

Case study

Drought in Kenya: safeguarding livestock and livelihoods

The WSPA-funded Veterinary Emergency Response Unit worked to save much-needed livestock

Some of the world's poorest and most disaster-vulnerable communities are also those most reliant on livestock, poultry and working animals for their survival. When disasters strike, in addition to the immediate devastation, food insecurity and loss of life, the loss of livestock can leave a secondary legacy of economic instability, debt and dependency.

In September 2011, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) worked to mitigate both immediate and long-term effects of the devastating drought affecting Kenya's animals and people.

Livestock losses: impact on livelihoods

In 2011, following three years of poor or failed rains, more than 11 million people faced starvation in East Africa. It was the region's worst drought in 60 years. In Kenya alone, 3.5 million people were affected by the crisis, which was declared a national disaster by the Kenyan government.

For the people of Kenya's Mwingi district, the keeping of livestock – including cattle, goats, sheep and camels – is the primary local livelihood and forms the basis of the regional economy.¹ As the drought continued, daily life became a struggle for survival for both people and their animals. An estimated 850,000 animals were thought to have been affected; in some areas, up to 45 per cent of the animal population died.

Already facing starvation and massive nutritional deficiencies, livestock had also become more susceptible to illness as a result of their poor condition. In addition, the scarcity of water and pasture meant farmers were forced to move their herds large distances each day – anywhere between six and

40 kilometres – in search of food, placing great strain on the animals and also bringing them into contact with livestock from other areas, spreading disease and parasites. Animals faced yet more stressful conditions at overcrowded watering holes where farmers competed for water and pasture for their herds.

With the welfare and physical condition of their animals declining, the livelihoods and food security of the region's farmers were also threatened. The condition of their livestock affects farmers' ability to till their fields and to transport goods as well as the price paid for any animals sold at market. For the mainly pastoralist farmers of Mwingi, their own survival is inextricably linked to that of their animals.



Animals are of vital importance to the people of Mwingi, providing food, transport and livelihoods



During Kenya's 2011 drought, the welfare of people could not be effectively dealt with in isolation from that of animals

Collaborative working for best results

With the backing of the Government of Kenya, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Nairobi carried out an initial Damage Analysis and Needs Assessment (DANA) in September. The DANA recommended an immediate veterinary response, focusing on the areas of Mwingi with the highest concentration of animals.

A WSPA-funded Veterinary Emergency Response Unit (VERU) was deployed² to help affected animals by treating their immediate needs and, through emergency food supplements, vitamins and veterinary treatment, to improve their condition so that they would be able to survive until the next rainy season. As well as reducing animal suffering, this course of action would help maintain and restore the livelihoods of the regions' farmers.

Response aids animals and people

During the four-day initial intervention and a secondary phase in November, animals were dewormed, received multivitamins and mineral blocks and were treated for a wide variety of injuries and diseases ranging from lameness and hyena bites to fungal infections, arthritis, mastitis and pneumonia.

In total, more than 36,000 animals – including cattle, goats, donkeys and dogs – were helped through the recovery operation in Mwingi.

By the time the VERU left in November, the condition of the animals in the area had significantly improved, as had the condition of the surrounding countryside thanks to the recent rainfall. With plants growing again, farmers were able to take their animals back to local areas to graze.

© WSPA 2013



Animals helped by the veterinary health camps:



For the mainly pastoralist farmers of Mwingi, their own survival is inextricably linked to that of their animals

Fostering food security through animal welfare

With steps taken to reduce animal losses in disaster-prone regions, food security improves and self-reliance increases. The inclusion of animals in disaster preparedness and recovery activities is critical to the survival of livestock-dependent communities: meaning that animal welfare should be viewed not only as an integral part of disaster recovery but ultimately as a supporting component of humanitarian relief work, and should be included as part of planning for disasters from the start. In this case, collaboration between the Kenyan government and other agencies led to a more effective response and a better outcome for animals and people.

¹ Livestock is the source of more than 80 per cent of the all meat consumed locally, and accounted for 3.3 per cent of national GDP at the time of the disaster.

² WSPA Veterinary Emergency Response Units (VERUs) are staffed by senior year veterinary students in universities that have agreements with WSPA to teach a course on how to work as an emergency response unit for animals during times of natural disaster. Some of the WSPA VERUs have existed for over four years in partnership with key universities across the world; Kenya's VERUs are the latest to be set up.

For more information, contact:

Pat Tohill

WSPA Canada
90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 960
Toronto, ON M4P 2Y3

416-369-0044
 416-369-0147
 wspa@wspa.ca