Impact case study

Distribution of imported in-calf heifers following the conflict in Kosovo

Importation of live animals from outside a country or region as an emergency response is generally not encouraged. Such practices are often associated with disease risk, problems in adaptation, threats to local breed conservation, and the undermining of local markets. Livestock recipients may also require support in order to feed and productively manage imported animals. However, in this case study from Kosovo, the devastating livestock losses from the conflict is likely to have reduced the options for using local breeds for restocking.

Background

The Kosovo crisis occurred from 1998-1999. An FAO/WFP crop and food assessment mission to Kosovo in 2000 recorded that the conflict had resulted in widespread looting and slaughter of livestock, leading to the loss of 50% of cattle, 65% of sheep, and 70-80% of poultry and pig populations. Under a multi donor-funded project, 4,395 in-calf heifers were imported from Austria and Germany into Kosovo to help poor farmers re-stock the local cattle herds. The recipients also received concentrated animal feed.

Activities

To qualify for a cow, each family had to have experience in livestock production and access to at least one hectare of pasture for grazing. The households were allowed to keep the first-born calf, but they were obliged to give any second-born calf to other needy families or village members. If they sold or slaughtered their animals, they had to pay a fine.

By working with local veterinarians and NGOs, the implementing agency (FAO) ensured that the recipients received the help they needed to care for their animals. They were encouraged to continue to breed from the imported heifers with advice from veterinarians. In addition, the project organised training in animal care, feeding and fodder conservation. The project supported private veterinarians through the provision of veterinary kits with drugs and equipment for artificial insemination, which they paid for by donating their services. The project supplied equipment and trained staff of the central veterinary laboratory to assist in animal disease surveillance.

Impact

A review of project documents highlights that following points were likely to contribute to the project's effectiveness:

- The imported breeds (Simmental Fleckvieh and Brown Swiss), are very hardy and particularly well adapted to the climate and small-scale farming in Kosovo. The project ensured mandatory quarantine of all imported animals in a designated facility to prevent the possible entry of diseases along with the imported animals.
- The heifer recipients received obligatory training on animal care and production for the imported breeds before distribution. The project also supported training courses on artificial insemination throughout the life of the project. In total, 65 veterinarians and 63 veterinary technicians received this training and were able to ensure the availability of appropriate breeding services, thus leading to an expansion of the artificial insemination market.

- Local capacities were not undermined by the project activities, with the possible exception of semen importers as the project imported the required semen for insemination.
- The project ensured that the imported cattle were all pedigree recorded animals, well-grown and pregnancy tested and, overall, typical of the respective breeds. They were likely to serve as a bank of quality animal genetic material with the potential to upgrade the local herd.
- The project encouraged the European Agency for Reconstruction funded Animal Identification and Registration Project to create a separate database facility for pedigree animal registration. The project also recommended that the local authorities adopt a well-designed breeding policy and appropriate regulation to ensure breed development.

Analysis

The final project report documented that a small minority of livestock recipients disposed of animals in breach of their agreement. They sold the animals due to lack of feed and replaced them with native local cattle (Buša cattle). The heifers under the care of the various contracted veterinary practices took varying periods to get pregnant after parturition. However, most were eventually successfully rebred (average 14.7 months calving interval). The calf mortality was around 3.5%. The milk production levels assessed from the imported heifers averaged more than 12 litres per day across all breeds.

Source: LEGS (2021) *Desk review of livestock-related emergencies and response in Eastern Europe & Central Asia* https://www.livestock-emergency.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Desk-Review_October-2021.pdf