

Key points:

- The majority of domestic animals live in poor countries and in conditions far worse than in the western world
- Financial and human resources spent outside the western world can treat many times more animals than the same amount of time and money spent in the developed nations

In some ways by default, the largest percentages of street dogs and cats worldwide exist in the poorest of countries. Yet, the lion's share of money dedicated to eradicating the problems of street dogs and cats comes from, and stays in, the richer countries. The end result is that although many, many more animals could receive care for the same amount of donated money in the poorest of places, the money remains in the United States, Canada, and other wealthy nations inside of which exist pockets of animal suffering and poverty.

Take Florida's closest neighbor, Cuba, as an example. A mere 90 or so miles from Key West, it exists as a true Third World nation, with food shortages, power outages, and innumerable street dogs and cats. In a nation in which food for people can be hard to find, street animals do not even have the luxury of garbage dumps with rotting food that they might find in America's other nearest neighbor, Mexico. Unlike Mexico with its obesity rates the highest on Earth, Cuban people survive in many ways on rice, beans, yuca, fruits, and limited other items that are primarily grown on the island. Commercial dog and cat foods do not exist, and the rare Cuban that cares for street animals is limited to the same rice and beans that they themselves eat, with feral cats supplementing their diet with rats, cockroaches, etc.

The street animal "protectors", as they refer to themselves, are truly limited in how much food they can provide since they themselves have very little. As such, every street animal is exceedingly thin, compounding other health issues such as heartworm disease, internal parasites, and other diseases common in the tropics.

In Cuba, the average salary of a vet (in 2022) is about \$2500 Cuban pesos a month, which is around \$25 US, or \$300 a year. In comparison, one of the larger US based animal welfare organizations whose annual income exceeds \$180,000,000 will expect to pay its vets well over \$125,000 in annual salary plus benefits (personal communication).

Compare the salaries. The US based vet at an "animal rescue" makes over 400 times the salary. If one considers that Cuban vets can do spays and neuters of equal quality, and that the conditions for street animals in Cuba are worse than anywhere in the USA, even the reservation system, it would seem that a benefactor wanting to give money for animal rescue could accomplish significantly more in Cuba. Barring supplies, 400 Cuban vets could be employed towards animal care for every one vet in the USA, and in a place where the dogs and cats need serious help. For those who disregard studies and instead insist that spaying and neutering is the answer to the world's animal problem, places like Cuba are where any money spent towards spaying would accomplish more. \$100 spent in the USA might spay one dog in a shelter, but would employ a Cuban vet for 4 months and thereby spay 20 a day, 100 a week, 450 a month, for a total of 1800 dogs and cats. In one year, a Cuban vet with the same training as an American vet (Cuba's education system is excellent) can do 5400 spays. For \$300.

And yet, despite the vast differences in scale, almost all of the money intended for street animals is directed towards large US based organizations with enormous advertising budgets and corporate logos, where pennies on the dollar actually are spent on animal programs, and in most cases is spent on animals that already live the life of Reilly as compared to street dogs and cats in other countries. For most street animals outside the United States, life is a constant search

for food, fighting to survive, being mistreated by humans, and in the end to die without the comfort of a humane euthanasia. And this is nothing compared to a dog being literally burned alive with a blow torch in Sulawesi as part of the dog meat market, where the public believes that the fear and agony impart a better flavor to the meat and where the screams of the tortured animal are part of the show. Imagine the sheer terror of the other dogs jammed into cages watching and listening to their fate. And yet, the animal welfare industry receives over a billion dollars in annual donations, spends hundreds of millions of dollars on advertising, ignores the lives animals live outside of the United States, and continues to preach that spay / neuter can solve the world's problems.

In rare cases, it could solve a few problems. If \$300 employs one full time Cuban vet and spays 5400 animals, then 200 Cuban vets desperate for work can spay 1 million female dogs and cats, far more than likely exist on the entire island. At \$300 per vet for an entire year, the entire country's female dog and cat population could be spayed for \$60,000, about 2 weeks salary for the CEO of at least one name brand animal welfare group. Think about that. Would you give up 2 weeks salary to permanently and irrevocably fix an entire nation's animal welfare problems? Would knowing that dog fighting for sport is still practiced there help you make that decision? This isn't even 70% per year for a decade, this would be one year total.

Cuba is a clear exception due to its size, geographic isolation as a literal island, and crushing poverty. But, it would be a start, and could be a place where the billion dollar animal welfare industry could for virtually nothing prove their spay / neuter philosophy could actually work. Of course, one might argue the politics of Cuba and America, but there are plenty of literal islands where spaying at high levels could literally be done for minimal cost. The fact that there are 2 veterinary schools in the Caribbean and that TVT and other Third World domestic animals problems still exist on these tiny islands speaks volumes.

One could argue that nothing can be done since culturally, street animals in places like Cuba or Mexico are viewed differently and there

is often no public desire to try and resolve the problems of street animals. In virtually every place on Earth, there exists this same divide between a "desirable" dog vs a street dog. This is the same divide between those in the United States that specifically get their household pets from shelters and those who purchase purebred puppies from breeders, pet stores, etc. In every culture, there are large numbers of people (if not most) who regard street animals as dirty or less worthy of a home than whatever specific breed is popular amongst that strata of people at that time. It might be Goldendoodles amongst soccer moms in rich white communities in the suburbs, Jack Russell terriers amongst rich rural horse owners, or small purse Chihuahas and Maltese in Mexico City, but in the end, certain breeds are popular in certain areas, even the Third World, and street dogs are almost never what most people want and the percentage of the population that is willing to take in a street dog is always limited.

Yet, this is all the more reason to try and improve things for animals that have to live in terrible conditions and to work on long term solutions that can circumvent cultural differences, solutions for places where money is tight and animal welfare is not a priority.

Even if surgical spay / neuter is still the prime agenda for an animal welfare group, a much more pragmatic approach would be to use the money in places like Cuba, with its salaries discrepancies as compared to the US or Canada, If a Canadian based animal welfare group wanted to pay local vets double the going rate, it would become a popular avenue for young, aspiring students. Any concern for whether the money was being spent correctly could be easily monitored by grassroot welfare groups since there are many Canadian and American retirees in Cuba and Mexico, respectively. Or, if the larger multi-million dollar welfare groups wanted to get involved, thir board members would likely jump at the chance to make regular "work" trips to Cuba and Mexico on the company dime.

Of course, the presence of the large groups would defeat the entire premise of every dollar donated being spent in the most efficient manner possible. These groups already have well intended but naive donors who give upwards of \$10M per year, not knowing that this

same amount of money could pay for medical care, food, supplies, etc. for hundreds of thousands of street animals as well as annual salaries for trustworthy people to ensure that money ends up in the right place.

Besides, even if half of the money ended up diverted by corruption (which would be easily prevented through good accounting and people on the ground ensuring things run correctly), a 50% return in direct animal welfare programs is far better than the 10% or so that large scale US animal welfare groups actually spend on programs, and those are the best numbers that they can manufacture for public display in order to stay compliant with 501C3 status. An imaginary 50% inaccountability in money donated is far better than a 90 percent loss in "administrative", "operational", or "fundraising" and "advertising" expenses.

Plus, we are in the age of the internet. Anybody can find local animal rescue and welfare groups anywhere in the world, and can go there directly, bring supplies, and help directly until they find the group that most suits their intentions. Social media groups are interconnected, and it is fairly easy to find a contact in virtually any country to start a conversation that can be continued in person.

In many places, local people try their best to help but are limited by supplies and funding. In many cases, a visitor can help by bringing a simple duffle bag full of basic items such as puppy pads, shampoos, collars, leashes, or other dog and cat items that may be hard to find or expensive. Depending on how risk averse someone is and the status of importation laws, a better thing to bring are expired meds donated from a local US based vet. Multiple studies have confirmed that expired medications even 15 years past their date have a greater than 90% chance of being completely fine for use, and 90+% is far better than nothing. In a very poor country like Cuba, most customs officials will permit importation of non-narcotic medications that are intended for vets (and physicians) that lack access to these medications. One large suitcase packed with antibiotics, anti-vomiting medications, anti-inflammatories, medications for TVT (transmissible venereal tumor), non expired suture, etc. can mean the difference between life

and death for hundreds of animals. Many persons involved in animal rescue locally will be caring for dozens, even hundreds of injured or sick animals in their homes, and may have access to vets but be severely limited in what meds they can afford to buy. In this sense, one person on vacation who is willing to give up their luggage space can do far more than they would giving a thousand dollars to a large humane organization.

Keep in mind that in the United States and other rich nations, individuals who rescue animals from the streets are frequently associated with hoarding, and in some cases may actually cause more problems than they solve if unvaccinated animals are concentrated together in large numbers or in households that had previous parvo cases and thus still harbor the virus. In Third World areas, however, the sight of street dogs and cats is so ubiquitous that people who take in street animals frequently only do so for the sick and injured, leaving otherwise healthy animals to free roam. It is not uncommon to find a person who has 20, 30, even 100 animals in a fenced off yard, many of whom have permanent medical issues. In these cases, the living conditions may be substandard by western comparison but frequently are infinitely better than being a paralyzed dog trying to find food and fend for itself on the streets. It is these situations in which spaying becomes a much more important issue, since food supplementation will allow females to come into heat more regularly and with more reproductive success than they otherwise would in a state of semi-starvation on the streets. Vaccination is even more important in these scenarios, although the likelihood of older street animals in these situations not having previous exposure (and thereby immunity) to parvo and distemper is relatively low.