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DAIRY ANIMAL WELFARE – AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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The international approach to livestock welfare is animal centred and reactive. Suffering is viewed as being due to deliberate or unnecessary abuse to meet extreme production requirements and is measured against the physiological and behavioural status of the animal. In Africa, dairy production systems range from the highly intensive, similar to those found in Europe and America, to semi-intensive and extensive. In North and West Africa cheese and milk is produced from indigenous cattle breeds, as well as camels and horses, often during transhumance. The majority of dairy animals in Africa are kept outdoors. In addition to welfare problems such as metabolic diseases, mastitis and lameness seen in highly intensive dairy systems, unnecessary suffering in dairy animals in Africa can result from conflict, droughts, floods, fires, transboundary diseases, parasites or poor management due to lack of knowledge. Socio-economic or political externalities can also have an effect on welfare. For instance, the rapid devaluation of a currency can make it totally impossible to purchase stock remedies, vaccines and parasiticides essential to the welfare of dairy animals in a tropical climate. Welfare problems in dairy animals are not only associated with production systems, but also with transport and slaughter. Markets may be a long distance from production areas and livestock are transported on foot, by rail or road. Vehicles used for transport may not be in good condition and loading facilities deficient. Exhaustion, injuries and diseases such as heat stress are associated with long distance transport. Methods of slaughter are not consistently in line with international recommendations, as more than half of the livestock in Africa is slaughtered informally and this includes ritual slaughter for ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. A new paradigm for improving the welfare of dairy animals in Africa is proposed.

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