

Beyond treatment and breed improvement

Beyond treatment and breed improvement: Why extension is critical for Indian livestock sector?



The focus of livestock development in India should shift from breed improvement and disease management to strengthening knowledge provision to livestock keepers, argues Dr Mahesh Chander.

While the role of extension services in enhancing crop production and productivity is widely recognized, livestock extension never got the attention it deserves and this has been one of the reasons for low productivity of India's livestock sector. The focus of all the five-year plans in India has been on breed improvement and improving health services with inadequate attention given to knowledge provision to



livestock keepers. For want of coherent livestock extension policy and programmes, livestock extension activities in India continue to remain sporadic, casual, occasional and highly unorganized and therefore do not effectively meet the requirements of a vast majority of livestock keepers.

Box 1: India's livestock sector: some glaring facts

Enormous livestock (530 million) and poultry population (489 million) notwithstanding, per animal productivity in India is much lower than that of the world average for milk, meat and eggs as also the quality of products is poor. Milk productivity per lactation is only 987 Kg in India against world average of 2038 Kg. Despite significant investment in artificial insemination and crossbreeding programmes during the last 5 decades, the crossbred cattle population has remained below 15% with huge regional variations. The claim of being number one milk producer in the world is often ridiculed when contrasted with the livestock numbers which are manifold more than that in the high milk producing countries like Israel, New Zealand, Australia and USA. The per capita milk, meat and egg availability too is far lower than that of the requirements as recommended in a standard diet. The per capita annual consumption of meat, milk & eggs is 5.1Kg, 65.2Kg and 1.8Kg, respectively against world average of 41.2Kg, 82.1 Kg and 9 Kg, respectively (FAO, 2009).

Under the central sector scheme, the investments in livestock extension activities have also been consistently very low. Moreover there has not been any exclusive livestock extension programme sponsored by the government. For instance, in the 11th plan, a meager Rs 15 crores was allocated to Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying and Fisheries (DAHDF) under central sector schemes for livestock extension activities. Here too, Rs 10 crores was earmarked for establishment of private veterinary clinics while only Rs 5 crores was meant for strengthening animal husbandry extension. This small allocation too remained unutilized till close to the end of the 11th plan. Similarly the investment on livestock extension activities at the state level also remained very low.

As a result, only 5% of farm households in India access any information on animal husbandry against 40% farm households accessing information on crops as per NSSO survey done in 2003(GOI, 2005). The same survey also revealed that public sector extension services are not the preferred option for accessing information on modern technologies on livestock production. Whatever little extension efforts are there, these are concentrated around large ruminants or dairy animals in particular. The large majority of small holders and the landless livestock keepers rearing goat, sheep, pigs and backyard poultry are largely ignored under the technology transfer schemes of various agencies. The much discussed National Dairy Plan, which is currently under implementation, too would cover only dairy animals.



India's Planning Commission in its document, 'Agriculture Strategy for 11th Plan: Some critical issues' rightly observed that "unfortunately, extension advice is almost totally absent in animal husbandry and thus, special efforts need to be made in this area". There is no coordination and sharing of information and resources among multitude of agencies claiming to have extension component in their array of activities. The 12th Plan sub-group on Animal Husbandry constituted by the Planning Commission recently observed that extension services for livestock have so far been a non-starter severely hampering its growth (Planning Commission, 2012).

Though the State Animal Husbandry Department (SDAH) is the major stakeholder in livestock development (having its vast infrastructure like veterinary hospitals, dispensaries, personnel and budget), its primary focus is on diagnosis/ treatment of animals and breeding services for which it has a clear mandate (Chander et al 2010). The veterinarians and other staff like Livestock Extension

Officers/Livestock Inspectors of the SDAH hardly have any motivation, appreciation, support, equipment, budget as also the required training to take up extension educational efforts (Ravikumar, & Chander, 2011). The paravet initiatives taken up by some of the state governments also failed to bridge the gap since the paravets too often compete for treatment & breeding services with the veterinarians leading to conflicts, while lacking in proper training on knowledge delivery to the livestock owners.

The investment in terms of budget allocated as well as the expenditure incurred on livestock extension activities by most of the SDAH in general is very low (1% to 3% of total budget), while 10% is considered as optimum per cent of budget allocation in a developing country context. In spite of clear recommendation by various committees including 10th and 11th plan working groups on Animal Husbandry Extension, only 8 states have created an exclusive extension wing within the SDAH. It is important for the SDAH to streamline its extension activities by ensuring well designed programmes, sufficient funds, infrastructure and human resources development strategy to train its manpower on delivery of extension support to livestock producers. Though the importance of extension policy has been sufficiently emphasized internationally and in Asian countries (Sulaiman and Hall, 2005), there is no policy for livestock extension in India.



In India too women face disproportionate challenges compared to men in accessing livestock services and information. Women account for 55% of livestock farming labour, whereas, their participation in works related to the care of animals is above 77%. Rural women make up for 93% of overall employment in dairying and their average contribution to the entire farm production is estimated around 45% to 56% of the total labour. Given the strong informal association of rural women with livestock, it is necessary to create matching programmes with sufficient funds so that their participation gets institutionalized. Several studies have shown that most of the conventional training and extension programmes are oriented at men. It would be effective, if women farmers are reached through women extension workers. Appreciably few dairy co-operatives have done some good work in this regard, but such initiatives need more encouragement and policy support.

In India, animal owners often do not follow scientific animal rearing methods and in most cases do not feed balance ration to their animals. Deworming and vaccination are not followed as prescribed and many take their sick animals to quacks ignoring veterinarians and all these have contributed to low productivity and high livestock mortality. Here lies the importance of veterinary/livestock extension professionals who can take up the responsibility to educate and motivate livestock owners to follow good livestock production practices. This would lead to increased demand for veterinary services, more

number of livestock owners seeking professional advice including visiting veterinary hospitals. It's a challenging task and often more difficult than treating individual animals, since here we have to deal with humans having complexities of mind, attitudes, perceptions, socio-psychological barriers, level of literacy, level of knowledge etc. This underscores the need for closer interactions between field livestock personnel and veterinary faculty as also the need for refresher training on livestock extension for field extension personnel and also the importance of specific livestock extension programmes.



Having said this, it would certainly help if qualified people in animal husbandry and veterinary sciences go for higher education in veterinary and livestock extension education provided they acquire skills good enough to change the behavioral complex of livestock owners, making them receptive to new ideas/practices. It is heartening to note that many veterinarians are currently coming forward for higher education in veterinary extension education. But they should have opportunities to practice their newly acquired skills once they go back to their respective organizations. The livestock sector in India therefore needs a serious rethinking on how to support livestock owners with new knowledge so that they can increase their productivity and income and thereby fully realizing livestock sector's huge untapped potential.

Some of the practical steps include:

- Working out an implementable National Livestock Extension Policy (NLEP) that would effectively systematize livestock extension interventions.
- Establishing a Directorate of Livestock Extension at central level within Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries and it should be mandated with the responsibility to plan, implement, monitor and coordinate livestock extension activities across the country.
- Initiating a major program on livestock extension (including all livestock species) with specific focus on women and livestock development during the 12th Plan. There should also be a provision for training and deployment of women extension workers for livestock extension at the Panchayat level.
- Including more livestock extension activities under Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) action plans and ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency) activities.
- Developing collaborative programmes for livestock extension with private sector, NGOs, producer groups/co-operatives, women SHGs and para extension workers involved in the livestock sector.

- Creating an extension and training wing within SDAH at state headquarters with regional/local wings (staffed and equipped with trained livestock extension specialists and supporting infrastructure) and should allocate at least 10% of the departmental budget for extension activities covering all livestock species.
- Developing capacities among livestock development and extension personnel from all sectors through curricula reforms as well as through design and implementation of appropriate training programmes.

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