

Unethical practices relating to cattle freedom, care and control among the market handlers in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract

Study on some unethical practices affecting cattle among the market handlers was carried out. The three major market centres for cattle in Ibadan city (Akinyele, Bodija and Oranyan) were purposively selected. Eighty (80) structured questionnaires were randomly administered to the respondents in order to elicit information on animal freedom, care and control. Percentage of handlers that believed cattle had no freedom of their own was 51.3. In animal care, 40.0%, 31.3%, 30.0%, 12.5%, 7.5% and 5.0% were of the opinion that cattle could be respectively tired, hungry, sick, heady, injured and being in a strange environment might be the reasons for their refusal to obey the instruction of the handlers. In controlling the cattle for a direction, 85.7%, 10.4% and 3.9% of the handlers used 'wooden rod' (Sanda), 'whip' and 'stick' respectively as the best technique. When an animal did not yield to an instruction to move, 84.0% and 16.0% of the handlers respectively employed dragging and beating as the final option. The study showed that majority of cattle market handlers were inhumane in the freedom, care and control of the animals and therefore, recommends that awareness should be created for a better understanding in animal freedom, care and control.

Keywords: Unethical practices, cattle freedom, care, control, market handlers, Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria

Introduction

Ethics and animal welfare are not stumbling blocks for the production of livestock but to assist their proper management. Proper management for quality animal production has to do with following the acceptable and standard norms for rearing and disposal through market channels or livestock in confinement or in deliberate captivity are expected to be cared for. Ethics forbid willful, intentional, malicious and wanton neglect of animals. Babayemi and Bamikole (2010) observed that certain animals under confinement have been deprived of essential necessities as comfortable space and quality diet. In Nigeria, animal welfare and ethics are

rarely enforced, as they are not seen as quality control issues. Therefore, the animals are exposed to all forms of treatment and consequently the well-being of the society at large is undermined. Livestock owners or handlers in Nigeria seem to be operating by the level of their personal understanding and possibly not by what is acceptable globally. Animal ethics in essence has to do with implementing the right thing and doing the acceptable thing for animals. It obliges change in attitudes and practices towards the animals. Animal owners and handlers are in the best position to ensure the general well-being and the execution of humane practices on animals, appropriate treatment and prevention of cruelty. Rollin (1995) explained that ethics as an aspect of philosophy prob the human behaviours as far as such behaviours to

animal welfare make the association that exist between the animals and their handlers vital and mutual.

Duncan and Dawkins (1983) described welfare as a condition in which animal is in complete mental and physical health. Broom and Johnson (1993) in another way reported that welfare has to do with what the animal feels: with the absence of strong, negative, subjective, emotional states that are often grouped together as sufferings which include pain, frustration, deprivation, fear and in some species, boredom. Rachels (1993) established moral decisions about human responsibilities to animals to include the development of standard operating procedures of animal husbandry by animal production industries, retailers and advocacy groups and legislative actions by government to regulate particular animal husbandry practices.

Scores of cattle come to Nigerian markets on daily basis. Some of the animals await buyers for a long time. Either on a short or long term market disposal, Defra (2006) opined that achieving a high standard of welfare at market must entail clean environment, well maintained feeder and drinker and sympathetic handling by competent people. The welfare of animals in livestock markets on code of practice covers the need for calm and careful handling, penning arrangements, shelter and feeding and watering. Therefore, the objective of the present study was to assess unethical practices in cattle handling relating to freedom, care and control among the animal marketers in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria

Materials and Methods

Three cattle markets in Ibadan metropolis were used in order to assess some unethical

practices carried out by the cattle handlers in the area. The cattle markets were Akinyele (Akinyele Local Government Area), Bodija (Ibadan North Local Government Area) and Oranyan (Ibadan Northeast Local Government Area). The markets were purposively chosen as they were central and major cattle markets in Ibadan. A total of eighty structured questionnaires were administered to those that keep cattle, in order to elicit information on the techniques for controlling their animals and the general ways of management. Also, a structured oral interview was used for contact evaluation of the practices. Data generated from the respondents were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

Presented in Figure 1 is the response of the cattle market handlers that showed their belief on the freedom of cattle in the market place. The study showed that 48.7 % of the respondents supported the fact that animals should be given freewill, while 51.3 % were opposed to animal freedom of any kind. The people opposing the freedom seemed to be high indicating that the animals would always be deprived of their rights. In Nigeria, there is no law relating to farm animal welfare but the right of animals under captivity or domestication has been defined by both criminal and penal codes that animals have the right to be free from hunger, discomfort, fear and distress and freedom to express normal behaviour. However, the oral interview showed the sub-standard understanding of the handlers for allowing freedom. They expressed their minds that animals should have freedom to

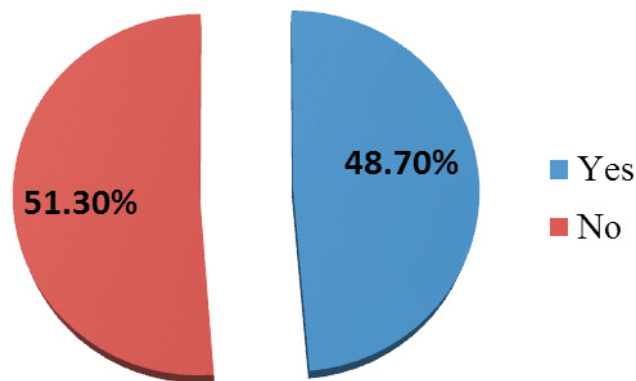


Figure 1: Response to the question - Should animals be given a free willΣ

be less bored, gain weight and be active. The handlers that opposed to the freedom of cattle advanced their reasons that when animals are accorded liberty, they could roam, be injured, poisoned or stolen.

Shown in Figure 2 are the instruments used by the livestock handlers for controlling the animals. It was revealed that 85.7%, 10.4% and 2.6% of the handlers restrained their animals with the use of the tools called *sanda*, stick and whip respectively. From the study, it showed that the use of rod (*sanda*) to control animals was interestingly high. Traditionally, the White Fulani is fond of using the rod for numerous reasons: as support, defence and for hunting. Thus, the handlers characteristically adopted the rod to control their cattle. The handlers believed that the animals would not experience any pain as they have thick skin for cushioning. The oral interview revealed the understanding of the respondents that cattle

are generally heady and stubborn and therefore require stronger measures. Singer (1990) reported that the use of stick, cane, rods and electric prods to drive animals is abnormal. Apart from the fact that it could create physical stress, it may be painful to the animals. The bruises and deep wounds inflicted could predispose the injured animals to infectious diseases and the eventual reduction in its market value. In a physiological study, Hixon *et al.* (1981) and Stoebel and Mobrg (1982) reported that the use of electric prods and other handling stressors lowered female reproductive functions. Therefore, Grandin (1987) recommended the use of flag, plastic paddlers or panels as friendly tools in controlling animals.

The measure applied by the livestock handlers when animals refuse to move is shown in Figure 3. Due to some reasons, the handlers noted that an animal could

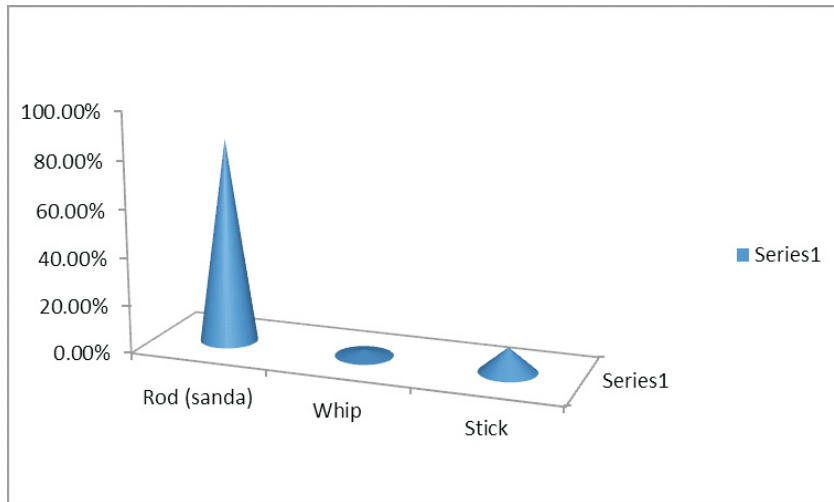


Figure 2: The type and percentages of instruments used in driving cattle in Ibadan metropolis

reluctantly refuse to move after applying all the necessary measures. Thus, 84% of the handlers reported that cattle should be beaten or hit with strength, while 16% of the respondents reported that animals should be dragged by all means. However, it was observed that the handlers often resolve to using hard object in controlling animals due to impatience and the cruelty tendencies. In this regard, the handlers seemed to lack knowledge of animal behaviour. Hutson (1985), Grandin *et al.* (1986) and Rushen (1986) reported that cattle, sheep and goats have excellent memories and they remember painful or aversive experiences and will be more reluctant to re-enter a facility where an aversive event has previously occurred. Grandin (1998) recommended the application of behavioural principles of handling such as flight zone and point of balance rather than those of primitive rods, whips and stick. In Figure 4 are reasons the cattle handlers

gave for animal's refusal to yield to control. About 40%, 35%, 31.5%, 31.3%, 12.5% and 7.5% of the handlers mentioned that animals could respectively refuse to move due to tiredness, sickness, hunger, heady, strange environment and injury. However, some of these factors could be misconstrued as the reasons for the refusals of animals to yield to instructions. Certain factors may be pertinent for discussion such as the question of strange environment and animal being 'heady'. The relevance of strange environment to animal movement is not clear. Notwithstanding, the respondents submitted that animals may react negatively when suddenly exposed to human crowd or to an unusual sound or when being removed out of the stock. Making cattle accustomed to people will make them calm and easier to handle (Boivin *et al.*, 1992 and Hutson, 1985). An animal's first experience with a person or

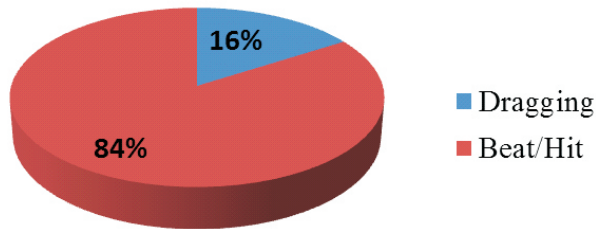


Figure 3: Measures taken by handlers when animal refuse to obey instruction in Ibadan metropolis

pieces of equipment should be made positive as possible. Again, how can animal be heady as indicated by the handlers? The philosophy behind this assertion seemed not to be clear. However, the question of being heady may probably be intrinsic and

not a reality. Although, knowledge of animal behaviour shows that they could be aggressive when sensing environmental hostility. Grandin (2000) reported that excitability in animal can be reduced and the animal will be easier to drive if the

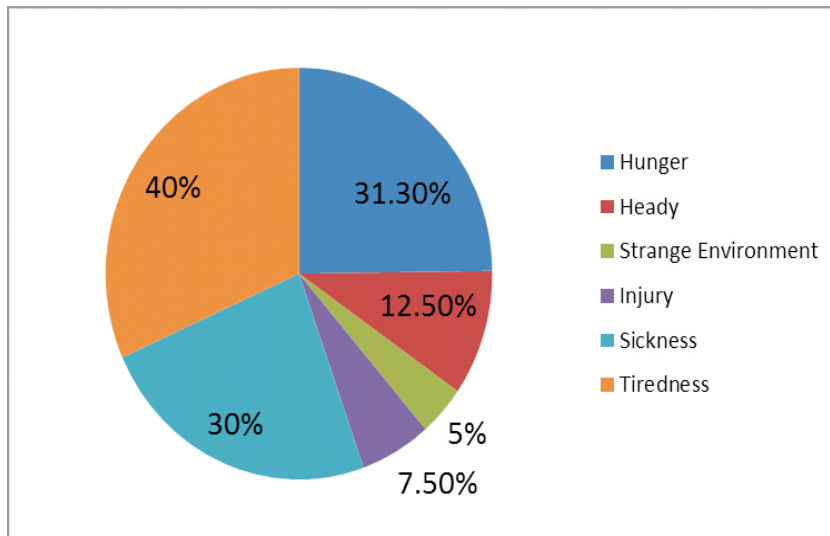


Figure 4: Reasons for cattle reluctance to move as desired by the handlers

producers walk through the pens every day. Direct human attention and gentle care produced calmer, less excitable animals (Grandin, 1987). Livestock movement should be at a slow walk with handler movements keeping the animals moving in orderly fashion. Defra (2006) reported that animals should be accorded freedom from hunger, injury, fear and express normal behaviour. The first principle of animal handling is probably to avoid getting the animal unnecessarily excited. Stermer *et al.* (1981) established that it takes up to 30 minutes for an animal to calm down and its heart rate to return to normal after rough handling and also that calm animals move easily and are less likely to bunch.

Conclusion

The study showed that unethical practices in cattle handling abound among the livestock marketers in Ibadan metropolis. The handlers were fond of using rod called *sanda*, whip and stick to subject the animals to the handler's will by serious beating and knocking, which suggest the handlers' insensitivity to the animal's pain, stress and weakness. Any animal that refused to obey the desired order was further dragged when the use of the afore mentioned tools failed, and this shows the extent of brutality on the animals. Study also indicated that the livestock handlers attributed tiredness, sickness, injury, strange environment, hunger and sturbornness to the reasons cattle always refuse to move or obey instruction, implying that the handlers were ignorant of the animal behaviour. Workshops, conferences and stakeholders forum should be organised for training and information relating animal ethics and welfare.

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Received: 3rd October, 2011

Accepted: 10th October, 2012