

## Natural disasters and “One – Health” Are we prepared?

Natural disasters, like floods, earthquakes or extreme climate outbreaks, severely challenge the health and welfare of people, animals and the ecosystem. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe in association with the Latvian Presidency of the European Union and the support of the European Commission organised a conference focusing on preparedness and management of such crisis. About 90 participants actively engaged in the discussions recognising that humans, animals and the environment are interlinked and advocating the imperative of considering ‘One Health’ holistic approach as fundamental part of the whole exercise. Civil protection mechanisms should consider human and animal interactions as major factor in order to enhance preparedness and ensure successful response.

### Conclusions

- ✓ Natural hazards are naturally occurring physical phenomena caused either by rapid or slow onset events which can be geophysical (earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis and volcanic activity), hydrological (avalanches and floods), climatological (extreme temperatures, drought and wildfires), meteorological (cyclones and storms/wave surges) or biological (disease epidemics and insect/animal plagues)<sup>1</sup>.
- ✓ Due to growing human and animal populations as well as climate changes, the interactions between human, animals and the environment become more challenging to identify and to manage.
- ✓ A hazard does not automatically lead to a disaster. Hazards are natural or human induced, but disasters are man-made, because the population is not ready to respond or is unable to cope. The consequences of many disasters become worse by poor natural resource management and by the degradation of the ecosystem due to human interventions. Therefore the focus should be on managing the risks instead of response to disaster.
- ✓ An animal in a disaster can be a victim, a danger, a source of food, a rescuer or a sentinel. The care of animal health and welfare has been identified as a significant response capacity gap.
- ✓ It is acknowledged that the overwhelming majority of the animal keepers want to save their animals and take a risk in order to do so. Pet-owners would put themselves or others in danger in order to save their pets, while farmers try to save their animals even though they know that when the crisis is finished it will be very difficult to recover. Therefore, animals must be saved together with their owners, in order to avoid increasing the risks during the crisis period and also help the local community to recover quickly afterwards.
- ✓ Food and feed safety can be severely compromised during an event of a natural disaster. We need to be prepared and well trained in order to efficiently respond during the crisis.
- ✓ Waste and carcasses management is one of the main problems that local authorities face during the crisis period.
- ✓ Recovering from a natural disaster takes long for both the local society and the environment. Mental health of people, especially the ones that are directly affected, is an aspect that should not be passed by. Quick restoration aftermaths will help the local communities to recover as quickly as possible. Therefore recovery phase should be closely looked at and included in preparedness plans.
- ✓ Disaster preparedness and response should be based on the approach that all disasters begin and end locally, therefore should be managed as close to the local level as possible. In order to do this, planning and preparedness must occur at all levels - local, national and European Union - with the ability to share resources between jurisdictions as needed.
- ✓ Risk assessment - risk communication -risk management are all interlinked. Equal emphasis should be given on preparedness and risk reduction.
- ✓ Veterinarian’s role in disaster management is crucial and includes the safeguard of animal health and welfare, the protection of human and environmental health and to their contribution in restoring the economic and social conditions.

---

<sup>1</sup> IFRC: <https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/definition-of-hazard/>

- ✓ Communication is of vital importance. We have to closely look into modern tools of communication and use them to improve preparedness and coordination of actions.
- ✓ The components involved in disaster management are diverse and they require an organised response with a multidisciplinary approach. Populations can be responsible and must be involved in these actions. Development of coalitions involving all state authorities, non-governmental organisations and private operators would help us to have a more holistic approach of preparedness and response. Governments need to invest in members of local community, especially veterinarians and other professionals, who have a special value in terms of advising on food safety and public health, transfer and shelter of animals.

### **Action Points for consideration by authorities and stakeholders**

- Natural and man-made disasters require a multidisciplinary engagement to achieve optimal efficiency and effectiveness in planning, mitigation, response and recovery<sup>2</sup>. The One Health model can contribute to efficient preparedness and management by avoiding the duplication of efforts, especially during the time-sensitive rescue phase.
- Preparedness for the event of a natural hazard must include appropriate risk assessment; sharing of experience from past events; planning for rapid well-coordinated response at the event's emergence; quick restoration of the local community and the environment after the crisis period.
- We need to set up emergency release networks with One Health clearly included. Planning, communication, and collaboration are essential in preparing for disasters. Practicing and conducting exercises involving organizations from both humanitarian and veterinary sector, will help increasing preparedness and successful response to the disaster, leading to saving the lives of people and animals.
- The One Health approach should be integrated in the civil protection mechanism<sup>3</sup> and include the close collaboration with veterinary services. We need a science based assessment in the framework of One Health to ensure better identification of the gaps, speed in response, quick decisions and efficient coordination of actions of all operators, national and European authorities.
- Training, exercises, lessons learnt and knowledge dissemination, as foreseen in the article 13 of the Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, should be the framework of One Health and include the component of animals. "Better training for safer food" could be another very useful tool for enhancing the preparedness of veterinary services in the European Union.
- International organisations, such as OIE, FAO<sup>4</sup>, UNISDR, are called upon enhancing preparedness by developing guidance and standards, based on a holistic approach – a One health approach – in order to achieve broader resilience and disaster management, promote the health and welfare of animals, safeguard human health and help in restoring economic and societal conditions when a disaster strikes.

#### Abbreviations

- IFRC: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- OIE: World Organisation for Animal Health
- FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation
- UNISDR: The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

<sup>2</sup> UNISDR Terminology: <http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology>

<sup>3</sup> Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013D1313&from=EN>

<sup>4</sup> FAO Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards - <http://www.livestock-emergency.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/LEGS-Handbook-2nd-edition-web-version1.pdf> and FAO Good Emergency Management Practice - <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ba0137e.pdf>