How protecting livestock saves livelihoods

While emergency disaster responses prioritise and tackle the immediate needs of people, effective risk reduction plans sustainably address a community's medium and long-term resilience and recovery. Such plans involve analysing and mitigating the many damaging effects of disasters that extend far beyond the initial event. For people and regions that rely on animals, this means a 'big picture' approach encompassing the welfare of both people and animals.

Because the world's poorest and most vulnerable people rely heavily on livestock and working animals, their resistance to and recovery from disasters is closely linked to animal wellbeing. As a result, whole communities can be helped and protected through an integrated disaster response and recovery plan that addresses the needs of both people and animals.

Effective planning and implementation is essential. It protects livelihoods, builds resilience, mitigates climate change, guarantees food security and enables long-term recovery.

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In 2013, Maharashtra State experienced its worst drought in 40 years – a drought that threatened hundreds of thousands of people and animals with thirst and food shortages. So we partnered with the Department of Animal Husbandry in the state to help 9,000 cattle and buffalo in three cattle camps in the worst affected areas of Beed. In doing so, not only did we help to meet the area's immediate needs, but we also showed how integrating animal welfare can save the livelihoods of entire communities.

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The context

In Maharashtra, more than 64% of the population make their living from agriculture and livestock. And in the central and western areas of the state, where the drought had the most severe effects, even more people depend completely on these means for their survival.

Beed is an economically depressed area where long-term drought has contributed to spiralling poverty. In 2013, rainfall was at least 75% lower than usual. And essential, annual crops like sorghum, millet and wheat had failed due to the lack of rain. The animals affected were mostly cattle kept in farms for dairy and agriculture work. In other words, these animals were essential to people's livelihoods.

1 Meeting immediate needs

During the winter of 2013, tens of thousands of people needing emergency assistance for their animals arrived at 400 emergency camps set up by the Maharashtra State government. These camps aimed to provide food and water to nearly 400,000 drought-stricken animals.

The plans, however, were inadequate. Summer, with its temperatures of 40°C plus, was on its way. And the hot, barren landscape offered little water, shelter and grazing opportunities for the cattle and buffalo who so desperately needed them.

While the government's efforts had provided short-term relief, the medium and long term nutritional needs of the animals and people simply weren't being met.

2 How we helped

First, we investigated the priorities and needs of communities in the worst affected areas of Beed. We found that netting was crucial in providing the animals affected with shade. Without it, they simply wouldn't survive the harsh sun, limited access to water sources and lack of wallowing opportunities caused by the drought. The animals also urgently needed mineral supplements, as the only food available at the time was sugarcane, which is low in the minerals that are essential to their health. That's why, as a key part of our intervention, we supplied the camps in Beed with mineral blocks for nutrition and netting for shade, helping save the lives of the 9,000 cattle and buffalo there.

3 Integrating animal welfare

The three camps were so successful that we supported the state government to replicate them in 36 other camps in Beed, as well as 400 camps across Maharashtra. Ultimately, this could save the lives of 400,000 cattle and the livelihoods of people in 12,000 villages who depend on them.

As the first INGO working on the ground in Beed, we also shared our findings with Sphere India. This is a coalition of humanitarian organisations that include CARE, Cordaid, Catholic Relief Services and others. As a result, several organisations within Sphere have committed to conducting their own assessments of how to address the humanitarian aspects of the emergency. This further demonstrates the growing understanding of how animal and human issues are interlinked when disaster strikes.

4 A safer future for animals and people

Our approach has highlighted that, where animals are a major source of revenue and productivity, their loss has severe effects on local economies, food security and poverty reduction.

Our work in Maharashtra and elsewhere demonstrates that it's essential to integrate the welfare of animals with the needs of people in any plans to reduce the risks of disasters. This can:

- reduce the effects of future disasters
- protect livelihoods, the economy and social wellbeing
- decrease animal suffering and deaths
- increase a community's ability to cope without intervention from governments or NGOs
- involve the most innovative thinking from across different fields of expertise.

Our extensive experience in disaster management illustrates that helping animals helps people. It has shown time and again that the integration of animals into emergency planning and disaster risk reduction measures is fundamental to achieving effective, sustainable results.

This reality is increasingly understood and recognised within humanitarian and global development movements. In particular, the post-2015 and post-Hyogo movements can provide a space in which together we can examine the need to incorporate the critical role productive assets (livestock, working animals, tools and seeds) play in sustainable development and disaster risk management, and how this can be achieved.

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World Animal Protection has 50 years' experience of helping people help animals in disasters. We partner with local and national governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations and communities to deliver expert emergency responses, world-leading risk reduction and preparedness planning. All to find the best possible solutions for animals and people alike.To find out more about our vital work – and discover how we can help you – visit **worldanimalprotection.org/disasters**

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