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Minor Veterinary Services in Andhra Pradesh: Stakeholder Consultations & Expert Group Deliberations

P. Venkatramaiah and V. Ahuja

1. Introduction

In the recent development literature, there is an increasing recognition of the immense potential of the livestock sector in enhancing the income of the poor. Livestock distribution is more equitable than land distribution. Thus, the livestock sector provides a natural entry point for poverty alleviation programs. A major issue affecting the livestock economy, however, is the effective delivery of livestock services. Ongoing studies in Andhra Pradesh, initiated by CALPI and PPLPI, have identified the increasingly important role of para-veterinarians in livestock service delivery. Despite the importance of the service performed by the para-veterinarians, there are severe concerns about the quality of the latter. It was frequently alleged that the para-veterinarians often go beyond their brief and perform services that they are not equipped or trained for. This not only holds true for Andhra Pradesh. A review of the international literature on the performance of para-veterinarians highlights similar trends. It is, therefore, important that a strong monitoring and regulating systems be in place to 'optimize' the contribution of para-veterinarians to the animal health system.

Currently, livestock keepers in Andhra Pradesh are served by several service delivery mechanisms sponsored by and operated through different government and non-government agencies and bilateral projects. A number of these mechanisms are supported by trained para-veterinarians known by different names – Gopals, Gopalamitras, Sanghamitras – with whom the state now has a rich working experience. However, accountability for the services they render remains a concern. One of the other critical constraints in regulating and monitoring the services provided by these para-veterinarians is that there does not exist a clear definition of 'Minor

Veterinary Services' that can be provided by trained personnel other than registered veterinarians. From the national perspective, the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) Act 1984 created a provision for certain personnel holding a diploma or certificate of veterinary supervisors, stockmen or stock assistant, etc to render 'MINOR VETERINARY SERVICES' under the supervision of a Registered Veterinary Practitioner (RVP). The above provision is subject to the condition that respective state governments have by order permitted such persons.

The direct implication of the Clause 30b of the Veterinary Council of India Act 1984 (No.52 of 1984) is that it makes it mandatory for all State Governments to identify 'Minor Veterinary Services' over and above the few examples indicated in the act and notify the same in the respective state government gazettes. The indirect implication is that the standards of the jobs and tasks involved in performing the notified 'Minor Veterinary Services' have to be described, which forms the basis for appropriate skill development. However, to date, only few states in India have undertaken this exercise.

In the light of the emerging importance of para-veterinarians in livestock service delivery, and the issues regarding quality, the Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP) recognized that to ensure quality services, it is vital to have a strong regulatory framework in place. Accordingly, GoAP issued an order to constitute an expert committee to propose a definition of the 'Minor Veterinary Services' in the context of its specific needs, and to prepare a list of services that can be rendered by para-veterinarians. In accordance with the Terms of Reference in the government order, the committee formulated the following objectives for itself:

- To propose a basic definition of Minor Veterinary Services/Minor Veterinary Dispensations in the specific context of Andhra Pradesh.
- To list out a schedule of services/dispensations falling in the category of the 'Minor Veterinary Services'.
- To shortlist context/skill related applications, skills and a service chain for differentially qualified para-veterinary practitioners/veterinary health care technicians/village animal husbandry or animal health link workers.
- To develop course contents and syllabi (curriculum design) for the training of para-professionals, technicians and link workers.
- To prepare a checklist of *do's and don'ts* for practitioners.
- To develop mechanisms to link para-veterinarians with registered veterinary practitioners (government or private) for professional and ethical supervision.

The purpose of this exercise was to provide a better basis for the planning, monitoring, and evaluation, and the continuous up-scaling of service delivery mechanisms through a well-considered regulatory framework. The process involved organizing focal group discussions and

meetings with stakeholders and intense discussions within the expert group in order to achieve the above objective. This report presents the process and the outcomes of the focal group discussions and the Expert Committee deliberations.

2. Methods

A systematic approach was adopted to guide the process of defining 'Minor Veterinary Services'. An Expert Committee was constituted to deliberate on various aspects of 'Minor Veterinary Services' and to come up with a list of services to be notified the state gazette. The process was initiated with a desk study to provide the necessary background. The study involved reviewing the existing information from the department, earlier study reports from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Institute of Public Enterprise (IPE), the Boston group and the NGO Anthra. Circulars issued by the Uttar Pradesh Government were also reviewed. With this background, a consultative process was initiated involving focal group discussions, brainstorming exercises, expert group discussions, and one-on-one meetings with organizations involved in service delivery. Workshops were also conducted with veterinary assistants and junior veterinary officers to get their inputs. The information collected in all the meetings was presented and reviewed in the second expert committee meeting.

3. Outcomes of the Consultations & Deliberations

One of the major objectives of the process was to put forth a formal definition of 'Minor Veterinary Services' which clearly stated the tasks that could be performed by the para-veterinarians. To identify these tasks, focal group discussions were held at Kurnool, Ananthapur and Vizianagaram. The concerned Veterinary Assistant Surgeons were present at the discussions held at Kurnool and Ananthapur, as were the Assistant Directors from Semen Banks. At Ananthapur and Vizianagaram the concerned Joint Directors also participated in the deliberations and suggested certain new work dimensions.

Para-workers with a high level of performance were also invited to participate in the workshops. Gopals (JK Trust), lay inseminators (BAIF), Gopalamithras (APLDA/VLDA), Sanghamithras (APRLP), Livelihoods Activists and Livestock Assistants (VELUGU) attended the workshops and the duties and tasks performed were listed. The lists of tasks performed by these workers were cross checked in the same workshop in the presence of all the participants. The agreed versions were consolidated to minimize overlaps and obtain a general picture of the services rendered by para-workers.

Definition of minor veterinary services and dispensations

As described in Clause 30b of Indian veterinary Council Act 1984. No52 of 1984 the term 'MINOR VETERINARY SERVICES' means the recurring of primary veterinary aid like vaccination, castration, dressing of wounds and such other types of preliminary aid or the treatment of such ailments as the state governments may by notification in the official gazette specify in this behalf.

The lists of services delivered by the para-workers in general were presented to members of the expert committee on May 2005. Based on these, the expert committee identified seven broad areas encompassing different services that can be rendered by para-workers:

1. Extension and advisory services
2. Fodder development
3. Preventive health care and disease reporting
4. Minor procedures in first aid
5. General dispensations
6. Doorstep inseminations
7. Castration

Based an extended debate the services were categorized as Schedule I, II, and III services. The spirit underlying the scheduling was to visualize the extent of training, handholding and supervision, which in turn will provide clues in formulating meaningful curricula. The essence of each schedule is given below:

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| Schedule I | All general extension and fodder development services (which require basic orientation training). |
| Schedule II | All services that require systematic skill development and guidance of a registered Veterinary Practitioner |
| Schedule III | All services that require advanced training and supervisory guidance of a registered Veterinary Practitioner |

The Expert Committee recommends that the state of Andhra Pradesh adopt the following definition of 'Minor Veterinary Services':

“Basic veterinary interventions, dispensations and livestock extension services (as specified in Schedules I, II & III) provided by trained and certified personnel, other than the registered veterinary practitioners, to support livestock health and production.”

Training duration and qualifications: Para-veterinarians

The existing curriculum (12 months) issued to impart entry-level training to direct recruits of Veterinary Assistants (10+2) employed with the AHD. This training course is inclusive of both classroom learning and apprenticeship. After the successful completion of their training and certification, these para-veterinarians shall be eligible to practice all services described under Schedules I, II and III. Further they shall perform additional tasks entrusted to them by their employers from time to time. Basic entry-level qualification for para-veterinarians will be:

- For a two year university diploma: a pass in the 10th class and
- For the one year certificate offered by AHD of Andhra Pradesh, 10+2 years of education was prescribed.

Training duration and qualifications: Animal Health Workers

Given the variety of tasks and the diversity of market, production and socio-cultural contexts, it is neither feasible nor desirable to prescribe entry-level qualifications and specific training duration of curricula for all types of AHWs. While a formal education of 10th standard and above may be desirable for selecting an Animal Health Worker, the committee does not consider this to be a mandatory condition. The nature and duration of training and the basic qualifications to undergo the training will depend on the range and purpose of the task they are expected to perform, and the overall production and market context under which they function. The expert committee debated on a minimum training duration for different types of AHWs and attempted to outline the essential elements of some of the training required for these. It is recommended that this framework be treated as an overall guiding outline and be reviewed after two years of implementation.

- All AHWs should undergo a minimum of 12 day foundation training
- Those wishing to provide all the services listed under Schedule I should undergo a minimum of 41 day training and certification in addition to the 12 day foundation training.
- Those wishing to provide all services in Schedule II should undergo a minimum of an additional 48 day training. Thus an individual AHW intending to practice 'Minor Veterinary Services' as stated in Schedule I and II, has to undergo and successfully complete a minimum of 101 day comprehensive training course inclusive of both classroom learning and apprenticeship.
- A minimum of an additional 13 day training and apprenticeship was prescribed at an advanced learning module to practice the 'Minor Veterinary Services' as stated in Schedule III. Only the AHWs who have been certified to deliver Schedule II services will be eligible for this course.

Given the diversity of contexts, however, there will always be a need for AHWs focusing on a sub-set of services as listed in Schedule I, II and III. It would not be desirable to prescribe for them the minimum duration of training equivalent to those providing the whole range of services. Without sufficient clarity on the purpose and range of tasks however, it is not possible to prescribe the duration of training.

Registration and training certification

All organizations imparting training pertaining to Schedule I, II and III services shall register with the state AHD and inform the latter of the nature of the training provided, the tasks being performed by the trainees in the field and the name of the registered veterinary practitioner (RVP) under whose supervision the AHW is delivering the services.

The principal / head of the registered training centre evaluates the performance of the trainees and certifies to that effect. The competent authority identified by the State Director of Animal Husbandry may further countersign such certificates. Certificates must be issued to the successful trainees at the training centre itself within 15 days of the completion of training.

The lists of certified trainees must be communicated to the respective district Joint Directors of the AHD for its records. The training centre principals / government / NGO sector are responsible for such notifications.

Linkages with registered veterinary practitioners

Animal health workers are a critical element in the overall animal health system and provide an effective model for extending the outreach of animal health services to poor and marginalized areas. However, the realization of their full potential requires a strong linkage and support system for the purpose of ethical and professional supervision and technical support. It is therefore essential that they become an integral part of the animal health system.

In Andhra Pradesh, some systematic linkage already exists between Gopalmitras and the state veterinary department. The linkage is, however, limited to input supply for artificial insemination (frozen semen and liquid nitrogen) and minimal monitoring and supervision.

The Expert Committee strongly recommends strengthening the linkage between professional veterinarians, para-veterinarians and AHWs, and extending it beyond input supply support. The system must provide for technical back-up and formal referral support, professional and ethical supervision, and the enforcement of regulatory measures. The government is already responsible for ethical/professional supervision, technical back-up and referral support of the para-veterinarians it employs. It is recommended that this function be extended to private and

non-government organizations seeking such support and not able cover the associated costs. Indeed, the system must strive towards recognizing and mainstreaming service delivery by para-veterinarians and AHWs as the third tier in the livestock services delivery chain. The VCI Act under Article 30 (b) provides for the dispensation of minor veterinary services by suitably trained para professionals *under the supervision of registered graduate veterinary practitioners*. The standardization of the training of these animal health workers/para professionals and linking them to registered veterinary practitioners for regulation and ethical/professional supervision thus became mandatory.

The Expert Committee is of the opinion that the linkage of the para-veterinarians and the AHWs with the registered veterinary practitioners should be multi-dimensional, going well beyond the mere legal requirements, in order to evolve and render the para-veterinarians and AHWs into multi-skilled service providers satisfying both the needs of the farmers and the regulatory requirements under the VCI Act. As private registered veterinary practitioners are few and far between in Andhra Pradesh and the Veterinary Assistant. Surgeon (VAS) of the AHD is the most accessible registered veterinary practitioner state-wide, the VAS will naturally be the key nodal point in the regulatory/supervisory support set up.

The AHD should formally link with each VAS up to 5 Gopalamitras / AHWs working within his/her jurisdiction for providing technical and referral support, professional supervision, and the enforcement of the VCI Act. For the AHWs employed by NGOs and private institutions who have registered veterinary practitioners employed by them, the role of the VAS may be limited to the enforcement of necessary regulations for minor veterinary services dispensation. In the case of the Gopalamitras, the responsibility of the VAS will also include continued and on-the-job/hands-on training over a three-year period to improve the Gopalamitras's proficiency in minor veterinary/AI services; technical support in terms of referral services for treatment of cases/AI; and opening up with the Gopalamitras a two-way professional and extension communication channel. The AHD should ensure that these tasks are reflected in the job chart of the VAS as the normal responsibility attached to the position s/he holds.

The Gopalamitras on their part will function as the non-governmental extension of the AHD service delivery chain: the third tier in livestock service delivery, expanding the AHD's reach right into the villages and as a force multiplier in the AHD's fight against animal epidemics. They will remain independent private practitioners, delivering minor veterinary and AI services at farm level as paid inputs, with add-on skills from time to time when necessary. The Gopalamitras / AHWs will, however, be obliged to complement the government's efforts in disease surveillance, outbreak reporting and disease control campaigns as paid associates.

In case of calamities, where mass preventive vaccinations have to be conducted in a campaign approach, it may be made mandatory for all para-veterinarians and AHWs to participate. Those who are not directly employed by the government should be appropriately compensated for these mandatory duties.

Monitoring and assessment

Every registered veterinary practitioner shall record the names of all the para-veterinary professionals and AHWs undertaking minor veterinary practice under his supervision and guidance in his area of operation. S/he will make public the lists of such para-workers and the services delivered by them.

Para-veterinary professionals and AHWs shall keep a record of what they do in a prescribed format and submit the same as and when asked for by the registered veterinary practitioner for the purpose of inspection, supervision and guidance what so ever. Registered veterinary practitioners shall verify the minor veterinary practices carried out and recorded by the para-veterinary professionals and AHWs and play a supportive role to enable the para-workers to better render their service.

Supervision of and guidance provided by NGOs, CBOs, corporate bodies and societies, should declare the names of the registered practitioners under whose supervision and guidance, the para-veterinarians and/or AHWs employed by them practice minor veterinary services. Such practitioners shall also keep a record of what they do and submit the same for the purpose of inspection, supervision and guidance.

4. Conclusions

The experiences from Andhra Pradesh and several other regions around the world reveal that the accessibility of livestock services has increased considerably through the services provided by para-veterinarians. However, some concerns as to the quality of the services and the suitability of these workers to provide certain services remain. The provision of medicines to people with only rudimentary training can potentially have negative impacts on animal health systems, undermining the international credibility of a country's veterinary services. Qualified veterinary professionals capable of regulating a complex service system and acknowledging the potential of para-veterinarians and AHWs as complements strengthening the animal health system, appear to be the need of the day.

Andhra Pradesh has had significant experience in working with the para-veterinarians trained by the government as well as by NGOs. However, the state does not have mechanisms in place to

regulate the quality of services. This study is an initiative of the government, along with CALPI and PPLPI, to formalize the definition of 'Minor Veterinary Services', the training required to perform these services and to monitor the services provided by para-veterinarians by linking them with the veterinary system.

This report proposes a formal definition of 'Minor Veterinary Services', which includes services under Schedule I, II and III mentioned in the report. Based on the services and the tasks involved, a comprehensive curriculum guide is prepared. Finally, specific guidelines for linking para-veterinarians and AHWs providing 'Minor Veterinary Services' to registered veterinary practitioners are laid down.

5. Contacts and Further Information

This research report is an excerpt from the full report submitted to PPLPI-SA and CALPI. For additional information, please contact:

Vinod Ahuja

Indian Institute of Management
Vastrapur, Ahmedabad-380 015, India
Email: ahuja@iimahd.ernet.in

Abraham K Joseph

Capitalization of Livestock Programme India (CALPI)
Sarvodaya Enclave, New Delhi, India
Email: lcindia.calpi@spectranet.com