

Viewpoint

Performing in the aid circus

David Love thinks that vets should be contributing more effectively in the field of international development.

THE Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) charged with monitoring aid from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) reported in 2011 that more than US \$73 billion had been appropriated for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan since 9/11 and up to US \$17 billion in each of the last two years (SIGAR 2011).

Inevitably questions about the effectiveness of the aid are raised but the report goes on to indicate that a mere 30 cents in every dollar goes to aid – the remainder is spent on administration, overheads, security, and so on. Frequently, however, less than half of those 30 cents reach the ground; the rest is lost, stolen or misappropriated. Add in the cost of the USAID's bureaucratic superstructure – including \$500,000 annually for each US employee in Kabul, and the supporting staffs in Washington – and something less than 10 cents of every dollar actually goes to helping Afghans. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee (2011) report concluded that few, if any, of these aid programmes are sustainable in the long term.

The USAID is by far the biggest contributor of aid in developing countries but I suspect that funds donated by the EU, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and other international NGOs and government agencies suffer a similar fate.

It is, of course, not all bad news, as the funds support a large community of aid workers who might otherwise be unemployed and dependant on social security payments; and much of the funding is returned to the 'mother' country in the form of wages, taxes and home-based expenses. However, such revelations do, in my opinion, emphasise the need for the money that reaches the people to be spent wisely, and for that we need to employ the best available skills to



support projects that deliver appropriate technology and training to ensure sustainability.

There are far too many white elephants, born of western ideals, littering the developing world and the biggest (repetitive) mistake that the aid industry makes is to deliver what is available as distinct from what is really needed. We also have more than our share of professional tourists working in the sector, often supplemented by optimistic volunteers, many of whom have little practical experience and thus set unrealistic and unachievable targets leading to frustration on the parts of both project and local staff.

Veterinarians have an extremely important role as a source of expertise and knowledge for the general public, animal keepers and policy makers, and in ensuring acceptable standards of animal production, health and welfare, disease surveillance and control, water quality and food security and safety in developing countries. With our ability to take an overview of the situation, we must be prepared to challenge accepted philosophies and practices and contribute to the many facets of international aid. Unfortunately, in the world of aid, veterinarians are not generally recognised as the first choice livestock, food or water specialists, these roles falling mainly to agronomists and engineers.

In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported on neglected tropical zoonotic diseases and recommended appropriate veterinary public health measures as one of five strategies for preventing and controlling such diseases (Anon 2010a). According to the One Medicine concept, 'there is a crucial role for veterinarians in the public health arena' and the Global Risk Forum's (GRF's) One Health Summit in 2012 aimed to consolidate efforts in this sector (GRF 2012).

The EC Health and Consumer Directorate, with support from the Federation of Veterinarians in Europe (European Commission 2011) has highlighted that 'veterinarians have an



The use of solar- and wind-powered water pumping and purification is viable and sustainable. Safe water should be the basis of all health interventions for both humans and animals. (Facilities shown developed by Trunz Water Systems Ag). Inset: Water before and after purification

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Too many 'white elephants' litter the landscape of the developing world – at least this unused 'improved' slaughterhouse provides a home for two families



Food but no water: dehydrated cattle in Pakistan

important role . . . in animal welfare'.

However, in societies where human welfare is not practised or even recognised, we may be over-optimistic of the likely success.

Nutrition and water

Animals that do not have an adequate intake of food and water cannot be expected to provide highly nutritional products for human consumption, and regrettably this is an area largely overlooked by the international aid agencies deployed to address the problems of hunger and food security in the human populations. In the wake of the Pakistan floods in 2010, I visited some of the worst affected areas to advise on solutions for reconstruction. I was appalled by the lack of coordination between the various sectors deployed to support health, food, water and shelter for the millions of displaced persons and their animals.

Dehydrated cows had bellies full of dry fodder but, without water, rumination had ceased and there was no milk production. Unfortunately, the link between the availability of water to cows to provide sustainable milk production seems not to have been considered in the overall strategy to ensure adequate nutrition for very young children; it seems that each sector has its own agenda and has little interest or ability to share information or expertise. One year on, it was interesting to note that the billions of aid provided to Pakistan in 2010 had been largely ineffective and, as a result, last year's floods merely exacerbated an already dire situation.

Water contaminated by microbes (especially faecal organisms) is still responsible for significant deaths in children and adults in developing countries (WHO 2010) and has been shown to have a negative impact on production performance in poultry in Europe (Anon 2010b)

Development projects always have targets way beyond the reality, needs and aspirations of local people; unfortunately, simple proposals with achievable targets are not considered 'sexy' by international donors and, while attempts to improve

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food safety by constructing, say, improved slaughterhouses are commendable, teaching local people improved techniques emphasising cleanliness and hygiene can contribute significantly to safeguarding fresh produce, provided the products are not subsequently contaminated by dirty water and utensils.

Livestock products

The importation of 'high yielding' western breeds to improve production is only viable if we also import sufficient quantities of quality compound feed to ensure adequate nutrition, otherwise we simply import animals destined to die of starvation.

The establishment of basic chilling can help to reduce microbial growth in milk and meats thus improving quality and keepability. Recent advances in solar, wind and hydro power make the provision of sustainable energy sources in remote locations viable without reliance on generators and fossil fuels and, although the initial capital investment may be high, are relatively easy to implement. In 2004, I instigated proposals for the first solar powered refrigerators for animal vaccines in Afghanistan and it is rewarding to see that

most of these cold chain installations are still operating.

The future

Aid should meet three basic conditions before the money is spent – projects should be necessary, achievable and sustainable. Reliable and commonsense inputs at the most basic level, coupled with appropriate technology (remembering that power supplies are frequently unavailable or at best unreliable), clearly demonstrate that improvements are attainable.

Given that 80 per cent of Afghans (and people in other developing countries) rely on agriculture for their livelihood, veterinarians are well placed to contribute, but we must utilise our differential diagnostic skills to seek appropriate solutions. Hiding our light under a bushel serves no useful purpose and has allowed intrusion of our discipline by a host of people who are less well qualified to solve some of these problems – this is an issue that our profession must address.

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