



**animalNEPAL.org**

## **SUPPORTING MOUNTAIN MULES**

*"A Survey on working mules of Gorkha"*



**THE DONKEY  
SANCTUARY**  
WORKING WORLDWIDE



## 1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

**Animal Nepal (AN)** is an innovative NGO based in Lalitpur, District of Kathmandu Valley, and run by an enthusiastic team of volunteers, who are both local and overseas animal welfare campaigners and educators. Animal Nepal was established as a non-profit company in 2004 and was registered as an NGO in 2009.

Animal Nepal believes that through awareness-raising and practical interventions, widespread animal cruelty can be gradually reduced, and that Nepal can ultimately become a model country for animal welfare in the region. Animal Nepal conducts three outreach programs, focusing on stray and community dogs, working equines and working elephants. We strongly believe education plays a vital role to improve the lives of Nepal's animals in a lasting manner. Hence, we organize awareness camps in brick factories, schools and local communities. Animal Nepal is well known for its national campaigns in the areas of working animals, livestock transport and slaughter, elephant abuse, dog poisoning, humane zoo conditions and urban greenery.

### 1.2. EQUINE OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Some 1500 equines (donkeys, mules and horses) are employed in brick factories in the Kathmandu Valley. Shocked to see their conditions, Animal Nepal in 2008 launched a **Working Equine Outreach Programme**. Animal Nepal, with the support of **The Donkey Sanctuary UK**, now works in over fifteen brick factories of Lalitpur, where it organises regular health camps and educates the owners and handlers. Animal Nepal rescues sick and handicapped equines and lobbies with the authorities for improved conditions and monitoring. By extending its outreach programme in Nepalgunj, Nepal's main equine bazaar, Animal Nepal wants to address the root causes of the abuse and make a lasting change in the lives of Nepal's working equines.

We conduct regular mobile clinics, provide first aid boxes and improved harnesses, and educate factory and equine handlers and owners. Weak and handicapped

donkeys are rescued and taken to the Godavari Donkey Sanctuary. By now, the conditions of working equines in Lalitpur have improved considerably. During the off season (May-December) Animal Nepal runs an outreach programme in Nepalgunj, where the equines are kept six month per year.

The objectives of our Working Equines Outreach Programme are:

- To improve the conditions of working donkeys
- To educate donkey owners, handlers and kiln owners
- To lobby for better conditions for working animals across the nation.

The programme aims at evaluating the following strategies:

- Organise regular health clinics for working equines
- Organise regular education sessions for donkey owners, child handlers and factory owners
- Rescue sick and injured equines
- Lobby for passing of Animal Welfare Act and rules for working animals
- Campaign against 'Blood Bricks'
- Promote responsible brick industry and 'clean and green bricks'

### **1.3. STATUS OF WORKING EQUINES IN NEPAL**

Nepal being one of the developing countries, it is estimated that over 25% people of Nepal still lives in poverty. And most of the country is dependent on agriculture and farming. Around 1,00,000 working horses and donkeys are employed all over the country that plays an important role in supporting the livelihoods of approximately one million people.

In the plains the equines are mainly used for transportation of people by cart. Equines here are the primary source of income for the owners. Since the region has majority of lower class population, not all can afford a good health and proper care for their animals and there are also less or no equine health practitioners in the region.

In the hilly region the equines are used for transportation of goods and the responsibility of equine care is on owners and/or handlers (a hired person by owners). Normally these equines are employed in the brick factories to carry the bricks. These equine hauling bricks in the brick factories work in a very pathetic situation. They are usually ill fed and less cared. Most of the working animals in the hilly region have been replaced by motorcycle or jeeps. After the road way reached to districts like Solukhumbu, Mustang etc. there has been major decrease in the number of mules. But in some places the mule and pony culture in transportation is considered quite unique and hence tourists prefer to pay a handsome amount for the ride even if there are vehicles available.

Mountains occupy over 64% of the total land of Nepal where mules are the primary source of transportation of people and goods. Mules carry much needed supplies like foods, fuels and firewood to the remote. 82% Nepalese people live in rural villages of Nepal where the villages are not accessible by foot. Education, health facilities and goods has not yet reached the rural. In these condition mountain mules becomes the only alternative that take days to reach these villages. These animals are also used for the transportation of goods and construction materials. The mountain region being the hot spot for trekking and tourism, they are usually primary source of income for most of the people.

It is estimated that only 3–5% of the country's vet services reach animal owners because there is limited technical expertise and it is generally only available in cities or major districts. The main welfare problems seen include a lack of appropriate feed, water, shelter, vaccination programmes and poor understanding of animal welfare: preventable wounds, lameness, colic, injuries and diseases are routine issues.

With the aim of working towards a better understanding of mule and donkey use in and after natural disasters in the mountain region of Nepal, Animal Nepal has started rapid **Assessment of Mountain mules** with the support of The Donkey Sanctuary UK (DSUK). The programme aims to find out overall condition of working mules in mountain region of Nepal.

Mules and horses being the lifeline of mountain region people, they are forced to carry foods, medicines, infrastructural development materials etc on a daily basis. Since veterinary service is not easily available in that part of nation, condition of working mules are not satisfactory (according to newspaper articles and verbal reporting). Hence, Animal Nepal in the month of November headed to Gorkha district with its outreach team in order to study real condition of working mules and explore possibilities of support for these needy animals.

#### 1.4. CONDITION OF WORKING MULES IN GORKHA DISTRICT OF NEPAL



Gorkha District, a part of Gandaki Zone, is one of the 75 districts of Nepal connected historically with the name of the legendary Gurkha soldiers. As with other mountain areas of Nepal, Gorkha contains popular locations for foreign trekkers. This provides

an important source of income through the employment of local people as guides, porters and guest houses.

The people of Gorkha faced their worst nightmare in April 25 when the epicenter of 7.8 magnitude earthquake fell in Gorkha district, 15km from Gorkha town. As of 30 April, 407 people have been killed in the district and more than 1,000 injured. (ACAPS Nepal Earthquake: Ghorka District Profile).

May 9, 2015 issue of Republica reported that the landslides triggered by the April 25 earthquake along the Aarughat-Sirdiwas section of Manaslu foot trail have affected 15 VDCs in northern Gorkha. Police said landslides have obstructed the trail in various sections, causing further hardship for the villagers already hit by the earthquake. The shortest route to reach Arkhet, Lapubesi, Khanibesi, Machikhola and Jagat villages have been obstructed. As a result, locals are compelled to take long route from Dhunchet, Yarsha, Runchet, Similarly, rescue and relief workers have been unable to reach Kerauja and its nearby villages due to landslides. Even mules cannot get across, said Dhana Prasad Gurung , a local. Likewise, the trail that connects Oohiya, Manbu, Kashigaun, Kerauja, Sirdibash, Chumchet, Chhekampar, Wihi, Prok, Loho and Samgaun villages have also been obstructed.



### 1.5. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To carry out a need assessment for the mountain mules
- To learn about the overall condition of working animals in Gorkha



## 1.6. PROBLEM STATEMENT



While during the survey our team witnessed many trails blocked by landslides which had made the income-generating opportunities extremely limited in Gorkha district. In addition the trails are the only access routes for people and goods to move in and out of the remote areas.

According to the local mule herder more than half of the total animals are stuck in the places where the roads are blocked by the landslides. However, the locals have managed to transport the goods even through the difficult trails and they have continued their mule business even in the hour of difficulties. In such circumstances there is high chance that the mules get sick, and dehydrated at times. And there are no proper veterinary facilities in the local place. Our team came across the local DLSO service center and community animals' health post, both based on the main Arughat Bazar. No other veterinary facilities are available in that place of Gorkha for mountain mule.

During the injuries and sickness in mules, the owners are forced to treat their animals using their own local resources like the medicinal herbs and sometimes even human medicines. In extreme medical condition, animals die in the absence of proper veterinary facilities.

## 2.METHODOLOGY



A team of veterinarian and a technician in the month of November left for Gorkha district of Nepal for the need assessment of the mountain mules of Gorkha. A questionnaire was developed in order to collect a concrete data and numbers. Our team went up to Arkhet bazaar and soti to collect the information on the condition of mules and their owners. 17 mules' owners were interviewed and made to fill the questionnaire. The major limitation of the survey was that about half of the mules were stuck in the places where the routes were collapsed by the landslides caused by earthquake. And when we started our survey half of the mules were sent to places as far as Samagaun, Chaikampar, machi khola Tsum Valley and even till Tibet. Hence, not all the mules were covered in our survey. But during our survey we found that 1300 animals were used for transportation in that region.

### 3. DATA AND FINDINGS

#### 2.1. WALKING ROUTE AND WORKING DURATIONS

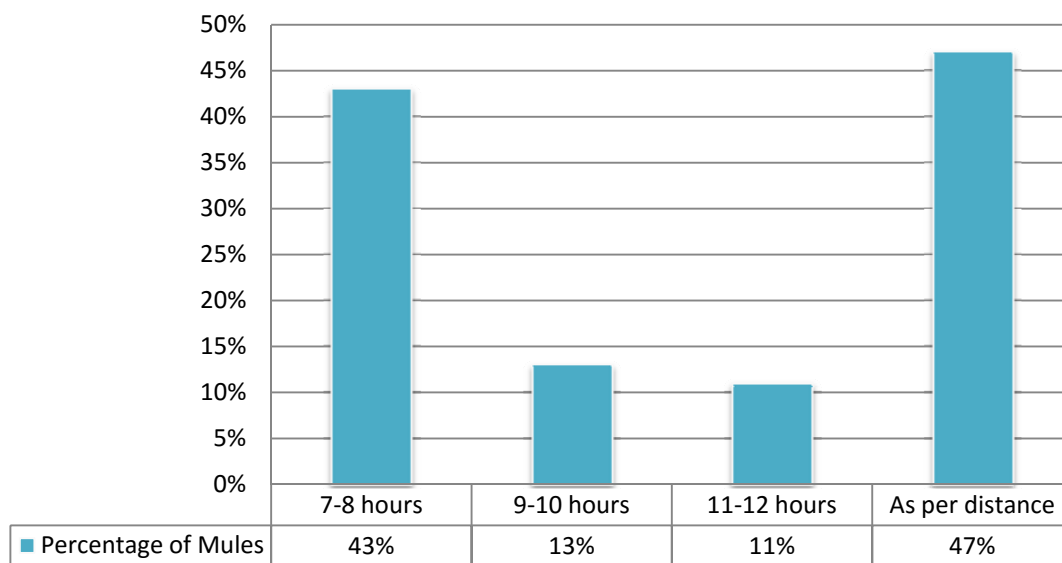


Places where mules are the primary (sometimes the only) source of transportation, it's not hard to guess that they are made to overwork. The mules of Gorkha walk from Arkhet Bazar and soti to as far as Samagaun and Tibet. Among surveyed mule owners, 47% of them do not provide a fixed working hour for their mules' .i.e. they can walk up to as many hours if the destination is far. Otherwise, the normal working

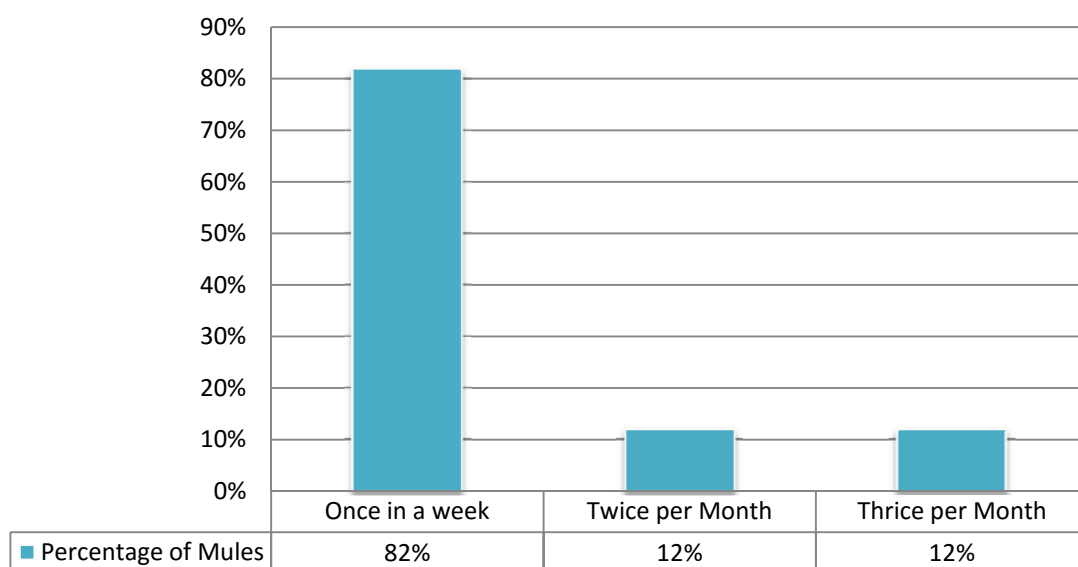


hours for each mule in average is about 7-8 hours which can be considered a healthy working period. Working mules get as much as 4 days off in a month and some gets as less as 2 days off in a month. However, the condition gets worse when there are no alternate animals for work in case one animal gets sick. More than 80% of mule owners do not possess alternative for sick animals. That means, more than 80% mules are made to work over loaded even when they get sick and injured.

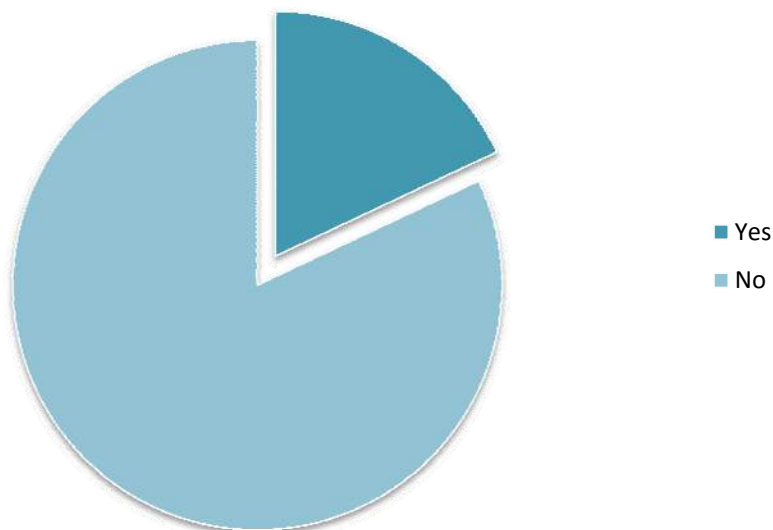
### Total working hours for Mules



### Total off days for a Mule



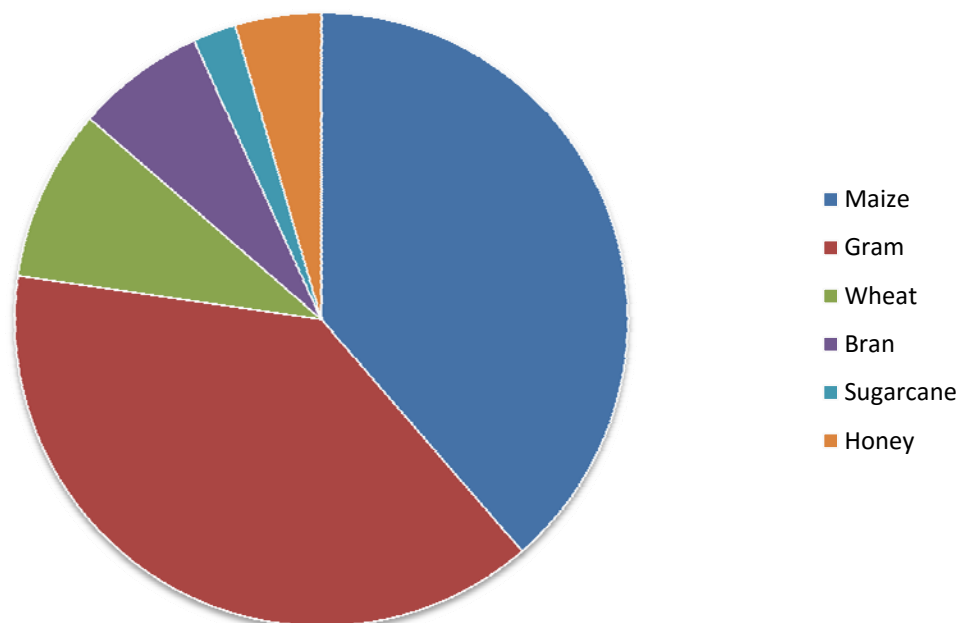
## Alternative mules incase one gets sick



## 2.2. FOOD AND FODDER



Working mules are mostly fed maize and wheat for about two times a day. The feeds are packed in a small sack and tied on to the mule's neck covering their mouth, which allows them to eat while they rest. Since the economic condition of most of the mule owners are not so stable, nutritious feeds like Bran, Sugarcane and honey are fed by only few of them. As a result some of the animals look malnourished and thin. However, the feeds are given in a good quantity with enough drinking water. Mostly, the resting places of mules are on the bank of river like Budi Gandaki which gives them enough access to the clean drinking water.



### 2.3. HEALTH AND HYGIENE

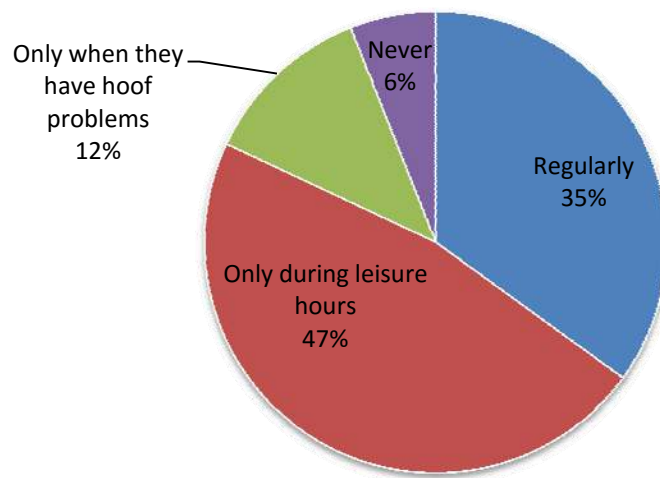


Since, almost all the mule owners are uneducated and have very less knowledge over animals' health, they still believe in witchcrafts which they also use to treat their animals. With only two vet technicians of DLSO service center working on an extremely less resources and manpower, more

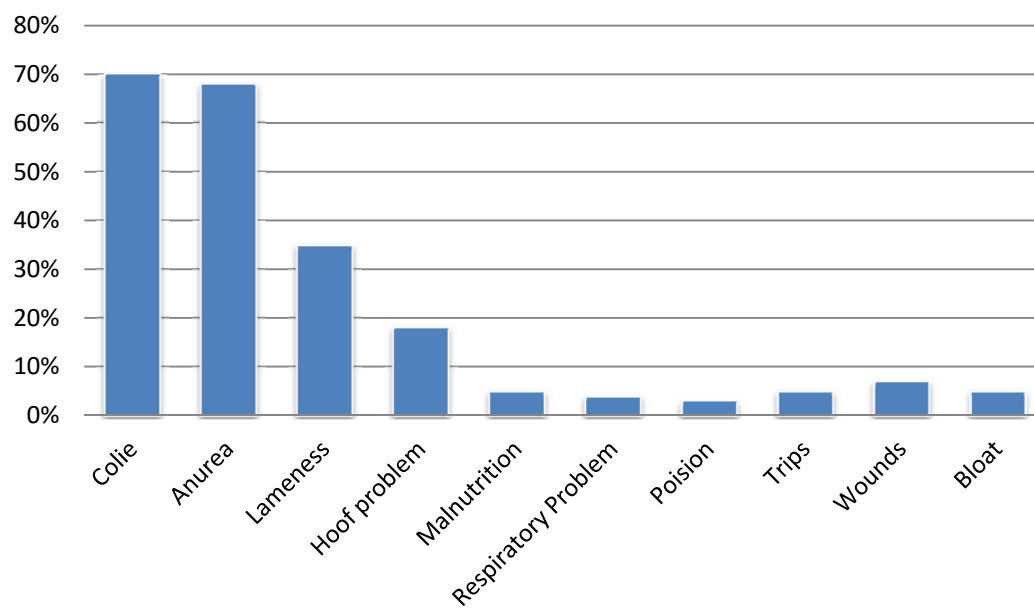
than 85% of the mule owners are forced to treat their animals by themselves. There is also no regular hoof cleanings in the mules. Our survey team came across maximum cases of overgrown hoofs in the mules. Besides Colic, hoof abscesses and Anurea were the most common health problems in the mules.



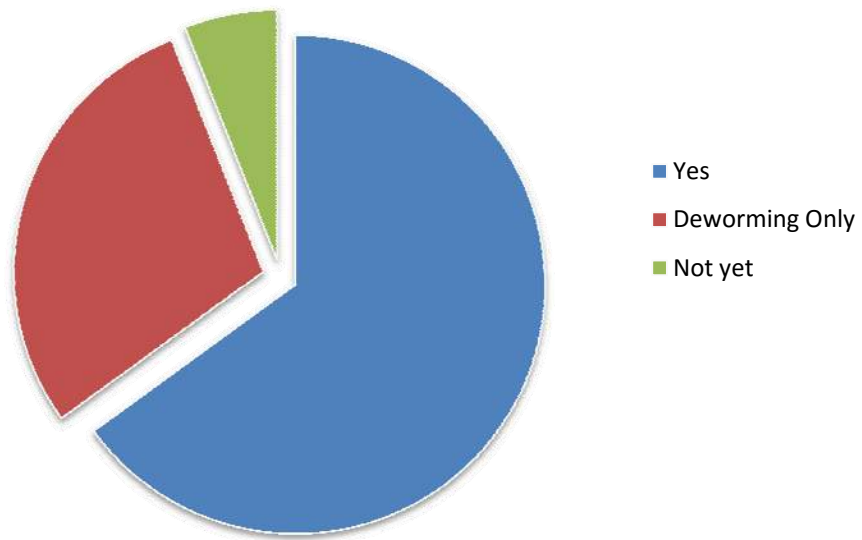
## How often do you clean hoofs of your mule?



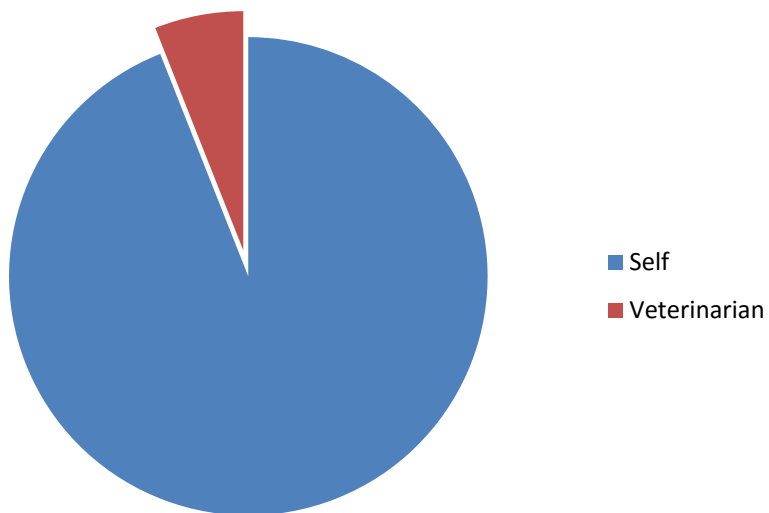
## Common health problem in Mules



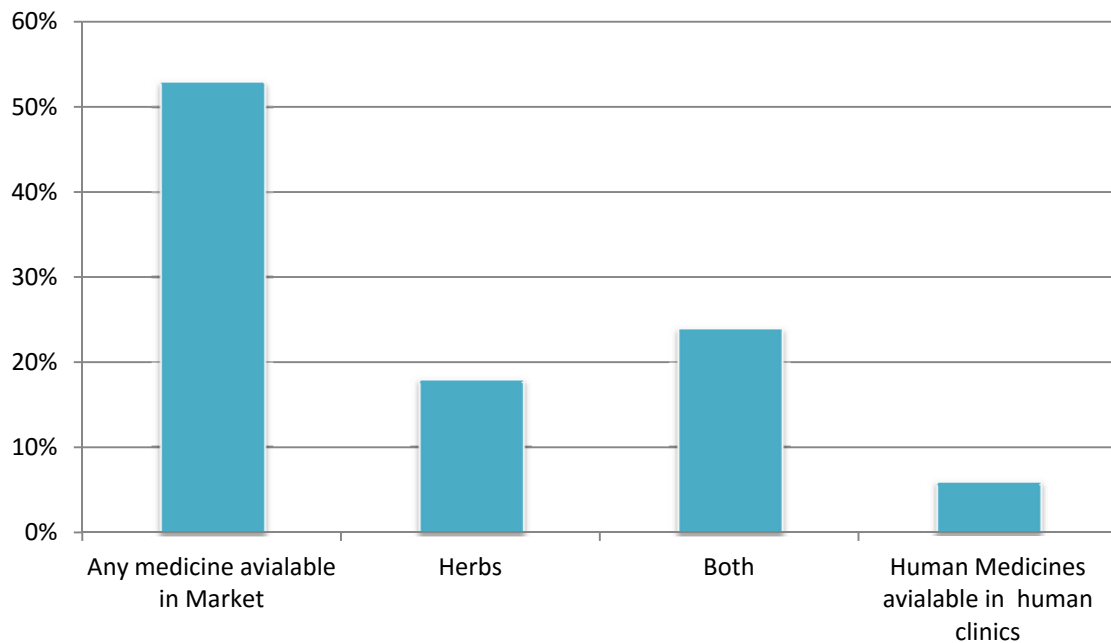
**Does your mule receives regular vaccinations?**



**Who treats your mule when they fall sick?**



## Types of Medicines used for mules



## 2.4. SADDLE AND BEATING WOUNDS



The saddles for mules are made out of reused sacks and ropes which is not a proper saddle for the mules to carry such a heavy loads. They have always been using the saddle made out of sacks which caused saddle wounds in most of the mules. Also more than 25% of mules had beating wounds on their hip area. The herders use a



long stick which is used to beat the animals to walk and they also throw stone on animals.



## 2.5. STATUS OF THE EQUINE OWNERS



Gorkha's population is geographically wide-spread, with small settlements and villages scattered in between deep valleys and mountains. Accessibility to mountainous areas was already very limited before the earthquake, and the disaster made it worst. Majority of houses in Gorkha are mud-bonded and constructed of bricks or stone (Nepal Census 2011). More than half of Gorkha population lives below the poverty line.

Due to the topography and poor road conditions, mountain mules are the primary source of transportation and hence the life line of remote local people of Gorkha. Our primary research found out that over 12 villages in Gorkha do not have proper road connectivity. And mule transportation hence becomes a hot job for the villagers'

especially young school going boys of Gorkha. Mules transport goods for the villages and create job for the young boys. However, mule owners and herders spend days and nights looking after the animals in poor living conditions where their earnings are barely sufficient to sustain their families.

On top of that, the earthquake on April 25 and the aftershock on 30 April killed 407 people in the district and more than 1,000 were injured. (ACAPS Nepal Earthquake: Ghorka District Profile) and 209 mules died in the disaster (According to mules association Arkhet). In such condition where people are forced to live outside in the cold under tarpaulins, we can hardly expect animals to get a proper shelter and better living in Gorkha.

## 4. ANEXES

### 5.1. SURVEY FORM

#### Animal Nepal

Condition of working mule 2015

Survey- Questionnaire

Date: .....

Name of owner: .....

Address: ..... District: .....

V.D.C/Municipality: .....

Ward no. : ..... Contact no: .....

1. Purpose of keeping the working animals?

.....

2. Beside the equine business do you have any other profession?

a. Yes ☐ .....

b. No ☐

3. Where do you bring these animals from?

.....

4. How many times do you feed them?

.....

5. What kind of fodder do you provide them?

.....

6. How many times you give them water?

.....

7. What is the working hour of your animal per day?

.....

8. What is the working days of your animal per week?

.....

**Details on animal health:**

9. If your animal gets sick do you have other alternative animals for work?

Yes ☐ No ☐

10. How many animals you had last year?

.....

11. Do you clean their hoofs regularly?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

12. Where do you keep your animals during night and rainy times?

Shelter ☐ House ☐ Outside ☐ Others ☐

13. What is the current health condition of your animal?

Good ☐ Bad ☐ Others ☐

14. What are the common health problems in mules in your area?

.....

15. Do you vaccinate and deworm your animal on regular basis?

Yes ☐ Not yet ☐

16. Who treats the animal when they get sick?



Veterinarian ☐ Self ☐

17. What kind of medicine do you use for their treatment?

Herbs ☐ Available in market ☐ Other ☐

18. ....

## 5.2. WELFARE ASSESMENT SHEET

### DESCRIPTION-WELFARE ASSESSMENT

<b>Behaviour</b>	Alert/Apathetic/Depressed/Aggressive/Friendly
<b>BCS</b>	1- Poor, 2- Moderate, 3- Ideal, 4- Fat, 5- Obese
<b>Wounds</b>	0- No wounds, 5- Majority have wounds (Harness wounds, bite wounds, beating etc.)
<b>Lameness</b>	0- No lame donkeys, 5- Majority are lame (Musculo- skeletal, Hoof)
<b>Other Injury</b>	0- None, 5- Majority are affected (Skin, Respiratory, Digestive, Ocular etc.)

Life of Donkey	
<b>D</b>	Condition of Donkey (Behaviour, BCS, Wounds, Lameness, Other Injury)
<b>WC-D</b>	Working Condition for Donkey (Load, Harness, Shelter, Feed/ water/ Grazing)
<b>WC-S</b>	Working Condition-Site (Terrain, distance between loading/ unloading, shade etc.)
<b>ATT</b>	Owners Attitude (Communication with donkeys, beating, husbandry practices, beliefs)
<b>S/R</b>	Stakeholders and resource availability (Health, Farrier, Harness/Cart maker, feed etc.)

S. N	Owner's Name	No. of Mules	BCS 1→5	Wound 5→0	Lame 5→0	Other Injury 5→0	Behavior	Life of Mule					Comments
								D	WCD	WCE	ATT	S/R	
1.	Aita Lama	10	2	1	0	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	
2.	Bharat Bahadur Gurung	6	2.5	2	1	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	
3.	Sajeen Thapa Magar	7	2.5	2	1	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	
4.	Sanak	10	2.5	2	1	1	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	

	Gurung												
5.	Hari Gurung	15	2	2	1	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	
6.	Hem Bahadur Gurung	8	2	1	0	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	
7.	Dhan Bahadur Gurung	9	2.5	4	0	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	
8.	Suman Gurung	21	2.5	0		0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Overgrown Hoofs
9.	Suk Gurung	9	2	1	0	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	
10.	Chandra Thapa Magar	15	2	4	1	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	
11.	Santa Bahadur Gurung	15	2.5	0	1	0	Alert	Y	Y	N	Y	N	

### 5.3. FEEDBACK

"It would be great if organization like Animal Nepal comes to Gorkha and help us in treating our mules. There are situations where we become helpless and have to let go our animals because there are no any veterinary facilities here and we have always been experimenting various herbs and human medicines on our animals. No wonder, only few of them survives"

-Local herder Suman Gurung

"First of all we need to improve the road conditions in here and develop a better walking route for our mules. The routes that are blocked by landslides are still not clear and we are bound to take a riskier route to destination. We have lost so many animals due to the difficult route."

-Mule Owner Bharat Bahadur Gurung



Dobighat, Lalitpur District

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