



How healthy animals protect livelihoods and build resilience

While emergency disaster response prioritises the immediate needs of affected people, risk reduction plans seek to sustainably address a community's medium and long-term resilience and recovery. To do the latter, we must analyse and mitigate 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 that encompasses the welfare of both people and animals.

The world's poorest people rely heavily on livestock and working animals, which means their ability to resist and recover from disasters is closely interlinked with animal wellbeing. For these vulnerable communities, an integrated disaster response and recovery plan that addresses the needs of both people and animals is necessary to protect livelihoods, build resilience, mitigate climate change, guarantee food security and deliver long-term recovery.

Case study

Chihuahua, Mexico



When the state of Chihuahua experienced devastating drought both animals and people suffered. We partnered with the Aldama District Municipality to deliver an innovative and effective response that considered both animals' and peoples' needs and demonstrated how integrated planning can rebuild and strengthen community resilience.

The context

The people of Mexico's largest state, located in the arid north-west, are largely economically dependent on agriculture and livestock, in particular on cattle farming. But at the start of 2012, they faced the consequences of two years of drought and three successive failed farming seasons.

Without rain, green pasture dried up; what was left was overgrazed. Malnourished cattle were forced to eat fallen leaves and cotton leftovers from nearby plantations. As livestock deaths rose to the thousands, the people of Chihuahua were desperately in need of an action plan that would protect the lives and welfare of their remaining animals and – by extension – protect their long-term economic prospects.



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1 Meeting immediate needs

The Mexican government responded to the plight of its people by authorising around US\$250 million for measures including the provision of emergency food and water. While people were the priority, there were officially sanctioned disaster response activities relating to livestock, including destocking (selling off cattle) and limited free distribution of feed supplements such as maize and alfalfa (which many farmers cannot independently afford).

While these efforts provided much needed short-term relief to farming families, they were not sustainable: animal-based livelihoods were not safe in the medium to long term. Destocking meant producers lost their key productive asset, undermining resilience.

2 Integrating animal welfare

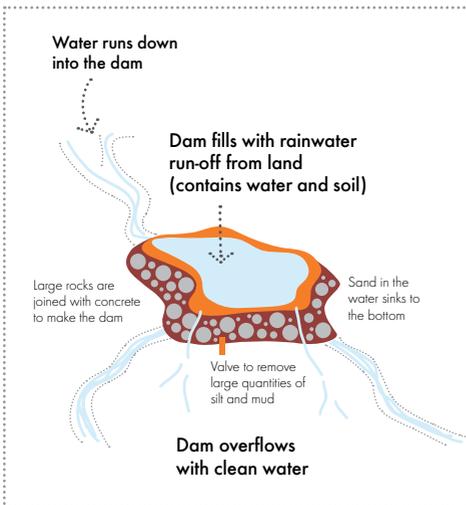


Diagram: Retention ponds now in use in Chihuahua, inspired by Kenyan sand dams

Recognising that for regional recovery the livestock needed not only to survive but also to thrive, the local government of Aldama (a Chihuahuan municipality) approached us to work in partnership with them. Together, we carried out a series of interventions that addressed the immediate welfare of at least 220 families and approximately 2,500 animals, with the long-term potential to help many more.

Our disaster team began by talking to local people and strengthening local risk governance through facilitating the formation of a community emergency committee. This early dialogue made sure that the animal-focused disaster reduction and recovery measures we introduced were supported and – in many cases – implemented by local people.

After distributing mineral blocks to farmers to offer immediate protection for suffering cattle, our response focused on sustainable action that would build community resilience to droughts in this arid region over the long term. Together, we:

- built two wells and a borehole to provide water for livestock and irrigate cactus plots
- planted indigenous cacti to provide an emergency animal food source in times of drought
- provided the parts and expertise to construct a water pump
- advised on the construction of modified ‘sand dams’, a type of retention pond – an example of cross-regional technology transfer – we had seen in use in northern Kenya. These collect run-off rain water to supply animals and pastureland. Built with the help of local families, the small reservoirs created by these dams now exist as an ongoing cost-effective risk reduction measure with the potential to benefit many thousands of animals and people in future emergencies.

To complement these efforts and increase local independence, the University of Coahuila delivered community training in animal and environmental management during disasters.

The success of the sand dams – an innovative technology transfer project that shows the benefit of cross-sector expertise – has been influential at the highest levels, moving authorities to go ahead with million-dollar plans for two permanent dams in the region.

3 A safer future for animals and people

World Animal Protection met Aldama’s needs by providing animal-welfare-focused disaster response and recovery planning that complemented humanitarian activity. In turn, by realising the importance of integrating animals into disaster risk measures, the municipality has been able to support communities in rebuilding their economies and planning for the future.

Since then, we have continued our fruitful partnership with the authorities in Aldama. Drought-mitigation plans included developing a community education programme on sustainable action against climate change.

As our work in Chihuahua and elsewhere demonstrates, disaster risk reduction planning that integrates the welfare of animals and the people who rely on them can:

- reduce the effects of future disasters
- protect livelihoods, the economy and social wellbeing
- decrease animal loss and suffering
- value the participation of citizens in increasing a community's ability to cope without government or NGO intervention
- involve the most innovative thinking from across different fields of expertise.

Our long experience in the field of disaster management has shown us that helping animals helps people. It has shown us that the integration of animals into emergency planning and disaster risk reduction measures is fundamental to achieving effective social, economic and environmentally sustainable outcomes.

This reality is increasingly understood and recognised within the humanitarian and global development communities. 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.

Our extensive experience in disaster management illustrates that helping animals helps people.



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