[**Livestock loss**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1720440/livestock-loss)

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JANIB Gul Mohammad can feel a pall of gloom as he enters his home. And when his wife Kasbano serves him a meat dish, otherwise a rarity, he knows why. Another animal has perished. For his wife, it is a day of mourning; to him, another huge economic loss.

As if the floods had not caused enough devastation — destroyed their home and the rice crop — it is sapping life out of their livestock too. A few days ago, it was the fourth time in the last one month that he ate meat.

He and his wife rescued all their six animals when they fled the floodwaters that submerged their home and took refuge on the embankment of a canal for two weeks before returning.

However, soon after being displaced, one pregnant cow, a calf and two goats died, Gul Mohammad said over the phone from his village in Fateh Ali Buledi, in Sindh’s Kamber Shahdadkot district. The cow and goat that are still alive will soon succumb, he said, estimating a total loss of Rs250,000.

The FAO has warned that about 6m people can face acute food insecurity in 28 vulnerable districts of Balochistan, Sindh and KP.

“Our animals are dying from hunger and sickness,” he said. Insufficient fodder and the stress of displacement is making them weak. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 85 per cent of farmers have observed signs of animal disease outbreak in their communities.

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Dr Nazeer Hussain Kalhoro, director general of the Sindh Institute of Animal Health at the provincial government’s livestock department, said the situation was alarming. In Balochistan, an estimated 500,000 animals perished; followed by 436,435 in Sindh; 205,106 in Punjab and 21,328 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to the National Disaster Management Authority. An estimated 1,164,270 animals have perished, while many more are on the verge of death.

Some animals drowned while others died of starvation as grazing land was covered with water. Consumption of contaminated water and eating wet fodder led to parasitic diseases making them weak.

With the veterinary infrastructure compromised the animals could not get vaccinated.

Livestock, the largest sub-sector in agriculture, contributed 60.1pc to agriculture value addition and 11.5pc to GDP during the 2020-21 financial year, according to the Pakistan Economic Survey. More than eight million rural families are engaged in livestock production and deriving more than 35pc-40 pc of their income from this source.

There are 42m buffaloes and almost 51m cattle in Pakistan, according to the Ministry of National Food Security & Research.

Sindh has an estimated 40m-50m livestock population, said Dr Kalhoro; it is also the worst-affected province in terms of losses, which he estimates to be Rs27,864,065,000. “Balochistan may have lost more animals, but it had smaller ruminants for personal use, not cash or dairy animals like the ones in Sindh.”

With no income, the farmers are selling their livestock to middlemen from Punjab, at a huge loss. Last month alone, Dr Kalhoro said, an estimated 4.5m animals were sold. According to several studies, faced with a crisis, small farmers are often forced to choose between selling their assets to buy food for the family or reducing their food intake to protect assets. Either way they face a loss — economic or nutritional — pushing families into poverty.

According to the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, the poverty ratio in Pakistan had declined from 57pc to 24.3pc in 2015 but has increased to 35.7pc recently.

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Before the floods, the World Food Programme had carried out an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis of 28 vulnerable districts in Balochistan, KP and Sindh and estimated about 5.96m people to be in IPC phase 3 (crisis) and 4 (emergency) between July and November 2022, that would increase to 7.2m by March 2023. After the floods, the WFP and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) project the number of people requiring emergency food assistance (IPC3/4) to increase to 11m.

There was an acute shortage of fodder even before the floods. A major portion of by-products needed to make fodder was exported and small farmers were forced to import food for their animals. Now the situation has worsened and this has already resulted in a surge in the price of milk, meat, chicken and eggs, pointed out Shakir Umer, president of the Dairy and Cattle Farmers Association.

The loss of buffaloes and cows means an acute shortage of milk. Although Punjab manages 90pc of the country’s milk requirements, for small farmers in Sindh it will result in the loss of income.

The FAO has warned that about 6m people, which is 30pc of the rural population, can face acute food insecurity in 28 vulnerable districts of Balochistan, Sindh and KP and about 15pc-16pc of the population overall. In the 2022 Global Hunger Index, Pakistan is 99th out of 121 countries. The situation is bound to get worse with crops destroyed and food prices rising daily. Latest official estimates show that the area affected by the floods represents about 35pc of the total area where cereal, sugarcane and cotton were sown for the 2022 Kharif season.

Unicef estimates half a million children to face severe acute malnutrition, needing immediate treatment, and an additional 80,000 needing urgent medical interventions.

In addition, 18,624,000 (or 11.24pc) poultry and 1,156 poultry farms have also been lost to the floods. This can have a huge impact, not only on the nutrition, but also on the livelihood of women in rural households.

It can take as many as 15 years to recover if things remain the same. Dr Kalhoro has come up with an emergency livestock rehabilitation plan for Sindh and if that is implemented, he is sure the sector can recover in four years.

This entails restocking among others. In the first phase, for instance, some 10,000 most vulnerable households may be provided with one milking buffalo; another 50,000 with five goats (one male among them) and 10 birds (one male). In addition, they can be provided with vaccination services, treatment of sick animals, feed, mosquito nets and spray, as well as construction material for the reconstruction of animal sheds.

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