

**SPEECH TO THE 6TH ANIMAL WELFARE CONFERENCE, GABARONE,
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**ANIMAL WELFARE, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**

I would like to begin by offering my sincere thanks to the organisers of this, the 6th Africa Animal Welfare Conference, a much-needed forum for leading voices on this hugely important issue that lies at the heart of a sustainable future for all.

And congratulations to everyone involved in achieving the adoption of the Resolution, *Animal Welfare, Environment and Sustainable Development Nexus* at the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi this year. I would like to particularly highlight the leadership shown by the governments of Ghana, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo and Senegal in achieving this groundbreaking Resolution.

What was so important about this Resolution is that it highlighted animal welfare as a key component in addressing the growing environmental challenges we all face.

It underscored how there is One Health – that the wellbeing of people the world over relies on animal health and welfare and a thriving environment.

That embracing this nexus, this series of connections is vital in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

As the Resolution so rightly says, “the health and welfare of animals, sustainable development and the environment are connected to human health and well-being”.

In other words, people and animals, we’re all in this together.

Living on a farm hamlet as I do, I get to see these connections every single day.

I get to see the life-affirming quality of my neighbour’s 40 cows roaming the river valley, grazing as nature intended; animals being kept in high welfare, in a nature-friendly way that brings back biodiversity and provides more healthy, sustainable food.

But living in a rural setting, I also see the downsides too, and I’d like to share one instant that particularly sticks in my mind.

Walking on the moon

It was early morning, and a tractor was ploughing a nearby field. Back and forth the tractor went, ploughing its lonely furrow. Behind the tractor, dust clouds spiralled and caught the sun. A timeless symbol of the season, I thought. Only, something was missing: there were no screeching gulls following the plough in search of worms.

I decided to take a closer look. I could see the tractor ploughing across a footpath, giving me a gull's-eye view of the newly upturned soil. As I stared down, do you know what I saw? - nothing. There were no worms or insects desperate to get back into burrows. The soil was lifeless. Little more than sand. No wonder there were no gulls – I could have been walking on the moon.

Later, the field was planted with maize (corn), a crop commonly used as animal feed. The soil was further impoverished by the chemical pesticides and artificial fertilisers used on the crops. No wonder then, when it rained, I could see soil washing into the river.

It made me realise anew the link between intensive crop growing and the factory farming of animals, something I saw particularly clearly on a trip to the American Midwest.

I remember being in Nebraska walking through a massive field of GM maize, much of which was destined for the feed troughs of factory farmed animals.

Close by, I visited one such farm, a feedlot with hundreds of cattle and calves standing listlessly in barren pens, not a blade of grass in sight. Before I got there, I imagined it to be noisy with lots of bellowing and mooing. In reality, there was an eery hush. It sounded curiously like a hospital wing, the silence broken only by the odd cough or sneeze. In the Nebraskan summer sun with no shade, I watched as the heat-stressed animals jostled, trying desperately to lie down in each other's shadow.

Sadly, factory farming, be it of cattle, pigs or chickens, is no longer confined to western countries; it has become a global phenomenon and now threatens all our futures.

I recently researched the world's biggest cattle feedlots and found that the largest one I could find was here in Africa. An enormous feedlot where 160,000 cattle were standing in one place, no grass in sight. Was this a bid to feed hungry people in Africa? No! It was geared toward export markets in China and the Middle East.

Other forms of factory farming have spread to Africa and around the world. Keeping hens in cages so small, they cannot spread their wings. Cages often sold by European companies despite the very same system being banned in the European Union. Mother pigs unable to turn around for weeks or months at a time and made to face the wall.

Coming back to that 'nexus' spoken about in the recently adopted Resolution, those series of connections between animal welfare, environment and sustainable development, these are already well researched.

Factory farming is the biggest cause of animal suffering on the planet and a key driver in the climate, nature and health catastrophes facing humanity.

A stable climate and thriving nature are essential for a sustainable future, but the trend is the wrong way. The animal agricultural sector alone produces more greenhouse gases than the direct emissions from all forms of transport.

Factory farming is central to the worldwide assault on nature. In the half-century since the widespread adoption of factory farming, the world has lost 68 per cent of all its wildlife.ⁱ

Existential threat

Without tackling factory farming and associated diets heavy in animal products that lie at the heart of that nexus, our global society will continue heading toward an existential threat.

Climate change will hit developing countries and people on low incomes disproportionately hard. It will also affect animals, not only leading to extinctions but from suffering caused by flooding, drought and wildfire disasters like those seen in Australia, Pakistan and the Amazon.

On nature, if we carry on as we have done for the last half a century, the world is on course for almost total obliteration of our wildlife by 2040.

It is also hugely important for us to recognise that the very thing that stores so much atmospheric carbon and water, as well as producing most of our food – the soil – is disappearing. The reason? - industrial agriculture, which fails to respect animal welfare, nature or sustainability. Carry on as we are and by 2040, in a world with more than a billion more mouths to feed, there could be a third less soil, with devastating implications for food production.

THE WORLD WE WANT

If we want our children to have a liveable future, then tomorrow's sustainable food menu will need a veritable 'three Rs' approach – Regenerative farming, Reduction of animal-sourced foods and Rewilding of the soil.

Regenerative

Nature-friendly or **regenerative** farming involves restoring animals to the land as rotational grazers or foragers where they can express their natural behaviours – running, flapping, grazing – making for happier animals with better health too. Regenerative farming cuts reliance on chemical pesticides, fertilisers and antibiotics, reducing costs to farmers and creating a varied landscape bursting with life.

Reduction

This, combined with a serious **reduction** in the number of farmed animals can create food systems that are genuinely sustainable. Based on scientific assessments within the EAT-Lancet Planetary Health Diet, we can see that saving the planet will require drastic reductions in consumption of animal-sourced foods. Evidence shows that by the middle of the century, our consumption of

animal products globally must be reduced by more than half. In high-consuming regions such as the West, deeper cuts will be needed.

By rethinking protein, meat from farmed animals would come only from higher welfare, nature-friendly regenerative farms.

Consumption of animal-sourced foods would be reduced through replacement with plant-based and other alternative proteins, including cultivated meat and precision fermentation, together with eating more fruit, vegetables, and legumes.

Rewilding the soil

With far fewer farmed animals, all kept regeneratively, soil fertility can be turbo-boosted by that rotational symphony of plants and animals working in harmony with underground ecosystems, thereby **rewilding** the soil. Huge amounts of carbon could be locked up in healthy soil. Much more water would be conserved for crops. And a vast array of biodiversity would be restored to thriving farmland.

How do we get there?

Transforming the food system for a liveable future relies on reconnecting food production, animal welfare and nature through regenerative, agroecological farming combined with more balanced diets.

The big question is, how do we get there, and fast?

The answer lies in us all playing our part: governments, civil society, business, finance and the United Nations working in partnership to transform the food system.

Embracing the animal welfare nexus is crucial for meeting the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

Leadership is hugely welcome by the UN in recognizing this nexus between animal welfare, environment and sustainable development.

Now action is needed. And urgently.

Which is why I again congratulate the leadership shown by the government of Ghana and other nations in achieving the Nexus Resolution earlier this year.

It is also why I propose that we build upon it with a new Resolution that embraces the multiple benefits of properly addressing animal welfare at the heart of the nexus with sustainable development.

One that clearly identifies the benefits to small-scale farmers and pastoralists, enhancing rural livelihoods, and providing decent work for all including women and young people.

One that recognises that high animal welfare in the food system can promote carbon sequestration, water conservation, restoration of biodiversity and soil health. All of which are crucial for our survival.

That is why I suggest that the time is right for the UN to acknowledge animal sentience, that animals feel pain, suffering and a sense of joy if we let them, as an essential part of addressing the environmental emergencies now facing humanity. T

That the time is right for a further Resolution, building on the brilliance of this year's Animal welfare, Environment and Sustainable Development Nexus Resolution.

One that acknowledges the wealth of knowledge already established in this field.

One that sees animal sentience as a key element to addressing the pressing environmental emergencies facing humanity in a way that truly builds a sustainable future for our children and our children's children.

Thank you.

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ⁱ R.E.A. Almond, M. Grooten and T. Petersen (Eds), *Living Planet Report 2020 - Bending the curve of biodiversity loss*, (WWF: Gland, Switzerland, 2020), <https://livingplanet.panda.org/en-us/>