Walking down a stretch of road in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, Philippines, I observed at least five stray dogs wandering about, scourging for food. This memory is by no means an isolated event as the Philippines unfortunately has one of the highest stray populations. I often witnessed people beating stray dogs along with other instances of cruelty in my hometown. What else could be expected when the value of such creatures has been diminished by their prevalence? The Philippines is not alone in its stray animal problem but is notable due to the prevalence of strays. In 2017, the Philippines’ dog population was an estimated 11.6 million, ranking number six in the world (Nag). Taking into consideration area, the Philippines’ dog to area ratio is approximately five times that of America. The World Health Organization reports that more than 200 million dogs roam the world today, and America is no exception. Houston, Texas, alone, is home to more than one million stray dogs (Raphaelson). Worried about the aggressive behavior and spread of rabies, governments throughout the world are resorting to mass culls (“Ending Inhumane Culling”). What many of these authorities do not realize, however, is that the eradication of dogs solves neither the problem of rabies nor overpopulation.

Mass culls have proven time and time again to be ineffective and even counterproductive. The Global Alliance for Rabies Control reveals that because “culling does not address the source of new or replacement animals,” it has only a temporary effect on population size. Worse yet, following a mass killing, some areas have experienced a boom in dog population. This growth may be attributed to an increase in dog importation resulting from the exorbitant demand for dogs (Morters 15). No amount of bloodshed will bury the desire for companionship through pets; therefore, governments should, instead, seek a more permanent solution. Furthermore, because they are prone to kill vaccinated strays, culls inadvertently lead to an increase in rabies
transmission as populations regenerate (Global Alliance). The random killing of dogs, in practice, hampers the benevolent work of community vaccination programs. Research has proven that the annihilation of strays is a shallow response to a complex issue and does not produce the intended effect.

Nevertheless, authorities from many countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Russia, sanction mass killings, usually in response to outbreaks of diseases harmful to constituents (Dell’Amore). The desire of politicians to establish initiatives that protect supporters is hardly peculiar, but the indifference and inhumanity of these officials are concerning. Instead of waiting for outbreaks, they should have proactively instituted reforms instead of waiting for crises to erupt, and, in addressing their individual country’s issue, officials should act with more compassion. National Geographic lists bludgeoning, gassing, and strychnine poisoning as the more common methods of massacring dogs. Kelly O’Meara, a director at Humane Society International, discloses that dogs ingesting meat laced with strychnine “can ‘take up to an hour to die’” and are in excruciating pain until their deaths (Dell’Amore). After the carnage, public officials have few results on which they may pride themselves as mounting evidence clearly display that overpopulation and rabies will prevail until they are properly confronted.

Methods, aside from culling, are wielded by various countries. Stray dogs are sometimes sterilized in areas such as the Philippines, western Europe, India, and South Africa (Dell’Amore). Sterilization, spaying and neutering, is effective in lowering the rate of population. Because it stops reproduction, overtime, the number of street dogs will decrease as fewer offspring are born. Moreover, sterilization eliminates detrimental hormone-driven behaviors as females stop emitting hormone cues that perpetuate mating behavior, and males tend to become less aggressive, resulting in fewer fights with other dogs and calmer interactions.
with humans (“Why Spay/Neuter”). Such interactions will lead to an improved public opinion of dogs, which is important in gaining the support needed to stop government sanctioned killings and prevent animal cruelty. Rabies vaccinations, too, are paramount in stopping culls, which are usually in response to rabies outbreaks (Dell’Amore). The effort to vaccinate and sterilize dogs will begin a new, more effective cycle that will minimize the call for killings. Spaying and neutering, coupled with rabies vaccinations, will eventually lead to a sustainable population of stray dogs.

Establishing more animal shelters as well as advocating for adoption of pets over shopping for them will also assist in reducing the street dog population. Davao, Philippines, is home to nearly two million people and innumerable stray dogs, but the city only has one dog pound. Santa Cruz, with 90,000 inhabitants, has no animal shelter or dog pound. One problem that local government units face in implementing a pound or shelter program is that differentiating between stray dogs and dogs whose owners allow them to roam is difficult. To surmount this inconvenience, challenged officials should model Davao’s City Ordinance 1457, stipulating that a “‘dog shall be considered stray if they are not accompanied by its own owner and found wandering in streets, plazas, markets, school premises, and other public places’” (Labrador). Another issue such bodies are likely to face is that Filipinos, among other peoples, are more apt to shop for pets at the mall or breeders than to adopt them (“Sign the Petition”). Raising awareness for the benefits of adoption, therefore, is crucial to decreasing the number of street animals. Once demand for adopting strays rises, an increase in the number of animal shelters will follow suit and lead to a great improvement in the lives of strays and humans alike.

The challenge, however, is complex, and to ensure population reduction, other factors must be managed well. One of them is the advertisement of numerous organizations devoted to
saving, sterilizing, and vaccinating stray dogs. CARA Welfare is a nonprofit organization that aims to spay and neuter, as well as rescue, cats and dogs in the Philippines; the Philippine Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals vaccinates dogs for free; the Philippine Animal Welfare Society sterilizes and shelters dogs (“Animal Welfare”). These organizations rely on donations and must raise public support to receive necessary funds. In the time that it takes to attain donations, many fertile dogs will reproduce while sustaining themselves with garbage (Admin). As such, substandard waste management needs improvement. In Santa Cruz, residents did not have - and still do not have - trash bins like the ones allocated by cities here in America. Instead, they had to take their cellophane bags of garbage to a shoddy, chicken-wire fenced container. Despite its allotment to one neighborhood, the box was jammed with garbage from distant areas, and trash was often scattered on the road because of stray dogs’ rampaging. In response, the local administration discarded the container, the only means of systematic garbage pick-up. Now, trash remains everywhere on the streets of my hometown, where the dog population grows continually and downplays the coverage of rabies vaccination programs. Until the names of organizations are heard and garbage control reformed, attempts to solve dogs’ overpopulation and the rabies epidemic will have limited success, and the suffering of stray dogs will continue.

With a corrupt government and few financially stable counterparts, capable Filipinos have to rise to the challenge; those who are able to help should give back to their communities. To contribute, I started a Facebook page to grow support for rescuing stray dogs and addressing their overpopulation. The page has numerous likes, and I am continuing to grow its following by sharing its posts with popular groups in my town. I am also planning fundraisers with friends to donate money to shelters near my hometown, such as the Happy Animals Club, that rescue,
sterilize, and vaccinate dogs. During our senior year, we will conduct dog washes and a spirit
night at a local pizza restaurant to raise at least $500, which may seem small but is a large
amount of money in the Philippines and will save many lives. I also want to ensure that garbage
in my town is properly discarded and that stray dogs are housed, so I am working with the Vice
Mayor’s Office to achieve these aims. Defeating the issue of stray dogs is no simple feat, but if
every person contributes to the cause, even on a minor scale, the problem will eventually be
solved - without culling strays.

Culling - massacring - stray dogs is an inhumane practice and leads to no permanent
reduction in their population. The government’s and the people’s time, money, and energy
should, instead, go towards ameliorating the grueling lives of stray dogs, creating more shelters
and pounds, and financing existing organizations that save strays and vaccinate them for rabies
and other diseases. Hopefully, as a result of individual and collective efforts, the problem of stray
dogs will, at least, lessen and perhaps cease to exist, and governments will no longer resort to
slaughtering innocent creatures.
Works Cited


Franscine Garcia

Stray Lives Matter