

Reducing the impact of natural disasters on rural communities: the WSPA risk reduction programme for livestock owners

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Natural disasters have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of the poor. According to the report of the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), climate change is likely to increase the frequency and strength of natural disasters such as droughts, tropical storms and associated floods. Continued population growth pushes the most vulnerable to live in areas of increased risk. In developing countries these are often small scale subsistence farmers dependent on their livestock for survival. The preparation of these communities for disasters is the most important immediate aspect of the protection of their livelihoods. As part of its disaster management work the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) has implemented a disaster risk reduction programme. This programme aims at decreasing the impact of disasters on local communities through the following projects. Firstly in areas of high risk, a local emergency preparedness committee is established: In collaboration with the community and local authorities, emergency preparedness plans for livestock owners are developed. These plans include the determination of roles and responsibilities in disasters as well as evacuation routes and options with regard to animals. The second component increases the local response capacity through the establishment of veterinary emergency response units (VERU) at local universities. Veterinary students are trained in disaster management and support WSPA and national civil defence in veterinary aspects of disaster response. At present this program is running in four Asian and three South American countries and is likely to be extended in future. The contents and outcomes of the programme are described and discussed by means of examples.