

Case study

Protecting livelihoods and food security: animal welfare in disasters

Problem:

Disasters affecting livestock destroy livelihoods and put food security at risk

In Myanmar, like many developing countries vulnerable to natural disaster, the majority of rural incomes depend on healthy livestock.

When Cyclone Nargis hit in May 2008, over 50 per cent of the country's livestock was killed. In the Ayeyarwady Delta, almost half the draught animals and a third of all pigs, goats, poultry and ducks were lost.

Surviving animals suffered severe injuries, trauma and the after effects of near drowning. Water contamination and a lack of veterinary facilities created a highly disease-prone and contagious environment for weakened animals. The threat of cross-infection to humans was also dangerously high.

Solution:

Effective disaster response and risk reduction operations that include animal welfare

Based on first-hand field assessments, the World Society for the Protection of Animals' (WSPA) Disaster Assessment and Response Team focused on:

- improving the survival rate and welfare of the remaining draught animals by treating injuries, vaccinating against seasonal diseases and advising on restocking issues
- safeguarding food security and livelihoods by strengthening the animals needed to plant the rice crop
- planning sustainable risk reduction activity for the future.

Working with humanitarian counterparts

To run a successful operation, we formed partnerships with agencies including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), collaborating from early cluster meetings through to field work.

The cyclone's toll

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Myanmar Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department estimated animal losses at:

- 66,000 swine
- 1,134,000 poultry
- 498,000 ducks
- 6,999 goats
- 227,268 cattle and buffalo; including approximately 61,000 working pairs.

Without cattle or buffalo to draw the ploughs, local farmers were left unable to plant deep water rice for the imminent monsoon season. This in turn threatened national food security and economic stability, meaning the survival and health of the remaining working animals became paramount.



Expert help. Safeguarding surviving animals was vital for community recovery.

Working together ensures that resources are used wisely and swiftly to protect people and animals. In Myanmar, WSPA was able to give the FAO expert advice about transporting replacement livestock; USAID and United Nations infrastructures helped move 120,000kg of WSPA-funded feed into affected areas. [Cont](#) ➤

❖ We also partnered with the Myanmar government's Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD). Their full cooperation enabled us – with assistance from Humane Society International – to set up four emergency animal health centres at LBVD premises across the delta. Sick or injured animals were treated by experienced WSPA livestock veterinarians, while healthier animals were given anti-parasitic drugs and vitamin supplements. WSPA also ran outreach clinics to reach livestock in remote areas.

LBVD clearly perceived the need to protect animals, bringing in extra veterinarians to help staff the centres and welcoming risk reduction plans.



Vital workforce. With improved animal health came a semblance of normal life.

Impact:

Prevention of a devastating loss of livestock, livelihoods and nutrition

WSPA activities and guidance in Myanmar prevented further post-cyclone livestock losses and minimised the spread of disease.

Concentrate feed supplied by the WSPA disaster alliance (a network of animal welfare organisations) benefited working animals, animals recovering from illness and those which could not access nutritious pasture. As a result, some rice planting was resumed, contributing to food security and local economic recovery.

Our collaboration with UN agencies and government bodies was highly successful, proving our goals are complementary, providing a mutual understanding of each others' systems and setting a precedent for swift coordination in future disaster scenarios.

The response to Cyclone Nargis convinced the LBVD that humanitarian and animal welfare concerns are addressed most effectively through coordinated disaster management activities. WSPA has since been asked to design risk reduction projects to safeguard Myanmar's animal welfare, food security and rural livelihoods from disasters.

Conclusion:

Animal welfare is integral to protecting livelihoods and food security from disasters

Development agencies and animal welfare organisations can mitigate the effects of disasters by:

- preparing communities in advance
- providing rapid responses and long-term rehabilitation projects.

Working together, the humanitarian and animal welfare communities have the combined capacity to reduce hunger, disease and poverty for humans caught in disaster situations, in part by ensuring the welfare of their animals.



Reducing risks. Animal welfare is integral to effective disaster preparation.