

One welfare: Linking poverty, equid ownership and equid welfare in the brick kilns of India

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Abstract

The brick kilns in India are associated with extremely low pay, poor working conditions and a lack of regulation. Equids, however, may provide a route out of poverty by enabling workers to access a higher income. The relatively higher financial returns from healthy equids could also motivate welfare improvements. We used a mixed-methods approach including livelihoods questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and welfare assessments to investigate the links between poverty, equid ownership and equid welfare in the brick kilns of Ahmedabad, India. Whilst equid owners earned more than non-owners during the kiln season, the opposite trend was found for these workers for work conducted outside of the kilns during the off-season. Equid ownership was, however, strongly influenced by social factors and, within certain communities, equid ownership may be the only viable escape from extreme poverty. In terms of welfare, equid behaviour was better for owners with better financial security, likely due to the availability of resources. Equid health improved with longevity of ownership, suggesting that owners who view working with their equids as a long-term partnership are more likely to ensure their equids are kept in good health. For stakeholders aiming to improve both human health and equid welfare, a 'one welfare' approach which values the intrinsic connections between poverty and both equid ownership and equid welfare could greatly increase success.

Keywords: animal welfare, *Equus asinus*, human livelihoods, poverty, sustainable development goals, working equids