Sustainable Solutions to Dog-Human conflict in Urban Areas

The solutions:

✓ The solutions are simple, yet currently being avoided by Municipalities, as they discourage economic gains from human and animal suffering.
✓ The objective is to reduce the population of dogs in urban areas, reduce rabies and reduce bites without harming the humans or the animal.
✓ Solutions are directly related to dog behavior and how ecology works.

Thus, solutions in the following order must be implemented at a local area level:

1) Mandatory semi-adoption of street dogs by RWAs, Commercial, Institutional establishments.
2) RWAs contact local NGO/AWO for ABC AR of these dogs.
3) A few residents regularly feed these domesticated dogs.
4) Blanket ban on breeding and sale and purchase of dogs as already implemented in many countries.
5) Proper Waste disposal management.
6) Ban on culling of any kind of dogs, including nuisance ones.

Scientific rationale behind the above:

1) By adopting RWAs are limiting the number of dogs as these dogs won’t let other dogs come into their areas. Dogs guard from dogs. Immigration of feral and biting dogs will be automatically checked by these community dogs. Dog migration is the main problem as otherwise the population is naturally controlled. This has been proven in the demographic study of dogs in the study. Real population increase is mostly due to migration which can only be stopped by semi adopted/community dogs. Domestication of a few dogs also reduces the human; dog ratio by manifold.

2) By vaccination & sterilization the RWAs can make sure the dog bites, aggression at time of mating season & that by lactating bitches is reduced. Plus these rabies-free dogs would provide protection from other rabid dogs. Their population will not increase for at least 8-10 years, which will give NGOs enough time to do the ABC AR program in the entire city. It also reduces the scope of AWOs & NGOs making money out of animal cruelty & making the program go round in circles with no effect on population by dislocation after operation.

3) Regular feeding will domesticate these dogs to the level that they would protect humans from any threat and within neighborhood bites will become zero. Humans become the primary food source which the dog would guard & protect, unlike feeding on garbage dumps which the dog inevitable guards against humans if these dogs are not domesticated. Also the notion that feeding dogs attracts them is false, as there is enough food on the street to sustain a minimum dog population. For e.g. A dog needs only 1006 Calories per day to survive which it can get from anything small which is dead. So humans by feeding don’t contribute to their population addition. On the contrary feeding breaks the natural large packs of dogs into smaller groups which safeguard humans as their primary source of survival, thereby making dog a natural enemy of any dog from outside which may come and increase the bites, population, rabies. Thus, feeding helps in reducing aggression and population distribution, but not population numbers. The problem is not over population of dogs, but population distribution. India has much lesser dogs as compared to humans than any other country. The problem areas are the ones where dogs accumulate and form large packs.
4) Breeders are cause of nuisance because they abandon dogs at a very high rate. The street dogs can control their own population as per environment, but breeders add new dogs to the neighborhood in urban areas up to 76%, as per our surveys. Many countries have banned sale and purchase of bred dogs for the same reason and have seen tremendous reduction in free ranging populations. This also has ecological impacts as the study proves at many places.

5) Proper Waste disposal management does not allow unchecked breeding of dogs at these sites & would reduce dog bites, aggression. Dogs will not have to guard the dumps from humans and hence again reduce aggression and nuisance values. But even of the waste disposal is improper, yet the first 3 steps are followed, would not affect the aggression in animals so much. Hence this step even though important is not necessary in reducing conflicts between man and dog.

6) Culling of any kind increase the problem manifold as the study proves in many ways. Also in reality the real Nuisance dogs can’t be caught, as they are naturally agile, feral and smart. So when dogs are caught and destroyed these are mostly the domesticated dogs which actually protect the humans from feral and nuisance dogs. As a result, and in the absence of domesticated dogs, the actual nuisance dogs are granted easy access into deeper human settlements thereby increasing bites and rabies. Only domesticated dogs can protect against nuisance and feral dogs as seen in the study. Moreover, many municipalities take undue advantage of this selective culling and destroy all dogs, as in the case of Meerut and Kerala. Any selective culling, no matter how minor, increases problem in many ways as explained in the study. The paradox of resolving nuisance value of the animal can’t be solved simplistically as though off by many. By linear approach if nuisance is attempted to be solved, leads to nuisance in many other forms. One of the major consequences being ecological magnification of migrant population of dogs into colonies, as explained in the study and mutation from K to R species. Thus, eventually it leads to a higher level of nuisance for humans and ecology. Hence selective culling of so called “nuisance dogs” leads to increase in problem. However, “nuisance value” of any dog can be resolved in many ways as the explained in detail in the study.

Apart from this the word nuisance, which has not been defined in the international law also, is very subjective. So the study has defined this nuisance value in many ways to resolve the dog human conflict. The study has also presented easy solutions, guidelines to remove the nuisance value of any dog without having to remove the dog.

Apart from this there is another problem in selectively culling nuisance dogs. Wildlife Protection Act 1972 mentions at some places of dogs which are protected under the act.

E.g. SCHEDULE-1
PART –I (MAMMALS)
Indian Wolf (Canis lupus)
SCHEDULE II
PART –I
Wild Dog or Dhole (Cuon alpinus)

The Act nowhere mentions that the wildlife act is applicable in wilderness and that a tiger, once out of its jungle and comes into a city, can be killed. In fact wildlife act covers two kinds of wildlife - natural wildlife & urban wildlife. And since these varieties
as mentioned in the act have many variations it is difficult to identify them if they are mixed with other dogs. A DNA test can only prove that. So a mechanism is needed to first quarantine all feral dogs, identify and separate the protected ones and then think of culling or not culling the rest. So selective or mass culling of feral dogs, centralized impounding of dogs cannot be suggested unless a mechanism is worked out for identifying the protected species. Since the wild, protected dogs are lookalike of the strays and the feral as seen in the city would lead to violation of Act, if selective culling is suggested.

**The basic philosophy behind the methods:**

In a diverse country like INDIA it is impossible to live without community animals like stray dogs. Unlike many other cultures our system of thought, life styles and many religion do not consider animals to be mutually exclusive from humans. The most important of all community animals apart from cattle is our COMMUNITY DOGS, also commonly known as stray dogs.

The basic reasons a dog becomes a problem to the society are that:

- **a)** Dogs form and roam in packs,
- **b)** They feed at mass level on the garbage and try to protect their area from anyone,
- **c)** They turn aggressive due to lack of food & medication.

The ratio of dogs to land available in any big city is very high, i.e. the number of dogs per sq. km. is very less, even in a city like Delhi. Hence, the overall population of dogs is not a problem as a whole. The problem is the distribution of these dogs over the entire area, i.e. when in one area the dogs become more and form packs whereas there are no or lesser dogs in some other areas at all. The problem starts with uneven distribution of population and the formation of packs of these animals with no human control on them whatsoever.

So are we going to address the root cause of this problem or keep running after resolving the consequences that arise out of such causes by mass or selective killing, impounding or relocation of dogs? Any method following removal of dogs only adds more dogs by creating a natural vacuum. If we need to address the root causes then we have to consider the presented solutions in our country very seriously. These solutions are inter related and have to be implement at the local level.

By nature dogs, like any other species, are capable of self regulating their population depending upon the resources available to them from their local habitat. You will find more dogs in areas with more food supply and spaces as refuge and lesser dogs with no or lesser food and shelter. If we remove the basic source of food and survival for dogs (i.e. the garbage dumps) then by nature any species including dogs will know the limitations they have with food vis-a-vis their population. That’s when their self regulatory method of controlling the population starts. The stronger dominate the limited food supply and the weaker migrate. Or the litter does not survive and die on its own. This is how the system works with almost any species on this planet, including humans. But removing the garbage dumps does not solve the problem alone. On the other hand it may aggravate the same, unless followed by the community level adoption of these dogs. This includes feeding them with healthy food every day, vaccinating them, providing them temporary shelters from weather conditions, etc.

If we do not adopt them at community level, it is very likely that due to lack of food they may again turn aggressive, which happens quite often. But with community level adoption of dogs the story reverses. Dogs by nature being territorial animals do not allow more dogs to come in their area, than the ones which, may survive on the food
that the community would supply to them, hence controlling the influx of dogs. Also the fact remains for centuries that the way to a dogs mind & heart is through its stomach. By community adoption, not only will the dogs start protecting the community (humans) as their basic source for everything, but will also turn docile to all members.

The basic difference between stray dogs feeding on garbage and on the other hand being fed by us, is that in the first case the garbage dump is the primary source of food for them which they have to protect from us, but the latter case we become the primary source of food for them, which they have to protect for themselves. Hence, adoption at community level is like making them dependent on us for everything, hence turning them into our pets on the streets. Thus a planned favorable habitat for the survival of the existing dogs will end the hostility these dogs feel to their existence. They would easily coexist with humans eliminating threat of any kind to the latter from their own species.

Thereafter, we may conduct the animal birth control program at local level and make sure the dogs do not reproduce at an alarming rate. After a few years the population will reduce drastically. But the ABC program is futile unless the first two methods are addressed at the city level. The solutions are simple and really effective, but have to be thought off rationally as a state level or national level policy and at the same time implemented at the local level. A knee jerk reaction to do killing or ABC without being sensitive to the nature of these animals is absolutely futile and is like going round in circles. This is why ABC is not effective in many areas and the reason why despite ABC the dogs continue to be aggressive. Aggression is only controlled by domestication of a few.

Finally it is very important that we follow legislation & registration as responsible pet owners. The house hold pet dogs are responsible for increase in street dog population to a large extent. The pet dogs should not be allowed to roam freely on the streets and multiply with the street population. It helps reduce the problem of street dog population by 30%. Also keeping a pet and then abandoning it on the street, is not only brutally cruel to the animal but also a grave crime which most commit due to various reasons or fallacies. It is far better not to love an animal than to first keep it and later abandon it. It is unforgivable. On an average 70% of pets are abandoned on the streets in India. Hence, it is very important to address the issue of irresponsible pet ownership in our cities in order to reduce the population and cruelty to animals. The same holds true for breeding. A blanket ban on breeding and sale-purchase of dogs would reduce the problem of nuisance dogs by manifold as breeders are in every nook and cranny of the city who abandons 8 out of 10 dogs which are bred on demand. The study has discussed all of this in detail.

Legal Scopes & aspects untouched so far:-

The solutions hint at a LOCAL AREA APPROACH by the Community instead of a centralized approach. This has roots based on many programs being run by U.N. for a very long time. Some of the norms which may help in implementing these steps in the local area approach are –

1) UDPFI norms say –
   a) 1 vet clinic for 50,000 human population
   b) 1 Vet hospital for 1,00,000 human population

Hence each human population of 1 lac can legally have one ABC center in the vicinity. These are master planning norms which should be followed all over India. Since Master Plan is a notified legal document this norm makes the state and the development authority to provide such a space in case it is not there. MCD/ DDA
have many such shut down units in Delhi which they are refusing to share for ABC by NGOs.

However, the Delhi state and the DDA is legally bound to allot these lands back to private or public institutions wanting to do the function of vet hospital for Urban Wildlife management, like ABC AR. The current concern of civic bodies is dogs, so the court can be convinced that these units should be used for ABC-AR.

2) U.N. Agenda 21 is an international treaty which talks in detail on many issues. The important one being involving the local community in decision making and development process. India is bound by this. So are many countries. Within that there is stress on local units for maintenance issues for a community. This means what Agenda 21 suggests is that state and local governments become facilitators and powers come in the hands of the people and their own local body. This no politician will ever utter in public. 73rd & 74th Constitutional Acts were also based on this. This international law must be appraised to the court and impleaded that the power to do such controls and measures like ABC should rest with local communities and their representative NGOs and hence we need to provide this infrastructure to decentralize the ABC for its effectiveness. The UDPFI norms have also been designed around this concept. Corporations, State governments don’t bring out this data for obvious reasons.

3) Recently the MCD has introduced this concept in master planning via LAPs (Local Area Plans). So instead of Master Plans, LAPs would be enforceable. This will become public in 2 years. The concept is based on sustainable cities in all respect. This is because in the present world master plans can’t control the cities as they are not sensitive to local context and needs of the people. The Bhagidari Yojna of the Delhi government is also based around this concept of “public participation”.

4) Around such international treatises and laws, the municipalities cannot centralize unscientific methods of doing important programs which affect human health and well being.

Hence the steps as suggested by this study are not only local, easy to implement but also within the legal framework which are being adopted by other countries as well.