

Animals as key promoters of human resilience

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African Health Sciences 2008; 8(S): 46

The concept of resilience has been applied in a wide variety of situations and from the molecular to the ecosystem level. It has been most commonly used, however, to describe the capacity of human populations to survive disasters of acute onset and broad scope that are political, economic, social or environmental in origin. One aspect of resilience that is frequently overlooked is the role that animals may play in helping human populations to maintain and restore resilience. The role of animals encompasses companion animals as key sources of social support, as was seen in the United States after Hurricane Katrina, to livestock as critical sources of social and economic capital, as has been seen among herding communities after drought and forced migration in Africa and elsewhere. Because the role of animal populations in disasters is typically overlooked,

data on the role of animals in maintaining and restoring human resilience is scant.

In situations where human communities maintain strong bonds with animals, regardless of the nature of those bonds, immediate post-disaster response must include efforts to address the survival needs of animals. Intermediate and long-term response planning must include efforts to restore animals to those communities. Public and private veterinary services should be included in post disaster response efforts. Veterinary services can assist by responding to animal needs, documenting critical needs of affected animal populations and thereby providing data for future disaster plans, and helping to restore resilience to human communities after massive disruptions.

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