



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 679, Interview with Linda Ncube

Mariann Sullivan: Welcome to Our Hen House, Linda.

Linda Ncube: Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you. I'm pleased, I'm happy to be here today. Thank you so much.

Mariann: We're thrilled to have you, and very excited to hear about the work that you're doing. Let's start off with the basics. Just tell us what is Humane Africa Trust and what kind of work does it do?

Linda: Okay. Humane Africa Trust is a nonprofit organization, animal welfare organization. What we do mainly, we work from the rural areas, we are based in the rural areas. So what we do, we're concerned about the welfare of animals. Our activities include teaching about the freedoms or about the welfare of animals at schools, at the community level. We also do mobile clinics where we visit communities, treating their dogs, donkeys, and cats.

Mainly we focus on the animals that are not eaten because they're the animals that are neglected most in our community. So mainly we focus on animals such as cats, dogs, donkeys, and we also do the farm animals. Yes, we do that. We also help people with the veterinary medications, like taking their dogs or their animals to the veterinarian because people, like I said, we are in a poor set up so people cannot afford the veterinary expenses. So that's what we do.

We also promote (the) vegan diet, so we're into promotion of the vegan diet. We go by preparing foods and (having) people taste, having lessons teaching them to make vegan meals.

So that's (what) Humane Africa mainly is.

Mariann: That is really a lot. You are doing really a great many different kinds of activities. Remarkable work, and I wasn't aware that you were in a rural area, which makes it even more interesting. Most of the people from Africa I have interviewed have been from cities.

But before we get any more into the work that you're doing, I know that your caring about animals and your Christian faith are deeply connected. Can you tell us about that and how they are so connected?

Linda: Okay, so what I believe, as a Christian, we talk about love. So when we talk about love, we're talking about love to every creature. We are here on with other creatures, with the environment, so when we talk of love, it should encompass all those.

We can't be talking about love from humans to humans. We should also talk about love to non-humans. So like I'm saying, in my Christian belief, God created us to be on this earth. He also put the animals, the environment, the trees so we are steward of those things.

It's my duty as a Christian to be taking care of those animals and the environment at large. To me, Christianity can't be Christianity without loving other creatures that are on earth. So Christianity has to go with animals, environment, and everything.

Mariann: I wish every person of faith shared your belief because it's a very, very beautiful image.

How do you account for the fact that so many people of faith, of Christian faith, don't see this? It must trouble you.

Linda: Yeah, it's troubling but I do understand because myself, at a certain point, I just took Christianity without looking at animals, it was just about us people. But due to learning, due to mingling with other animal lovers and things, I learned that principle. So, I'm not angry (at) those people.

Of course, it's disheartening because when people see animals, they just see products to be eaten. I see it as a duty, that this task is upon me, that I should also show some light to others that are not aware what's happening, how we should anchor our Christianity. So it's my duty.

I see this as a task. I see this is a calling. I'm called to help people understand about animals.

Mariann: I just love your vision. I wanna put you in charge of everything. Like, if only people could see the world the way you do. I know it's not just you, because a lot of your beliefs, at least to some extent, are rooted in Seventh Day Adventism.

Now, that is a religion that I have heard of and I'm familiar with its vegetarian background, which is very exciting, but I don't know a lot about it. Can you tell us a little bit more about Seventh Day Adventism?

Linda: Okay. Seventh Day Adventism, we are Christians that believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ.

We worship on the seventh day. That is Saturday. What I like about Seventh Day Adventist is we talk much about our diets. Our health is a concern. So my Christianity doesn't promote the eating of animals. It doesn't restrict, but it doesn't promote. It promotes a vegan diet. It promotes what we call an Eden diet.

The diet that was found in the Bible in Genesis. Because we believe that the eating of other animals came after seeing, that was Noah's time. But when God created Adam and Eve, there was no meat. It was just fruits, vegetables, and plants. That was that. So as Seven Day Adventists, there is this concept of health and temperance.

We're so particular about our health, what we eat. We realize that most of the things that we eat, especially animal products, most of it are the causes of our illness, of our suffering and things like that. So my faith is so particular about about what we take as human beings, what we eat. Yeah. That's what I can say about my faith.

Mariann: It is so interesting, isn't it, that it turns out that the things that are best for us to eat are the things that are best for the animals, are the things that are best for the planet. Like it all makes sense. So few people seem to make sense of it. Did you grow up as a Seven Day Adventist?

Linda: Yes. I was Seventh Day Adventist. I come from a Seventh Day Adventist family, up to now, I'm still a Seventh Day Adventist.

Mariann: Tell us a little bit more about where you live, and is Seventh Day Adventist is a very common religion there, and are there a lot of people who agree with you about animals or do you feel all alone with it?

Linda: In our community there, it's like the animal welfare thing, the animal welfare issue concept is something that is new to the people. When people look at the animals, it's just about making business, rearing the chickens, eating them, selling them.

So what I can say, they're a little bit of Adventist that understand that. But true to the work that I've been doing, especially from last year, I had a program that I was doing with Creature Kind, an organization in America, it was an online organization, so it allowed me to preach.

It was specifically preaching to my kids. Speaking to the Seventh Day Adventist about the issue of animals and about our health. So that's when I, last year, that is 2021... Yeah. The program ended. So I was mainly teaching about the issue of animals and people were welcoming that issue. So it's like it has started to penetrate in my church.

We talk about it in my church, I ask to preach about it, to send some WhatsApp. I also share media, I do preach about it. So it's like something that is entering. As Seventh Day Adventist, we have the concept of being the steward of the earth. So it's not all that tiresome. It's not all that difficult to convince the people cause they know that they're stewards of this earth, so they're stewards of the animals and everything that is in it.

Of course there are not a lot of Adventists in this area, but the ones that are there, they do understand and they're helping me so much in my work. They are making it easy for me to do my work.

Mariann: Oh, that is amazing. It's amazing to have a community, even if it is a small one, it really changes everything.

What kind of outreach do you do? I know you mentioned a lot of things you do with animals, and a lot of them have to do with direct care of animals, companion animals, et cetera. But let's start by talking about vegan advocacy. What kind of work do you do outside of the Seventh Day Adventist community to help spread the idea that we shouldn't eat animals and that veganism is a good way to live?

Linda: Okay. We've got community programs where we invite people, anyone is invited, the one that we did in February, everyone was invited to come and do a practical lesson on cooking the vegan meals. I'll buy the ingredients and everything that is needed and people come and concentrate and we teach them on how. Because mainly people are saying that the vegan diet is boring cause

they do not know much recipes about it. So what I discovered is that there are many recipes that we have, especially the traditional ones. There's a survey that I was doing sometime this year going to the rural areas, trying to get the traditional recipes, traditional foods that we're eating because as we know about the civilization, most of our traditional foods are now, like, we do not know them.

So I was just interviewing all the people, people around 90 years, 85 years, asking them what is it that they were eating. And there's a lot. So we are compiling a recipe book for that. So that's what mainly I'll be doing (in) the community.

Mariann: And what kind of response do you get? Are people enthusiastic?

Linda: Yes. People are willing to try. They're willing to try. Of course some of them are not promising a hundred percent commitment, but they're willing to try. Cause some of them you find maybe have health conditions that they have been prescribed to reduce on meat or things like that. So for those people, it's just easier if you talk to them after getting those information from their doctors or whatever.

Mariann: What about the traditional diet in Zimbabwe? Is it largely plant-based as it is in much of Africa, or are there a lot of animals in people's traditional diet?

Linda: Yeah. Meat has always been an important part of the diet, but meat mainly is there for special occasions. They assume meat is supposed, it's a must when there are big occasions, people are gathering like we are going towards Christmas and things like that. There has to meat. But the traditional dial has a lot of interesting vegan diet also.

Mariann: Do people associate meat with prosperity?

Linda: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Meat eaters, mainly people who can afford to have a breakfast with meat, lunch with meat, and dinner with meat are people who are better in the society. Yeah. Eating vegetables like associated to being poor.

Mariann: Yeah, we see that. We see that in so many countries and a lot of vegan advocates in Africa that I've spoken to, as well as in other places in the global South, point out, and this may not be true in Zimbabwe, but point out the relationship of really a lot of meat in the diet with colonialism, that it's not from a longstanding African or South American or whatever tradition, it has to do a

lot with the European diet being imposed on people. Is this something that people are aware of or agree with in Zimbabwe?

Linda: What I realize may be traditional, there were times when animals were killed, especially the domestic animals, they were killed during winter because people did not have refrigerators, so they would kill animals during that time.

I think it was a good idea cause it limited the number of animals being killed, like cows and goats were killed winter. So like the colonial diet also, I can say, it contributes to too much meat eating because there's these things like bacon, sausages that we did not have traditionally.

Traditional for us was to kill a cow then eat. We do not have these other processed things, but with the introduction of the processed things, there's too much intake of meat.

Mariann: Yeah, I think we see the same trend happening in so many different places.

Let's move on to the other topics because your, your organization is doing so many things. How do you approach teaching children, that's one of the things that you mentioned, about respecting animals and caring for animals? Like what's your method for working with children to really reach them with this message?

Linda: Okay. Like in primary school, we work with children of different ages, like in primary schools, we do like dramas.

Do you understand? Dramas...like theater, something like that? Yeah. Where we teach through actions, teach through pictures, especially for the primary kids. We teach them, and the kids are so intelligent to grasp everything that we teach to them. So we like tell them maybe schedule a weekend where we'll visit their homes because all these kids, they have homes where there are these animals. And we'll see, let's say we are visiting a kid with a dog. We make sure we prepare the place for the dog to sleep. We prepare the dishes and everything, the plates for the dog, and we make the environment of a dog to be better. So like we teach at schools and then make a follow up to a homestead by homestead for the kids to make sure that their animals... Yeah.

Mariann: Wow. That is really intensive. And what is the response of the children? Do you see their attitudes changing towards their companion animals as they see how much you care?

Linda: Yes, yes. There is a lot. Especially, there was this kid, there is now 10 years to vegan, she was 12 year old.

She was not comfortable after the lesson, comfortable about killing the goat and the mother was saying, "Please, can you please give me some food that is vegetarian? Cause my kid, after hearing you, she's refusing to eat meat."

So kids, they do and they have that empathy towards the animals bause the kids are the ones who take care of those goats and cows. So they've got an attachment with those animals. So killing those animals, they feel pain too, even if it's for their food,

Mariann: That's a great story. I love that. And I love her mother too, for not just making her eat what is put in front of her, but actually respecting her wishes. That's a great story.

You're in a rural area and I'm sure a lot of the animals there are raised by individuals, but what about factory farming? Is it growing in Zimbabwe?

Linda: Yes. Factory farming is growing so much in Zimbabwe, especially in bigger towns. Yes, there's factory farming, there are cages. We also do online campaigns for cage-free week.

So there's so much more chickens in cages, in battery cages, layers and broilers. In fact, the government is promoting that, factory farming is being promoted. There are loans that are given for people to buy the battery cages. So it's hard working on that because the factory farming is for those people with money, for those men that are connected with the government, with the power.

So you're like being a nuisance to them when we talk about these things. So yes, it's being promoted in Zimbabwe.

Mariann: I'm just curious about the fact that though, as you said, factory farming is growing there, in Africa and in Zimbabwe, specifically, it hasn't completely taken hold as it has here. Here all the animals are raised in factory farms.

You never see animals and so I'm wondering whether, in spite of the fact that it seems tough and the government is against you, maybe there's an opportunity for Africa, Zimbabwe specifically, Africa in general, to be kind of in a leadership role here, to put an end to this before it gets worse.

Linda: Yes. For us, yeah, it's maybe like factory farming hasn't taken hold of everything. Like in the rural areas, we have our cows, we have our goats, so I think we just, what we need is much advocacy. I can't blame the government. I can't blame those teaching, or those doing the factory farming, it's that they do not know. There are some that we've approached and they seem to be in the dark about that.

Yeah. So I can't blame people, but what we need to do is to maybe increase our own advocacy so that people do understand. It's not that people are resistant, but in our situation, people do not understand. They don't know about those animal rights and things.

Mariann: Yeah, no, it seems like people everywhere, even good people who are otherwise leading very virtuous lives can be very blind to what's happening to animals. It's so troubling.

One of the things I noticed, so you mentioned that you work with dogs and cats. I notice on your social media many pictures of cats, and I love cats. I have cats myself. Can you tell us a little bit about the kind of work you do with cats...and dogs as well? I mean, I love dogs too, I don't mean to leave them out.

Linda: Ok. For cats, our community has lot of, you can say, homeless cats. They're roaming. You can just go around 500 meters, you see a cat, you see a cat. There are lots of cats. So what we do mainly is spaying and neuter. This year and last year, we were busy with spaying and neutering those cats.

We had a grant from SPCA International, so we are neutering those cats but taking back them to where they live in the community. So that's what we do. And we do feed them, we feed these cats and we try to teach the people, because people sometimes they become cruel to these cats because they eat their chickens, they eat their chicks.

So we try to, people make a coexist with them. Cause also they're good. They protect people from snakes, like they catch the snakes and the rats. So we try to make people coexist with these animals.

And the dogs, most of our dogs, they're not stray dogs. They are owned but they roam around to find food. So you find dogs everywhere, they have homes but they roam around. And when we are trying to do the neutering and spaying program, people were not welcoming it because dogs are seen as a source of income. They're a source of income. If a dog has a puppy, you then go and sell that puppy. So people, they don't want their dogs to be fixed. It's a challenge

when we're trying to fix the dogs, yeah. It's an income, like a puppy is exchanged with a chicken, so people do that.

So we find a large percent of dogs are very poorly kept because each year we can't afford them, but it's a source of income. We're trying to teach people on those things about that. Yeah. Mainly for dogs and cats this year and last year it was about spaying and neutering and then feeding them. Yeah. And the dogs we were vaccinating against rabies because there is a lot of outlets. People do not take their dogs for rabies vaccinations. So we are doing most of the vaccinations against rabies.

Mariann: You certainly have a lot of work cut out for you. Actually, I have one more question because we haven't talked about wild animals and you know, a lot of people here very much associate Africa with your extraordinary wild animals. Do you do any work with wild animals, either directly, or teaching children about wild animals?

Linda: We do teach the community about the wild animals because there's a tendency of poaching. They do illegal poaching here because we're near a game park. So there are elephants, there are water birds, and these other, kudu, other small animals. So people, they do hunt. Like I said, they keep many dogs, they use those to do hunting. So we are trying. Of course it's illegal, but they do it.

So we are like advocating or teaching them that these animals, they're not supposed to be just eating or doing those things. And we work with the national parks, like if we see, and they do stray, these elephants or whatever, we phone the national parks to come and attend to the animals that have strayed, we work with them in keeping the environment.

Mariann: Even though you have trouble getting people, sometimes, to care about wild animals, or to care about cats and dogs, I'm sure there are still many people who do care about them but still don't make any connection to the animals they eat.

Do you find this to be the case? That's certainly the case here. So many people care passionately about wild animals, about cats and dogs, and just never give a thought about the animals that they eat. Is this the case as well? And how do you encourage people to see the connection, both children and adults?

Linda: Yes. That's the case here. When people see a pig, they don't see a pig. They see stackshot, they see trotters, those things. So people, of course, they've got this connection with the animals that they do not eat, but the ones that they

eat, to them, it's like a product. Like people be saying, "Why are you advocating about, or why are you talking about chicken?"

It's like chicken is just like a vegetable, something that we should eat. So there is no connection, literally there's no connection. People see this as products that need to be eaten. Like even if we're talking about the welfare of the chickens that they keep, they'll be like saying, "Why should you care about these chickens? At the end of the day, we're going to kill them."

So it's a lot of a challenge. People don't see them as animals, but mainly as food.

Mariann: Yeah. That is exactly the same here. And I think everywhere. What do you think the difference is between you and other people? You know, other good people who care about animals and you know...why do you see it?

What is the answer, Linda? Because if we know that, we could change the world! What is it that helps people see this connection between animals, which not everybody loves animals, but really a lot of people love animals, but they just don't see the connection to animals they eat.

How do you get people to see that?

Linda: The way we were socialized, the way we grew up is the one with which has this challenge. Cause we were socialized to think that chickens are food. So like I said before, we need to teach people. People need to be taught. It's not that people are resistant to what, of course, maybe we can't reach them all, but people need to be taught.

This thing is, I think it's taught, it develops. Like I say about myself, when I entered into animal welfare, I was different...of course, I loved the animals, like we are saying, but there was never this connection. But now, after much study and being in the field, there is this connection that I have about animals.

So it's just teaching people about that. Some people, they need to be taught. We need to tell them.

Mariann: Yeah. They really need to be taught and I'm so grateful that you're there doing exactly that. It is a big job though. There's a lot of people. There's a lot of people and most of them just seem so blind on this issue.

I'm so glad that you are not, and that you're doing this work. Where can people find out more about your work online?

Linda: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. That's where we are found, mainly.

Mariann: That's Humane Africa Trust, right?

Linda: Yes. Humane Africa Trust.

Mariann: Excellent. Thank you so much for doing what you do, and for sharing it with us today.

I really appreciate it.

Linda: Thank you so much! Thank you.