

Post-earthquake livestock distribution in Iran

In late December 2003, a major earthquake hit the region of Bam, Kerman Province, in southern Iran. In only 15 seconds, over 70 per cent of the buildings in the city and the surrounding villages collapsed, and more than 40,000 of the area's 130,000 population lost their lives. Most of the people living in the Bam area were involved in date farming or farm labouring, but many kept small numbers of animals to supplement their food supply and income – mainly cattle, sheep, and goats. Livestock keeping was particularly important for poorer farmers who owned either a small plot of land or none at all. Livestock losses in the earthquake were estimated at 31 per cent for cattle and 26 per cent for sheep and goats. Most of these animals were housed in simple shelters near their owners' homes and many were killed when the buildings collapsed. Others ran away in the panic following the earthquake, while some were stolen or sold to meet urgent cash needs.

In response to these losses, Action Against Hunger (ACF) Spain designed a livestock distribution project to provide two goats and 300 kg of feed to 1,200 vulnerable families in 17 earthquake-affected villages in the Bam area. The aim of the project was to support the target households to gain milk for their families and to provide additional income. The project targeted poor families who had lost livestock, in particular widows and other vulnerable people, but the selection criteria required that participants had experience in raising sheep and goats and had adequate shelter for the animals so as to ensure the sustainability of the initiative. Selection of participants and distribution were conducted in collaboration with local councillors. The Iranian Veterinary Network was contracted to provide veterinary support to the purchased livestock before distribution; this included vaccination against enterotoxaemia, disinfection, deworming, and provision of mineral and vitamin supplements.

The 1,200 participating families each received two female goats (one the local Mahali breed and the other a Rachti – local Mahali crossed with a high-quality Pakistani breed), together with 300 kg of barley for feed. The original plan was to distribute pregnant animals, but this proved logistically challenging, and it was determined that sufficient numbers of male goats had survived the earthquake to enable the distributed goats to reproduce quite quickly after distribution. Post-distribution monitoring showed that 84 per cent of participants were satisfied with the breed selected and 87 per cent with the distribution process. Nine of the participants were already milking one goat; two households were milking both the goats they had received; and 27 had already mated their goats to a buck.

When asked about the impact of the project, participants listed economic benefits such as milk and wool production, but these were seen as potential benefits as it was too soon for the livestock to have reproduced. People also emphasized the psychological benefits – for example, entertainment for the children, and increased motivation to get involved in other activities. Most were positive about the opportunity to resume livestock activities after losing some or all of their animals in the earthquake.

Sources:

(ACF-Spain) Action Against Hunger – Spain (2004) Livelihoods Recovery Project (Livestock Distribution), ACF-Spain, Bam.

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