diseases is increased and also decreased economic productivity of meat.

From the above facts we can easily realize the immense need to develop national animal welfare protocol like EU’s for ensuring animal welfare in livestock and also for improving animal health and production. The government should be initiative to implement the law and develop a standard animal welfare protocol. The government also should appoint requisite number of veterinarians for these purposes. Veterinarians have a strong and broad scientific background, professional ethics that bound veterinarians to work for the benefit of animal welfare. Real veterinarians maintain regular and close contact with animal. They are trusted by the society people as a source of practical and reliable advice for wellbeing of animal. Thus the veterinarian can easily put great contribution to persuade the society people about animal welfare. Professional organizations of vets, vet educational institutions and state veterinary services should negotiate with the government for developing **animal welfare protocol**, adequate manpower and legislative power of implementing “**Slaughter House and Meat Control Act**”.

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