

# 20 years of LEGS:

protecting livestock,  
protecting livelihoods



## Introduction from the Chair of Trustees

It is a pleasure, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, to introduce this 20-year report from LEGS.

For millions of people worldwide, livestock are at the heart of daily life – providing food, income, transport and a vital buffer against hardship. In times of disaster, protecting these assets is often essential for sustaining livelihoods, food security and the ability of families and communities to recover.

LEGS was created because this reality was not always sufficiently recognised in humanitarian response. Too often, livestock support came too late, was poorly targeted, or was missing altogether. Over the past 20 years, LEGS has helped to address that gap by providing practical, internationally recognised guidance to support timely, appropriate and effective livestock-based interventions in emergencies. Its standards, handbook and training resources have helped build a shared framework for better, more impactful humanitarian action for livestock communities the world-over.

This report is both a celebration and a reflection: a celebration of what has been achieved through the dedication of many partners and practitioners across the world, and a reflection on the importance of continuing this work in the face of growing humanitarian need. From its establishment in 2006 to the publication of successive handbook editions, LEGS has evolved while remaining true to its core purpose – to protect livestock, and the lives and livelihoods of those that rely on them.

On behalf of the trustees, I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the LEGS journey over the past two decades. We are proud of what has been built together, and we look forward to the role LEGS will continue to play in supporting livestock-keeping communities affected by crisis.

*K. Sadler*

**Kate Sadler,  
Chair of Trustees**



## Why livestock matter

Around one billion people worldwide depend on livestock for their livelihoods, food security and nutrition. For many rural households, animals are their most valuable asset – providing milk, meat, eggs, income, transport and manure for crops, as well as acting as a vital safety net in times of crisis.

When disasters strike – whether droughts, floods, conflict, disease outbreaks or economic shocks – livestock are often among the first assets to be lost. The consequences can be devastating, pushing families into crisis and prolonging their recovery. Humanitarian aid has traditionally prioritised urgent needs such as food, water, shelter and health. While these are essential, support for livestock has sometimes been overlooked, poorly planned, or delivered too late to be effective.

Yet helping people protect their livestock during emergencies is essential. Timely support can help households continue producing food, generating income and maintaining their independence. This can also reduce the need for prolonged relief assistance and contribute to faster recovery.



Recognising this need for more timely, appropriate and coordinated support to livestock-keeping communities affected by crisis, the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) were established in 2006. Over the past 20 years, LEGS has grown into a globally recognised initiative that provides clear, practical guidance and standards to help governments, humanitarian organisations and communities design and implement effective interventions that protect livestock-dependent livelihoods, food security and resilience.

This publication celebrates two decades of LEGS, highlighting key achievements, global partnerships, and impacts.

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The main livelihood of our community is livestock, so if the livestock are affected, so is the community. If our animals don't have feed, we can't sell livestock products or the animals themselves to support our families. If help arrives too late, many animals will already be too weak, and the support will only help a few.

**Livestock keeper, Ethiopia**

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## What is LEGS?

LEGS<sup>1</sup> provides a set of international standards and practical guidelines for the assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation of livestock interventions in humanitarian crises. Its ultimate aim is to improve the quality and livelihoods impact of livestock-related emergency responses.

LEGS promotes a structured, evidence-based and participatory planning process to ensure that assistance is appropriate, timely and accountable to affected communities. It supports governments and humanitarian organisations to assess needs, identify appropriate interventions, and monitor results, helping livestock keepers during and after crises.

The LEGS approach is based on three core livelihoods objectives to support crisis-affected communities to:

- + obtain immediate benefits from existing livestock assets; and/or
- + protect key livestock assets; and/or
- + rebuild key livestock assets

The approach also draws on a livelihoods perspective, emphasising the preservation of productive assets to protect future wellbeing and support sustainable recovery. It provides an opportunity to address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, supporting more coordinated response across the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors.

LEGS guidance applies to all types of livestock, from chickens to camels, as well as animals used for transport or farm work. It is underpinned by a rights-based approach, recognising the importance of the right to food and the right to a decent standard of living.<sup>2</sup>



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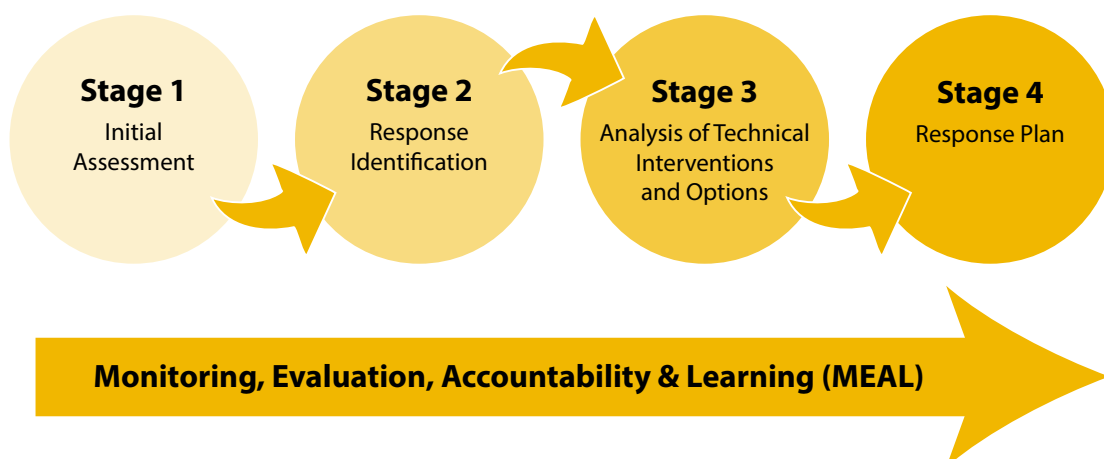
1 LEGS is a non-profit organisation registered in the United Kingdom, managed by a small central secretariat and supported by a Board of Trustees and a technical advisory group.

2 <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/>



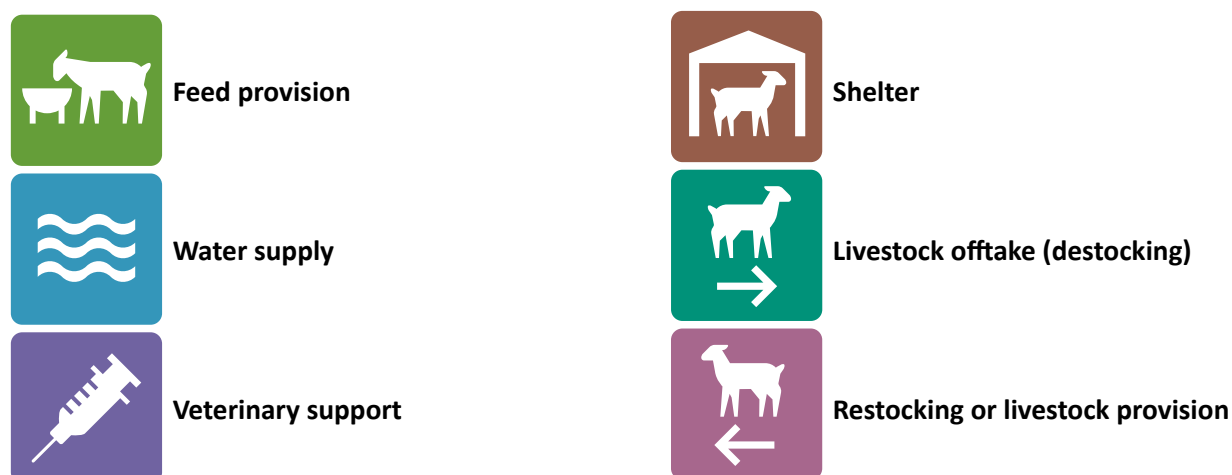
## What does LEGS do?

LEGS works with local, national and international organisations to ensure that disaster responses support, rather than harm, livestock-based livelihoods. Its guidance is grounded in research, evidence-based good practice, and expert consultation from around the world, and is regularly updated to reflect emerging challenges and lessons learned.



The guidance includes a participatory planning process and practical tools to support the development of appropriate and timely responses.

Six main technical intervention areas are covered:



In addition to technical guidance, LEGS promotes [key principles](#) that emphasise the importance of involving local people in decision-making and implementation, ensuring gender equality, and fostering climate change awareness alongside risk reduction. It also highlights the need for preparedness and resilience building, as well as a strong commitment to animal welfare, including reference to the Five Animal Welfare Domains.<sup>3</sup>

Through this holistic approach, LEGS encourages coordinated responses that strengthen, rather than undermine, livestock-based livelihoods.

3 <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-are-the-five-domains-of-animal-welfare>



# LEGS 8 Principles



## Focus on Livelihoods

Livestock-keeping communities are supported during emergencies to protect their livestock as a key livelihood asset, and to rebuild their livelihoods post-emergencies.



## Participation

Communities actively participate in the assessment, design, planning, implementation, and monitoring & evaluation of livestock emergency programmes. Participation barriers for different groups are addressed.



## Climate & Environment

Programming takes into account climate change and environmental impacts on livestock keeping communities, as well as the potential environmental effects of livestock keeping.



## Preparedness

Emergency responses are based on the principles of disaster risk reduction and early action, including preparedness, contingency planning and early response.



## Coordination

Different livestock interventions are harmonised and complementary to interventions that save lives and livelihoods. They do not interfere with immediate activities to save human lives.



## Gender-sensitive

Emergency livestock programming understands different gender roles and responsibilities; promotes equitable access to resources; recognises the differential impact of crisis and emergency interventions; and mitigates the risk of gender-based violence.



## Local ownership

Programming encourages context-specific, locally designed and owned responses that are based on equal partnerships which empower local actors.



## MEAL

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) systems in emergency livestock response ensure effectiveness, accountability to affected communities, continuous improvement and better future programming through evaluation and learning.

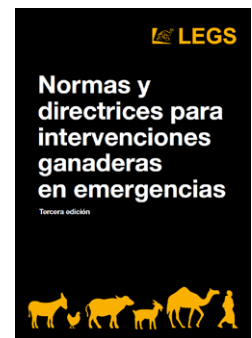
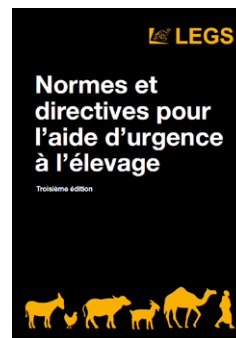
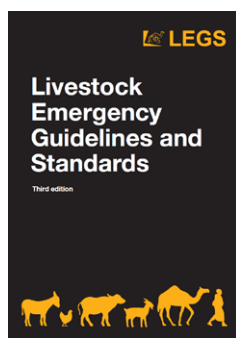


## What has LEGS achieved?

Over the past 20 years, LEGS has grown from a small initiative into a global network of practitioners, trainers, and institutional partners, setting standards for livestock emergency response worldwide.

### LEGS Handbook

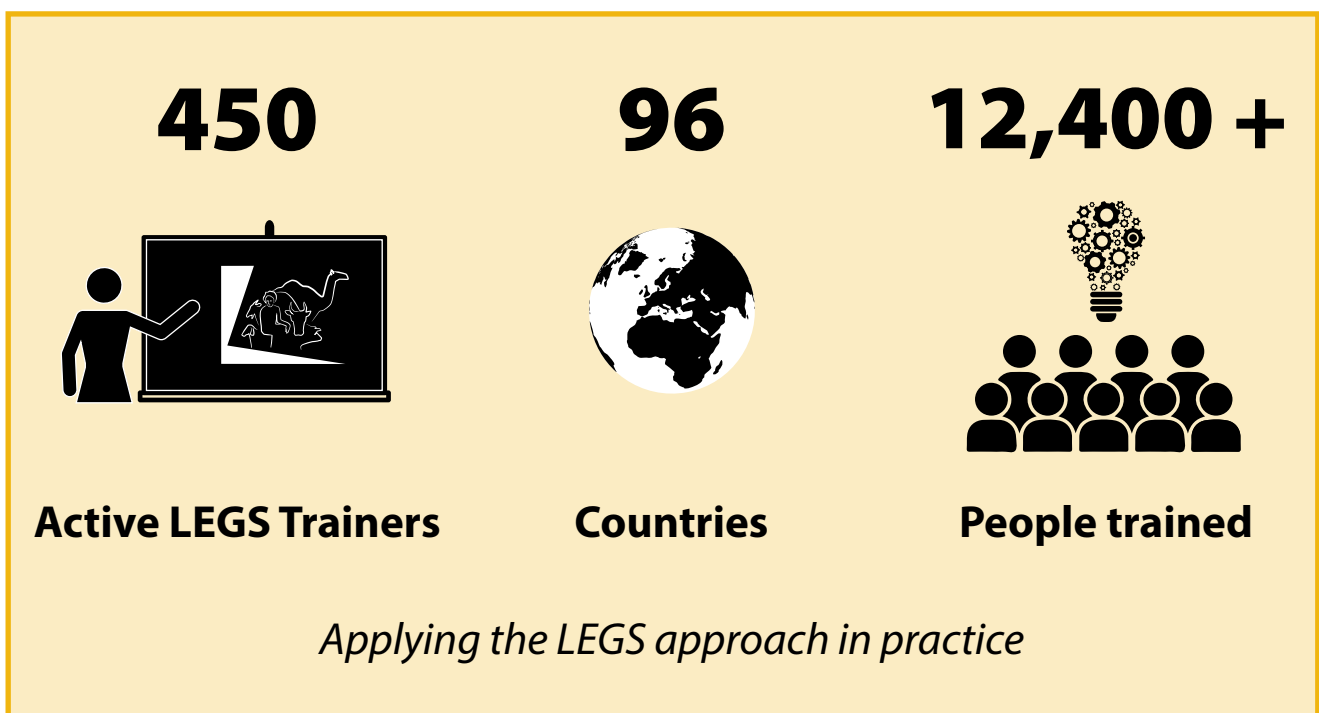
The LEGS Handbook, now in its third edition, has become a key reference for livestock emergency programming. Available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, it consolidates global good practice, field-tested tools, and participatory needs assessment methods that support effective response planning. The Handbook also draws on a rich collection of [global case studies](#), with new examples added periodically to reflect evolving challenges and solutions.



In 2025, LEGS expanded access to the Handbook so that it can be printed locally in countries outside the UK, US and Australia. This initiative makes the Handbook more accessible, affordable, and timely for organisations and practitioners supporting livestock keepers affected by crisis.

### Training

LEGS Standards are delivered through a training programme that has grown significantly since it began in 2009.



LEGS Training has increasingly been adapted to local contexts, incorporating regional case studies and flexible learning approaches. These include drought- and gender-focused e-learning modules, as well as an online refresher course for graduates of the LEGS Core Training. More recently, adapted approaches have also been used to deliver training directly to livestock keepers.

A major milestone came in Kenya in 2025, when the three-day LEGS Core Training was officially accredited by the Kenya Veterinary Board, awarding Continuing Professional Development points. This marked an important step in embedding humanitarian standards within Kenya's livestock emergency response sectors.

### Additional resources

LEGS has developed [specialised resources](#) to support responses to specific types of disasters, including droughts, floods, winter storms and emergencies in refugee settings. In 2024, LEGS, in partnership with the Standards for Supporting Crop-related Livelihood in Emergencies ([SEADS](#)), launched the Joint Assessment Tool. This groundbreaking resource integrates livestock and crop emergency needs assessments, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of agricultural livelihoods in crisis situations.



### Institutionalisation

Our goal is to ensure that LEGS becomes the primary guidance used by governments, as well as by local and international agencies, in emergency response programmes. In several countries, LEGS has focused on institutionalisation within national systems, embedding standards into government structures and policies.

In Kenya and Mongolia, designated LEGS Institutional Focal Points within key government departments are leading efforts to integrate LEGS standards into emergency preparedness and response plans. This represents an important step towards sustainable, nationally led humanitarian action. In 2024, Kenya's National Drought Management Authority formally assumed the role of LEGS Institutional Focal Point, while in Mongolia this role is held by the Ministry of Agriculture and Light Industry. In Colombia, collaboration is on-going with the Ministry of Agriculture to incorporate LEGS into the national emergency response protocol.

The Brooke Latin America and Caribbean Regional Programme has pioneered a dual approach: implementing LEGS with partners while raising awareness of the need for working horses, donkeys, and mules to be incorporated into government emergency preparedness, response, and recovery policies. Through collaboration with the Central American Integration System across eight countries, the Brooke has initiated a regionally coordinated approach to livestock emergency management, with the LEGS approach central to effective disaster response.

“

The guidelines have been, and will continue to be, instrumental in quality responses through continuous learning and exchange amongst partners, including policymakers.

**Rein Paulsen, Director of Emergencies and Resilience Office, FAO**

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## Evidence of impact

Since its creation, LEGS guidance has informed livestock emergency responses across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, supporting governments, UN agencies, and NGOs to deliver more effective and accountable assistance.

From pastoral drought emergencies to conflict-related displacement, LEGS has helped improve the timeliness and appropriateness of livestock support. Humanitarian agencies and government institutions increasingly recognise LEGS as a trusted framework for designing livestock interventions that both protect lives and livelihoods. Field practitioners report that LEGS tools support better decision-making, more effective prioritisation of resources and stronger engagement with affected communities.

For livestock-keeping households, appropriate support can mean the difference between dependency on relief assistance and the ability to sustain themselves through crisis.

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During the drought, LEGS helped us decide that emergency livestock feeding was the most appropriate intervention.

**County Director, Veterinary Services, Kenya**

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Across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, LEGS is a key reference used by international organisations and national governments when designing, implementing and evaluating emergency livestock interventions.



## Localisation and community engagement

A defining feature of LEGS has been its strong commitment to localisation. Over time, the LEGS Training of Trainers (ToT) team has become increasingly regionalised. For example, there are now four LEGS ToT trainers in Latin America and three in East Africa, enabling more context-specific support and capacity building.

In Somaliland, a LEGS mini-module on drought was integrated into the three-day LEGS Core Training to address urgent, locally relevant challenges. These mini-modules provide flexibility, allowing trainers to dedicate



additional time to topics that are particularly relevant to the region or context, enhancing the practical relevance of the training.

More recently, elements of the three-day LEGS Core Training have been successfully adapted for community-level delivery, empowering livestock keepers to actively participate in planning and preparedness. Community-level training helps to:

- + build local capacity
- + support decision-making and planning
- + prioritise interventions using the LEGS Participatory Response Identification Matrix (PRIM)
- + guide planning with LEGS decision trees

In June 2025, experienced LEGS trainers delivered the first of these community-level awareness sessions in Colombia. This initiative introduced rural households – most of them women – to practical LEGS tools for protecting livestock during floods and other crises. Women’s leadership was central (at 90% of participants), actively shaping strategies to safeguard their animals, livelihoods, and food security. As one participant noted: *“Before, we just waited for help. Now we know how to prepare and protect what’s ours.”*

This pioneering initiative demonstrates that tools originally designed for humanitarian professionals can be successfully adapted for communities, reinforcing resilience from the ground up and ensuring that local knowledge and leadership are at the heart of livestock emergency preparedness.

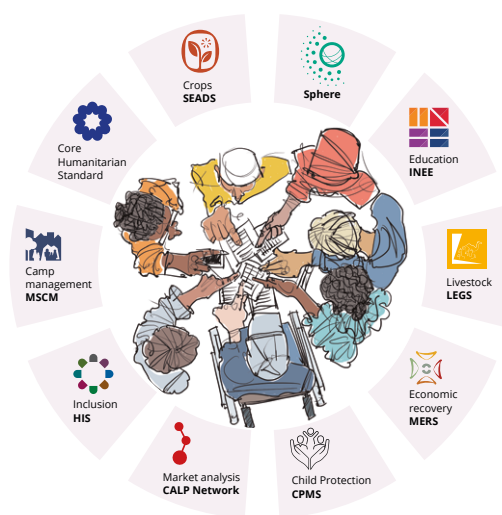
## Strengthening collaboration

LEGS has built strong partnerships with a wide range of partners, including international organisations, national governments, research institutes and NGOs. These collaborations have been essential to promoting quality and accountability in livestock emergency programming worldwide.

LEGS is a founding member of the [Humanitarian Standards Partnership](#) (HSP), a coalition of nine leading standards initiatives and organisations hosted by [Sphere](#). Through this collaboration, LEGS contributes to global efforts to strengthen humanitarian standards, ensuring responses are effective, accountable, and evidence-based, increasing quality and accountability in crisis response.

In March 2026, LEGS and Sphere announced a landmark shared services agreement that deepens this long-standing collaboration and signals a new phase in how humanitarian standard-setting organisations work together. Under the new agreement, the two independent organisations will share a range of services while retaining their own legal status, governance structures, mandates and intellectual property. This reflects a shared response to a changing humanitarian landscape, in which organisations face increasing pressure to operate more efficiently, demonstrate value, and adapt to shrinking resources and growing needs.

LEGS has also recently taken on the coordination of SEADS, reflecting the strong links between livestock and crop-based livelihoods in crisis situations. This new structure will strengthen both standards initiatives and enable the development of further joint tools, such as the Joint Assessment Tool.



## What's next for LEGS?

As LEGS marks its twentieth anniversary, its vision remains clear: to ensure that livestock-based livelihoods are fully considered in humanitarian policy and practice worldwide.

By building on two decades of learning, partnerships and practical experience, LEGS will continue to promote timely, accountable, and livelihoods-centred responses that enable crisis-affected communities not only to survive, but also to recover with dignity and resilience.

Protecting livestock means protecting lives.

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Thanks to LEGS-based support from NGOs, I can now feed my goats. My family can drink the milk, and we don't need to buy emergency food.

**Livestock keeper, Kenya**

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### Connect with LEGS:



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### Recommended citation:

*20 years of LEGS: protecting livestock, protecting livelihoods* (2026). Prepared by LEGS, Wivenhoe, United Kingdom.

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