

World Association for Transport Animal Welfare and Studies (TAWS)
**The challenge of improving transport animal welfare in the world:
ways forward**

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**Career prospects in research and development concerned with
animal power**

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Introduction

The remit for this presentation was to comment on “how realistically young people can contribute to improvements in the technologies, science and welfare of animals used for transport in the world”. The possible areas in which people could contribute were examined. These include research (basic or applied, single or multi-disciplinary approaches), extension and development (encouraging self-help and community involvement), provision of services (such as veterinary care, farriery, equipment manufacture and saddlery) and education and training to improve knowledge of those involved with animal power.

The present situation

Most working animals are found in the Third World and so contributions to their wellbeing can best be made by working in these areas. Some of the key factors that influence the success with which people can make a contribution to improving working animals are discussed in the following sections.

Incentives

There is a certain ‘feel good factor’ about a job that involves helping people who keep work animals improve their livelihoods, as they are often living in considerable poverty. It is also, for those that like to travel, a good way to see the world and meet people from other countries. Often friends and acquaintances see it as glamorous, forgetting about the down sides. The disincentives are that the work can usually be short term, with many projects receiving from 3-5 years support in an area, and rarely more than that. Consultants in these conditions become conscious of their next job and towards the end of a contract there is the added distraction of worrying about what to do next and where to go next. University academics wishing to enhance their research ratings will find it difficult if they work in this area. The journals in which animal power research is published have low ratings compared with those in the more fashionable areas of research in for example the molecular and genetic fields of science.

Career structure

This is not as obvious as it might be for those people wishing to work in the tropics and sub-tropics (necessary if anyone is wishing to work with animals used for transport). In the UK a recognised career structure for those wishing to work overseas does not really exist anymore. In some other European countries, e.g. France and the Netherlands it is possible to have a career ‘overseas’ as their

Governments have a more structured career for overseas workers. In the tropical countries themselves while the career structure may be there, the pay is often poor and so good people aim to move on into the private sector or better-paid jobs in other countries. For students, VSO is generally recognised as a stepping stone into development, but the important stage for many is making the step from Student/ VSO/NGO worker to experienced consultant i.e. how to gain experience in order to become employable by many of the good consultancy firms operating in the tropics and sub-tropics.

Funding direction

The focus in recent years in many donor agencies has been more on the social and economic issues in research and development rather than technological advances. Money from the UK government sources is now channelled much more through the EU or direct to countries themselves that it was in the past when UK centres of expertise working overseas also received independent Government support. This trend has been seen in other countries that put considerable money into development in the Third World. It can make it easier for those young people in the countries to get started, but more difficult for young people from the UK and Europe to get started. Similarly many charities spend their money directly in the countries they are targeting, with local expertise and locally trained experts (e.g. veterinarians and artisans) being employed.

Some opportunities

VSO continues to be available to those from UK who want to gain overseas experience. Postgraduate courses are available throughout the world, although less than there used to be and NGOs continue to need people to work in their projects. People trained in a profession can also help improve animals used for work by offering their services when most needed, but they will not necessarily get rich.

Conclusion

Despite these openings and others, career opportunities are certainly less clear cut than they used to be, and people wishing to contribute to improving animals used for work need to adopt an innovative and optimistic approach to their career plans.