

ASIA LANDSCAPE STUDY

Understanding capacity building gaps within farmed animal welfare / vegan organisations in Asia

A study by [Good Growth](#), commissioned by Animal Advocacy Africa

June 2022



GOALS

To better understand the internal challenges and bottlenecks faced by farmed animal welfare/ vegan organisations in Asia, in order to:

- Explore what capacity building actions/interventions are most needed to solve the challenges faced by organisations in the region
- Assess whether Animal Advocacy Africa's capacity building programme should and can be replicated to the region

TARGET AUDIENCE

This study began as a scoping study for internal, strategic decision making. Ultimately, we decided, based on our findings, that our African programme was not the right fit to solve the imminent challenges faced internally by Asian animal advocacy organisations.

Hence, we think this report could be especially useful to other capacity builders, donors, and advocates who are interested in growing the FAW/vegan movement in Asia.



METHODOLOGY

STEP 2

Completed semi-structured interviews with:

- 4x regional capacity builders/grantmakers
- 6x local organisations

(More about these organisations in pg.4)

We also did 3x informal chats / email interviews with other regional and local organisations.

STEP 4

By synthesising feedback from the interviews and the survey, we report the major challenges and needs in this deck; and we recommend high-potential ideas that other capacity builders and donors should consider implementing or exploring in Asia.

STEP 1

Conducted desktop research based on publicly available reports by animal advocacy organisations, charity evaluation reports by Animal Charity Evaluators, media interviews with advocates, events, and more.

STEP 3

Based on the challenges identified, we came up with capacity building ideas. To validate these ideas, we shared a survey asking local organisations to indicate **which intervention ideas they would prioritise or want the most**. Respondents were asked to choose as many or as few ideas as they'd like from a list of 35.

We received a total of 8 responses out of 17 organisations sent (5 of which we had spoken to in Step 2, and 3 we had not). Full survey responses are included in the appendix.

TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS

For this study, we targeted organisations doing farmed animal welfare (FAW) and vegan advocacy work in East, Southeast and South Asia.

We focused on local organisations that do direct FAW/vegan advocacy work in a country, and is not a local office of an international FAW organisation.

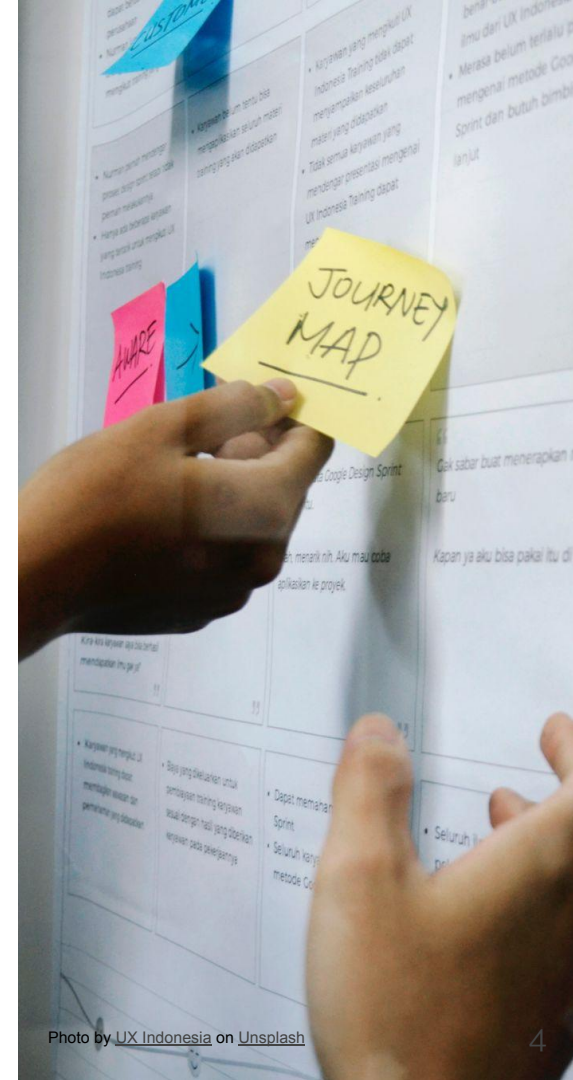
Of the 6 local organisations we spoke to, 1 focus solely on vegan advocacy work, 2 focus on both farmed animal welfare and vegan advocacy, and the remaining do both as well as animal advocacy for other types of animals.

We also spoke with capacity builders and grantmakers / donors who work in the region.

LIMITATIONS

The sample size for the survey was limited due to the number of organisations that responded (e.g. 8 out of 17 responded to the invite to fill out the survey).

We were only able to speak with advocates who already have working proficiency in English. This may have led to ideas related to language differences (e.g. translation services) being de-emphasised.



PAST AND PRESENT

The current concept of “animal welfare” is often regarded as a Western concept in many parts of Asia, where in some countries, is linked with its colonial history.

Within the animal advocacy space, there is a dominance of companion animal and wild animal organisations. The farmed animal welfare movement in particular is in its nascent stages, and international NGOs who have a presence in Asia such as Humane Society, Sinergia Animals, and World Animal Protection, have bigger budgets compared to local grassroots organisations.

FUNDING SOURCES

Most, if not all, of FAW work in Asia is funded by Western/international sources, particularly from EA and EA-aligned organisations such as Open Philanthropy, or international NGOs such as Humane Society.

There are few non-Western funding sources due to the relatively low recognition these issues get locally. Nonetheless, there is some funding by religious (Buddhist or Hindu) institutions throughout Asia.

LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Local FAW/vegan organisations varied in terms of background and experience.

During our initial discovery research process, we found less than 5 organisations doing only FAW work. It was more common to see organisations focused on promoting veganism, or were part of an advocacy organisation that also helped other types of animals.

FAW teams were generally small (<10 paid staff).

COUNTRY SPECIFIC LIMITATIONS

Certain countries, including but not limited to China, India, Thailand and Vietnam, have varying levels of restrictions on non-profit advocacy work and/or restrictions on receiving foreign funding (more on this on pg.13).

The nature of advocacy in these countries may look different: higher levels of cooperation/less obvious differentiation between NGOs, government and industry; or adopting less confrontational approaches to institutional engagement rather than doing investigations/negative campaigns.

Photo by Ketut Subiyanto from Pexels



KEY CHALLENGES, NEEDS & IDEAS

Organisational-level

- Training for Direct Work Interventions
- Communications
- Research
- Operations
- Fundraising
- Hiring and Talent

DEMAND FOR DIRECT WORK-RELATED TRAINING

As the movement is relatively new in Asia, there is a general need for developing best practices. This applies to internal operations and direct/programmatic work (e.g. engagement with corporates, government and public).

NEED: INTERNAL KNOWLEDGE BUILDING FOR DIRECT WORK

Organisations we interviewed said training is needed for various topics, for example:

- Public outreach campaign management
- Corporate engagement best practices
- How to do government-related work

In the survey, the following ideas emerged as the top three:

- 1 Corporate outreach training
- 3 Government lobbying training
- 3 Public outreach training

NEED: VOLUNTEER TRAINING

3 local organisations pointed out that it would be good to provide volunteer training (for those who help with public awareness events) on fundraising, campaigning, leadership and strategic thinking etc. Doing so could also inspire volunteers to consider animal advocacy as a career path more seriously.

CHALLENGE: LANGUAGE AND LOCAL RELEVANCE

However, as the institutional landscape may vary across countries, not all best practices from abroad would apply and local expertise may be necessary to supplement existing training materials.

A local organisation pointed out that it is important to figure out the unique “leverage points” within each country, i.e. important contacts or interventions within the local context that would create the greatest impact.

Another local organisation also mentioned the need for training materials to be in their local language, particularly for local staff and volunteers.

DIVERSE POSSIBILITIES WITH KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

More direct-work related training should be provided to local organisations. Further research needs to be done on:

- The most efficient methods of knowledge transfer based on existing materials
- Identifying local knowledge gaps that could be filled via the development of new training materials (see specific topics in pg.7). This applies to both training for staff and volunteers.

Apart from virtual or in-person group training, other training formats could be considered:

- International work exchange or job shadowing opportunities with more established/experienced organisations
- Knowledge sharing workshops among farmed animal welfare/vegan advocacy organisations
- Mentorship or coaching



NEED FOR BETTER COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

NEED: BETTER PUBLIC OUTREACH MATERIALS

Four local organisations mentioned the need for more effective external communications via better design and branding of outreach materials, and online community outreach and engagement.

One organisation brought up the need to create short social media video clips to engage the public.

Another organisation would “appreciate capacity building support on cultivating compassion towards farmed animals amongst young people through digital approaches”.

When asked about support they have received in the past, a local organisation endorsed Challenge 22 who subsidised their advertising spend, and provided valuable feedback and support to their online campaigns.

In the survey, this idea came in second:

- 2 Discounted/sponsored outsourced services for communications (e.g. social media or design consultants)

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the findings show a need for services that would help with social media campaigns and online community building.

Capacity builders and donors could consider:

- Funding or subsidising communications related work
- Promoting existing support/resources such as Challenge 22 to Asian-based organisations; or creating more of such services
- Working with university or high school students interested in the movement to engage similar-aged audiences online

ORGANISATION-SPECIFIC, BUT OPEN-ACCESS RESEARCH

NEED: FUNDING FOR LOCALLY-RELEVANT DATA AND RESEARCH

A local organisation shared the need for more funding to engage academia on local research related to animal welfare standards. They gave an example of speaking with government-affiliated experts who insisted that international research on certain fast-growing breeds did not apply to local breeds. The org believed local research would be more convincing when speaking with industry/government stakeholders.

This organisation also mentioned that general market data (e.g. import/export numbers, what's going well in similar markets regionally for high-welfare products) could also help with persuading government stakeholders.

In the survey, ideas related to research support ranked last and second to last, reflecting that this was likely not an urgent priority for local organisations.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Researchers and funders should work with local organisations to determine what research would be most useful for their work, and ideally make the data publicly available.

More research could also be done on the most promising or effective local intervention strategies.



BUILDING MANAGEMENT CAPACITY THROUGH TRAINING

NEED: BUILDING MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

Many local organisations are small and relatively founder-driven. Founders may not necessarily have the relevant management skills. While some have had experience running volunteer-based organisations, the work and expectations of running a team of permanent staff are different.

A capacity builder mentioned it was common to see passionate newcomers join, but burn out quickly due to lack of organisational support and poor work culture. A founder of a local organisation also expressed concern that the organisation would discontinue if the founding team left, as the existing team are not yet fully equipped to lead.

This shows the need to upskill existing teams on management and leadership capabilities.

CHALLENGE: LACK OF TIME AND RESOURCES FOR “NON-ESSENTIAL” TRAINING

However, training on topics related to organisational building and culture such as mental health, sensitivity training, management and leadership, diversity & inclusion etc. is often put on the back burner compared to direct work/operations.

An organisation of ten years also shared that they only just begun their first internal training programme on these topics.

This was reflected in the survey as management training and mental health support came in fourth after direct work-related training topics.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the reality that direct work usually takes priority/precedence over leadership and organisational development internally, funders and capacity builders should emphasise the importance of this topic for the sustainability and growth of the movement.

Providing regionally-appropriate training materials on these topics could be beneficial for the movement in the long run.

SUPPORT WITH OPERATIONAL TASKS

CHALLENGE: LACK OF SUPPORT FOR OPERATIONAL TASKS

A few local organisations face challenges with HR and financial processes / compliance.

One organisation described the constantly changing government regulations for finance and compliance renders it difficult for smaller organisations to keep up with.

Another mentioned that doing expenses and accounting are time-consuming due to lack of operational support.

A founder said they would “spend a lot of time on admin tasks which I am not the best at”, showing the inefficient allocation of time that could have been used doing direct work.

An organisation also mentioned the need to develop HR systems and processes before being able to hire and expand their team.

In the survey, this idea came in second:

- 2 Discounted/sponsored outsourced services for operations (e.g. accountants, technical experts, personal assistants)

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, there is demand for more support with operational tasks (likely due to small organisational size), so that organisations can operate more efficiently and focus efforts on direct work.

Further exploration should be done to **create better support systems for operational tasks for small organisations** in the region.

For example, there are plans to build an ops support organisation specifically for farmed animal advocates in India.

RISKS WITH RELIANCE ON FOREIGN FUNDING

Though all (but one) local organisations we interviewed said they were doing fine with funding for their current work, they mentioned the following concerns:

CHALLENGE: RELIANCE ON WESTERN FUNDING

As mentioned in pg.5, most, if not all, funding for FAW/vegan advocacy work (of organisations we interviewed) are derived from Western sources. Even for those with local sources of funding for other types of animal work, their FAW/vegan work is solely supported by international grants.

Past reports have indicated that donors may make funding decisions based on what works in the West, which may not necessarily work best in local contexts.

CHALLENGE/NEED: RESTRICTIONS WITH FOREIGN FUNDING

In multiple countries where foreign funding and ownership of NGOs can be restricted on the basis of political and national security, or viewed with increasing suspicion of "foreign influence", the need to find local/regional donors becomes critical in the mid to long term.

CHALLENGE: LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Language can also be a barrier in communicating with donors (who mostly work in English), especially for small grassroots organisations.

Though this can be resolved by accepting applications in local language and working with translators, it still poses difficulty for some local teams to fully communicate with donors regularly.



LACK OF LOCAL DONOR INTEREST

NEED: DIVERSIFYING FUNDING SOURCES

CHALLENGE: LACK OF LOCAL INTEREST

Four local organisations noted inherent risks with relying on a small donor base. Relying on a few major donors could be risky if they discontinued funding, particularly in times of global downturn.

Current funding sources may also be limited in amount, and are unable to provide larger amounts for more “commercial projects” like pilot model farms.

When asked about the reason for lack of local funding, all organisations we talked to cited a general lack of interest by local donors in FAW/veganism (more about this on pg. 21). This disinterest extends across local/regional foundations, corporations, high-net worth individuals, and small donors. Even donors who might be interested in animal welfare may not see the “direct impact” of FAW work (as opposed to saving stray or wild animals, for example), and others may prefer to donate to more reputable, international organisations.

Being in low to middle income countries may make it difficult to fundraise among small donors, where a donation culture is not well established and currencies are relatively weak ([Sinergia Strategic Plan 2022](#)).

CHALLENGE: COMPETITION AMONG ORGANISATIONS AND DONORS

Among organisations that may rely/ have relied on corporate funding (particularly those with companion/wild animal backgrounds), there may also be a culture of competition. This, in turn, may result in a lack of information sharing and cooperation among organisations as they are competing for the same funding source.

A local organisation also cited issues with grant compatibility (some international donors unwilling to fund continuation of work funded by other “competing” funders), which led to budgetary issues with hiring and campaign expansion.

CHALLENGE: ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL DONORS

A regional capacity builder mentioned that some organisations in Asia lack the knowledge and access to the breadth of potential (local and international) donors, but the local organisations we interviewed did not mention this as an issue.

DIVERSIFYING FUNDING SOURCES

With the general need to diversify funding sources, it is perhaps not surprising that this idea came in second in the survey:

- 2 Engagement with alternative funders (e.g. impact investors or crowdfunding)

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a list of non-exhaustive ideas for non-traditional funding sources:

- Invest in social enterprises, for-profit or other non-profit business models for commercial projects such as sustainable, cage-free farms
- Local organisations to partner with online platforms such as [abillion](#) or crowdfunding sites to develop a global donor reach

- Cultivate small donors in Asia for FAW/vegan causes by providing interesting content like videos, podcasts or newsletters using platforms such as Patreon. Depending on who initiates the page, funds could be distributed across different local organisations

In the short to mid term, local organisations could still benefit from international (Western) institutional donor search, outreach and relationship building, but the cultivation of donors in Asia is needed in the long term.

While general movement building may help increase the pool of individual donors, there is still a large gap in **cultivation of institutional donors (e.g. corporates, foundations, family offices etc.) in Asia** to include farmed animal welfare / vegan advocacy as part of their funding portfolio. Further research needs to be done to understand how to best engage with and persuade these institutions..

FUNDING CHALLENGES FROM A DONOR'S PERSPECTIVE

From a donor/grantmaker perspective, the most commonly seen issues were:

CHALLENGE: LACK OF “FUNDABLE” IDEAS

Funders and capacity builders have cited the lack of “fundable” ideas to support (e.g. teams not having enough technical FAW knowledge in areas such as veterinary science, legal, policy, and management skills).

NEED: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (FROM GRANTMAKERS) TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF PROPOSAL

Two grantmakers reported having to provide considerable support and advice throughout the process (from grant application to execution of the idea). Unlike in more developed markets, a grantmaker mentioned the need for more “hand-holding”, such as the creation of a technical team to support grantees’ application development.

On the other hand, a local organisation reported strategic decision making as one of their main barriers to organisational development, and were hoping to get more feedback from donors about what they should be focusing on.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Funded mentorship programmes or ad-hoc support** from other established FAW organisations/technical specialists/capacity building organisations in the region. This could include giving local organisations strategic feedback or advice on funding proposals.
- **Funding research** to identify the most impactful interventions in specific countries to guide strategic direction of where funding should go.

SALARY AS A BARRIER TO HIRING TOP TALENT

Most of the local organisations we interviewed did not find hiring to be an immediate issue as they have a small but stable team. This was confirmed in the survey as intervention ideas to overcome hiring bottlenecks received only 1-2 votes each.

However, when hiring had to be done in the past, many mentioned the difficulty in finding mission-aligned individuals.

NEED: BUDGET FOR HIRING AND FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Two organisations cited issues with hiring: one due to lack of funding, and the other with finding the right individual with high levels of passion and professionalism.

CHALLENGE: LOW SALARY AS A BARRIER TO RECRUITMENT

Three interviewees mentioned low salary as a barrier in attracting talent, due to varying limitations:

- Some donors or organisational headquarters do not see the need to pay well
- Competition with for-profit businesses for qualified candidates
- Even in more established international organisations, many staff in Asia are contractors, who generally receive lower salary packages compared to full-time staff

This could be resolved if donors/management understand the need to provide competitive compensation.



NON-PROFITS = VIABLE CAREER PATH?

CHALLENGE: NON-PROFIT WORK NOT SEEN AS A VIABLE CAREER PATH

Many interviewees shared that in Asia, working in non-profits is not generally seen as a viable career path. In addition to FAW/vegan advocacy not being recognised as an important issue, many applicants may face pressure from their families to avoid such jobs, due to perception of low pay and lack of future prospects.

CHALLENGE: LIMITED CAREER PATH FOR FAW/VEGAN ADVOCATES

While there is a perception issue, three interviewees also mentioned the lack of a clear career trajectory for advocates within the movement: there is not much upward mobility or even lateral movements due to the small size of the team and lack of organisations doing similar work.

One organisation said: “When the organisation is small, It is not easy to dream about the future within it.”

Another organisation said that this was a reason enough for universities to reject their requests to host talks, as they were unable to offer many job/internship opportunities.



Photo by Zainul Yasni on Unsplash

CULTIVATING TALENT IN THE MOVEMENT

Similar to fundraising, the issue with finding the right talent is more long-term rather than an immediate concern for most local organisations we spoke with.

However, as multiple interviewees expressed, there is a general need to **promote non-profit work as a viable career option**, particularly in a nascent movement like FAW/vegan advocacy.

From the survey, the following ideas related to hiring received 2 votes each:

- Matching skilled volunteers
- Offering individuals job shadowing/work placements opportunities so they can better understand the field

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Ideas to support organisations:

- Offering FAW/vegan advocates professional development opportunities (even if upward/lateral opportunities are few at the moment) (see pg.7-11 for training topics)
- Factoring in competitive salaries when funders provide grants and when organisations are hiring
- Matching skilled volunteers with organisations

Ideas to get more people interested in working in the movement:

- Working with existing fellowship programmes to offer project incubation grants or opportunities to work in local organisations
- Working with initiatives beyond the FAW/vegan movement that promote non-profit work as a viable career path in Asia



KEY CHALLENGES, NEEDS & IDEAS

Movement-level

- General Awareness
- Community Building

RAISING AWARENESS OF FAW/VEGANISM

CHALLENGE: LACK OF RESONANCE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ISSUE

Everyone we interviewed, regardless of country based, mentioned a low general awareness and understanding of FAW and veganism among the public. For example, one interviewee quoted meeting an individual interested in companion animal work, but did not understand FAW and thinks “chickens are going to die anyway”.

This is a challenge not only for advocacy work, but also for hiring: a few interviewees mentioned job applicants not fully understanding the work they are doing. One said that “they think the organisation is promoting a vegetarian restaurant”, and therefore, face difficulties in finding mission-aligned individuals.

It also affects organisations’ abilities to fundraise locally (see pg. 14).

NEED: CONNECTING FAW/VEGANISM TO BROADER, GLOBAL ISSUES

One interviewee brought up the need for their staff to understand the global significance and importance of FAW/veganism in order to fully understand the purpose of their work.

Another interviewee said that they usually present FAW/veganism as part of a global environmental movement, which brings a more positive and professional image to the organisation, as well as presenting it as a career with growth prospects in various fields.



GROWING AND ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

NEED: GROWING THE ENTIRE MOVEMENT

Most of the interviewees cited the need for building the community and overall movement. Some examples include:

1. Organising brainstorming sessions with other organisations to generate ideas together
2. Getting more individuals interested in FAW. More talent needs to be cultivated for organisations to grow or for new groups to form
3. Setting up more organisations (international or local) to create momentum and an additional voice to FAW work in the country

4. Understanding and working with other social movements where there may be synergies

Especially in environments where non-profit work is more restrictive, capacity building initiatives may also need to include individuals in animal agriculture industry, sustainability-related businesses, academia and science, as many who are interested in the issue may not be working in what we typically consider “animal advocacy” roles.

CHALLENGES: PUSHBACK FROM RELATED MOVEMENTS

Nonetheless, a few organisations doing FAW work pointed out some pushback on their work from those in the vegan and environmental movement as they did not agree on the same principles or values.

NEED: MORE SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS IN THE MOVEMENT

There are at least three regional organisations/fellowships (e.g. Animal Alliance Asia’s [Animal Advocacy Academy](#), EA Singapore’s [SE Asia Farm Animal Welfare Fellowship](#), and [The Ahimsa Fellowship](#) by People For Animals Uttarakhand) that runs training programmes for individuals interested in FAW advocacy. Many local organisations also work with volunteers for their campaign work.

There is room for further outreach, engagement and funding for these individuals who are interested, but not necessarily doing full-time FAW/vegan-related work.

As Asia covers a broad range of countries with different socioeconomic conditions, it is no surprise that the challenges local FAW/vegan organisations face are also diverse. Nonetheless, from this research, we can see some common barriers/needs:

- General low public awareness of farmed animal welfare and plant-based diets as an important issue for health, animals and environment
- General low favourability for a career in non-profit work
- Lack of local donors concerned about this issue
- Demand (from organisations) for more locally-relevant training on best practices for engaging stakeholders like corporates, government and the public
- Lack of support for “non direct work” tasks like operations, finance, HR etc.

In this report, we outlined some ideas capacity builders and donors should consider implementing, and the ideas themselves range from short-term possibilities (e.g. developing direct work training programmes on topics such as corporate outreach, working with capacity builders to offer individual project incubation grants), to mid-term (e.g. developing outsourced support systems for operational tasks), and long-term (e.g. cultivation of local donor network).

For any questions or feedback about the report, please contact Lynn Tan at lynn@animaladvocacyafrica.org and Ella Wong at ella@goodgrowth.io

“Capacity building needs to be done with long-term impact in mind, there should be clear KPIs and an exit plan by any external capacity building organisation working in Asia.”

- A regional capacity builder

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The full set of survey responses can be found in the appendix [linked](#).

