

Why Collaboration Matters for Livestock Development?



Livestock sector's growth in India is constrained not due to lack of organizations or programs, but due to inability of organizations to collaborate with each other, argues Professor S V N Rao.

It is a well known fact that every state in India has a number of organizations for the development of the livestock sector. The state Department of Animal Husbandry (DAH), Veterinary Colleges and Universities, Livestock Development Agencies and Milk Unions are the most notable among these. Though the approaches adopted by these organizations are different and there is a variation in availability of resources based on their mandate and the number of schemes each is implementing, the goal of all these organizations is the same and that is about supporting the livestock farmer. However, effective delivery of livestock services is lacking in most cases mainly due to lack of collaboration among the different organizations in the livestock sector.



Effective delivery of livestock services

Delivery of livestock services has three components viz.

- providing technical services to the animals
- supplying technical inputs and
- educating the livestock farmers

Providing services to animals involves vaccination, deworming, breeding and disease management services. To do this, the needed technical inputs such as vaccines, medicines, semen, AI guns, syringes and needles etc., have to be supplied. The livestock farmers have no option but to depend on vets or paravets for all the above services and, to some extent, supply of technical inputs. Unfortunately, the third component, educating livestock farmers on various aspects of livestock management, (feeding, vaccination, disease management, breeding etc) is grossly neglected. Many a time supply of inputs and providing services are considered as an extension service ignoring the fact that “education of farmers is the core of livestock extension service” (Box 1).

Box 1: Delivery of livestock services: A reality check

It is well known that the vets and paravets focus their attention mainly on breeding and health care services that too in large ruminants. The owner of the large ruminants is also more concerned about the breeding and health care aspects as they have direct and immediate impact on the milk production. However, practices like vaccination, deworming, clean milk production, balanced feeding etc., (that have poor observability of results) which indirectly influence the milk production are ignored both by the livestock farmers and the veterinarians. Education aspect of farmers on these improved practices is largely ignored by the vet as it is neither considered as his responsibility nor listed in his job chart.

Small ruminants which are usually reared by the resource poor families, the contribution of which is not more than 20% of their total family income (and that too through sale of animals once or twice in a year), are often neglected by the vets and paravets. The minimum preventive measures like vaccination against two or three important diseases and regular deworming are not performed by the vets and paravets as they consider that the delivery of these services is not worth the effort. The goat/sheep owners being poor in education do not approach the vets for treatment (perceiving it as costly and time consuming) and rather approach butchers to sell the sick animals. Same is the case with pigs which are reared by the poorest of the poor in the society and there is nothing like delivery of services to these animals. Transfer of information on various aspects of management of these animals is almost non-existing.

With respect to back yard poultry neither the owners are worried nor are the vets concerned about the delivery of services as the contribution of back yard poultry to the family income is not more than 5%, which appears negligible to both the service providers and the service receivers. Hence, the mortality and morbidity is very high in small ruminants, pigs and back yard poultry, due to diseases as the bare minimum services such as vaccinations and deworming are never provided except during outbreaks.

Effective delivery of livestock services mostly depends on two factors:

- The number of veterinarians and animal health workers and their competence to address the contemporary challenges faced by livestock keepers, and
- Collaboration between Livestock Development Organizations (LDOs) and Veterinary Universities (VUs) is critical for betterment of the livestock sector.

Rajiv Gandhi College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (RAGACOVAS) Pondicherry, India in collaboration with State Veterinary Universities, State Departments of Animal Husbandry and Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP), Hyderabad, India organized a workshop at Pondicherry in November 2011 to explore these issues (Rao et al 2012).



Manpower

An analysis of manpower shortage in the 5 southern states of India revealed that there is a severe shortage of veterinarians (40%) and paraveterinarians (20%) in all the departments of AH that is affecting the delivery of services. The situation in veterinary universities/colleges in terms of shortage of faculty is equally bad affecting the quality of teaching.

Capacity

To meet the evolving challenges confronting the livestock sector, both veterinary faculty and field veterinarians need new capacities. The veterinary faculty would need to develop capacities in teaching methodology/extension approaches. Refresher courses in advanced clinical subjects, management of large scale livestock units, large scale marketing of milk and milk products, animal welfare, public health issues, understanding effects of environmental pollution for livestock, livestock business management etc. The field veterinarians need to develop capacities in utilisation of livestock byproducts, value addition, import and export of livestock products, entrepreneurship, sanitary and phyto sanitary standards, addressing fodder crisis and super speciality in clinical subjects. (Rao et al 2008).



Collaboration

About the collaboration between the development agencies and the universities/colleges, lot of scope for improvement exists. Both parties believe strongly that each can complement and support the work of the other. For instance, the universities/colleges expect the DAHs to support them in the following ways:

- Identification of field level problems for research and cases of disease outbreaks
- Support for validation, testing and refinement of technologies
- Sharing of field data and ITKs for R&D and
- Support to field level trials and validation of technologies

Similarly, the DAH expects the veterinary university/colleges to support it in terms of

- Skill upgradation in clinical subjects,
- Continuing veterinary education,
- Research on vaccines for emerging diseases, fodder and feeds, soil mapping for micro/mineral deficiencies
- Genetic mapping and conservation of native breeds and
- Consultancy support from the University on managing large commercial farms.

Box 2: Potential for Win-Win Collaboration

There are several areas for collaboration that can result in “Win-Win” outcomes. For instance, the Disease Investigation Lab under DAH will be having a large number of samples which will be screened at that level. But some samples need advanced equipments and expertise for further investigation which the DAH lacks. On the other hand the Veterinary College will be having few samples (inadequate exposure for students) but it has better equipments and expertise. An effective collaboration for sharing samples and expertise in this would benefit both and thereby contribute to the capacity of the system. Similarly, the DAH can provide its facilities at its farms and facilitate support to field level research of post-graduate students. The Universities/colleges may acknowledge and use their field knowledge by including them in their Research Advisory Councils. Veterinary Universities/Colleges can in turn provide their subject matter specialists for mass contact programmes organized by the DAH (e.g.: vaccination, deworming and fertility campaigns etc.) and also involve their students to ensure wider coverage of the activity and to provide exposure to them.

Way Forward

Increasing the number of faculty, field veterinarians, paravets and animal health workers and developing mechanisms for continuous upgradation of their capacity merits immediate attention. Considering the interdependence of each other, suitable mechanisms to promote better interaction, knowledge flows and collaboration between the veterinary universities/colleges and the DAH also needs to be institutionalized to improve the delivery of livestock services.

As a follow-up to the regional workshop at Pondicherry, a state-level workshop was organized at Hyderabad in September 2012 with top officials of the state animal husbandry sector in Andhra Pradesh to find potential ways to promote collaboration. Similar exercises in other states can initiate the much needed collaboration that is critical for livestock development.



Some of the practical steps include:

Manpower: Increased intake of students at UG level from 60 to 100; Encouraging private sector in setting up veterinary colleges and lifting the ban (that exists in some states) on recruitment of faculty positions and also field veterinarians (Rao et al 2011).

Capacity Development: Allocating adequate budgetary support for human resource development; establishing an academic staff college for livestock sector and developing partnership for capacity development with technical and management institutions in India and abroad.

Collaboration: Remandate the Directorate of Extension in Veterinary Universities to play a major role in developing collaboration (sharing information and facilitate joint planning) with the DAH; and create a policy working group at the state level comprising the heads of all agencies in the livestock sector to meet at regular intervals to share details of programmes and review collaborative arrangements.

Reference

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