



## The Big Picture: Animals and people in disasters

**When a disaster strikes, the international community's first response must be to safeguard and meet the immediate needs of those people whose lives have been affected. Providing the tools for recovery also forms a vital element of effective disaster management, enabling communities to rebuild in the medium and long term. With the vast majority of the world's poor heavily reliant on animals for their livelihoods and food security, protecting animals must be an integral part of any effectual disaster response.**

At the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), we know this to be true. We have nearly 50 years of experience in helping people to help animals in disasters. We work by partnering with local and national governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations and communities to deliver expert emergency response and world-leading risk reduction and preparedness planning that ensures positive solutions are in place for animals and people alike.

### Focus on an essential relationship

Livestock is owned by 70 per cent of the world's poor – also the group most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters – with many aspects of their income and diet derived from animals.<sup>1</sup> The loss of livestock and working animals can therefore leave whole communities facing a significant second disaster in the form of long-term malnutrition, food insecurity, debt and dependency.

This is the big picture for disaster experts: healthy working animals and livestock provide food and income and so are critical to recovery. The inclusion of animal welfare measures in national and regional disaster management plans strengthens the humanitarian response, builds community resilience and protects food security and livelihoods.

Beyond their immediate financial and dietary offer, animals have an important role in many societies as companions. Often considered family members, the wellbeing of loved pets is an additional concern for owners coping in disasters



Nearly  
**1 billion**  
people keep livestock  
in support of their  
livelihoods<sup>3</sup>

and can even affect their willingness to evacuate dangerous scenarios.<sup>2</sup>

From a development perspective, the contribution animals make to many of the world's most pressing challenges – such as nutrition, food security, agricultural output, financial stability and social wellbeing – is enormous. It is very real and tangible, and increasingly recognised and understood in humanitarian and development circles.

## Picture animals in your plans

Protecting the wellbeing of animals must be one of the building blocks of effective disaster management planning, because they have intrinsic value and because communities must have the chance to thrive. This is not an 'optional extra' if we are to sustainably safeguard communities' livelihoods, food security and ultimate resilience to disasters.

Today, measures to integrate animal welfare into governmental and organisational emergency planning, policy and response are ever more established. These measures

include providing knowledge and resources that enable owners to support their animals in times of crisis and to maintain good animal health and welfare as efforts to rebuild begin.

Big-picture disaster planning that recognises the inextricable links between human and animal welfare is beginning to be successfully implemented by a growing number of local and national authorities. Over the last two years alone, WSPA has been invited to work with the governments of Australia, Colombia, Costa Rica, India and Mexico.

**WSPA offers advice and assistance to a range of partners on integrating animal welfare into disaster planning. We do this to achieve our vision of a world in which animals and the people who depend on them are protected from disasters.**

1 Campbell, R., & Knowles, T. (2011). *The economic impacts of losing livestock in a disaster, a report for the World Society for the Protection of Animals*. Prepared by Economists at Large, Melbourne, Australia.

2 Hesterberg, U. W., Huertas, G., & Appleby, M. C. (2012). Perceptions of pet owners in urban Latin America on protection of their animals during disasters. *Disaster Prevention and Management*, 21(1), 37–50.

3 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2009). *The state of food and agriculture: Livestock in the balance*. Rome: FAO.

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