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Livestock Service Delivery in Andhra Pradesh: Veterinarians' Perspective

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1. Introduction

Andhra Pradesh has a strong, well qualified, committed and forward looking State Animal Husbandry Department (AHD). The state has a large network of veterinary infrastructure (veterinary dispensaries, hospitals and polyclinics, rural livestock units, and AI centres) and individuals - professional veterinarians and the para-veterinary staff. However, changing internal and external environments require the animal health and breeding service delivery system to become more dynamic and needs-oriented, financially sustainable, and closer to the ground.

Veterinarians are a critical part and major stakeholder of any livestock service delivery system. They are the link with the livestock owners and hence have insights into the ground level reality. To inform the Livestock Service Delivery Reform process in the state of Andhra Pradesh (AP) being facilitated by PPLPI-CALPI, it was important to also get their perspective on the main issues and constraints they faced and to elicit some suggestions on enhancing the quality and reach of the livestock services in the state.

2. Methods

Focus group discussions were conducted with Veterinary Assistant Surgeons (VAS) of the Animal Husbandry Department (AHD) of Andhra Pradesh to obtain their views. Various districts were selected as the sites for conducting the focus group discussions. The criteria for selection of districts were agro-climatic zone, predominant livestock species, and prevailing production system considering that the needs of veterinarians operating in an area with intensive dairy

systems are likely to be different from those working in the tribal region where the bull-calf system is prevalent. Based on these criteria, the districts selected were: Mahbubnagar, Chittoor, Prakasam, East Godavari, and Adilabad. The characteristics of each of the districts are as follows:

- **Mahbubnagar:** semi-arid, high density of small ruminants, low intensity dairy;
- **Chittoor:** low rainfall, rainfed agriculture, high intensity dairy (cattle);
- **East Godavari (Kakinada):** irrigated agriculture, low intensity small ruminant production, high intensity dairy (buffalo);
- **Prakasam (Ongole):** between East Godavari and Mahbubnagar in characteristics, however, people are recognizing the importance of dairy as a source of livelihood;
- **Adilabad:** tribal area, buffalo-calf production system, importance of livestock for livelihood support is high but accessibility of services is very low.

The main objectives of focus group discussions were to identify:

- The constraints faced by the veterinarians in effective service delivery and identification of 2 to 3 critical constraints.
- Given the constraints, suggestions for strengthening the services, involving simple organizational changes and collaborating with other key players in the area.
- Veterinarians perspective on the para-veterinary system and ways of strengthening veterinarians-para-veterinarians linkage.

3. Results

3.1 Constraints

The constraints faced by the veterinarians can be categorized in: Human resource, financial, policy-related and administrative. Constraints in the tribal areas are discussed separately because the needs of veterinarians / para-veterinarians operating in these areas are very distinct.

Human resource constraints

Lack of human resources (VAS, para-veterinarians, attendants): Lack of manpower was identified as the single most important constraint to livestock service delivery in all group discussions. In several places, veterinary positions were vacant, with the result that one VAS

was simultaneously handling more than 2 or 3 animal health centres (AHCs)¹. Also, there was severe shortage of para-veterinarians to assist the veterinarians. The frequent complaint was that if the one person attending the AHC had to go on a field visit then there was no one to take care of livestock owners who visited the centre during that time. Also, with the lack of attendants, the VAS in charge was required to multi-task, including sweeping and cleaning the office. Sweeping the office while clients were waiting was felt to be socially demeaning.

Human resource development: Apart from the shortage of human resources, one of the key factors that needed attention was upgrading of skills in the form of continued education. The VASs stated that their training dated back to their time in veterinary college and that there was a need for continued upgrading of skills. Another aspect of human resource development mentioned was the need of exposure to meetings, conferences, and other districts.

Lack of incentives: Although an incentive system for the veterinarians exists in principle, this is not always adhered to, which leads to complacency and low morale.

Financial constraints

Lack of basic materials: It appears that even basic materials such as iodine, ointments, and sterilizers, which are necessary to provide a minimum quality of service, are not made available to them in sufficient quantities. As a result, VASs find it difficult to maintain even the minimum level of service quality. Further the quantity of medicines provided is insufficient to meet demand and the quality of medicines is also quite dubious.

Poor infrastructure: A very important issue that came up in all discussions was the lack of infrastructure at the veterinary hospitals. A critical issue here was the lack of simple diagnostic kits, which severely hampered the use of veterinary skills as available diagnostic laboratories are at large distances. Consequently, even though veterinarians have higher skills than Gopalamitras², treatment is based on their best judgement and the quality of services that they provide is at best only marginally better than that of Gopalamitras.

Another infrastructure related issue was the lack of basic equipment at the animal health centres. It was pointed out that these centres are in dilapidated conditions and their maintenance needs

¹ This report uses AHCs as a catch all term for veterinary dispensaries, polyclinics, hospitals, and first aid veterinary centres (FAVCs). Veterinary polyclinics are the veterinary hospitals with multiple specialties and specialists such as surgery, gynecology, radiology, etc. These employ several post-graduate veterinarians and located mostly in state headquarters. Veterinary hospitals are institutions with inpatient facilities and with usually one or two qualified veterinarians. These are located mostly in district headquarters. Veterinary dispensaries are the same as hospitals but without inpatient facilities and usually with one professional veterinarian. FAVCs are minor dispensaries in *pancayats* manned by paraprofessionals. A number of these also have trained technicians to provide AI services.

² Gopalamitras are government promoted private animal health workers trained for providing AI and first aid veterinary services. Andhra Pradesh Livestock Development Agency provides them with necessary technical and input supply support (at cost).

urgent attention. A remark made to this effect was that “VASs *should be provided accident insurance to continue to work in the buildings because many of these could crumble any time*”.

Lack of mobility: Lack of mobility was another issue that came out in all the meetings. The VASs were not provided with a vehicle and were also not given any travel allowance. This lack of mobility hinders their capacity to address situations in the field.

Policy-related constraints

Poor emphasis on creating awareness/extension: In the areas where dairy production is not developed, there is lack of awareness about AI, which leads to low demand for services. In areas where awareness is high, service delivery is good, as the livestock owners demand services.

Large ruminant bias: The emphasis in livestock service delivery in the state has been on large ruminants and less on small ruminants and poultry. This is true also as far as training is concerned. The needs of the keepers of small ruminants are different from those keeping dairy animals, as shepherds are illiterate and also have to move their flocks in search of grazing lands.

Poor attention to disease prevention: The notion was expressed that disease prevention and eradication should receive more attention. Often, after an epidemic, large amounts of money are spent on reimbursing livestock owners for lost animals. This money is spent ineffectively because it does not contribute to curbing the spread of diseases. Focused and timely vaccination and increasing the awareness regarding proper timing of vaccination is obviously a more effective way of controlling diseases.

Supply-driven service provision: The administration's approach to effective service delivery is through provision of targets. However, targets are not the best way to ensure effectiveness of service provision. If there is a demand for a service, then the service will be provided. Target setting causes unnecessary pressure on the VASs and produces undesirable unintended outcomes.

Administrative constraints

Paper work / record keeping: There is too much paper work and record-keeping, which takes up inordinate amount of time and distracts from their technical work. There appears to be much duplication in the paper work that can be avoided.

Involvement in other development activities: The VASs were often involved in activities which do not require their technical expertise. For example, distribution of fodder seeds is one activity which takes up much time, especially in areas with high livestock density.

Specific constraints in tribal areas

In the tribal areas literacy levels are low and people still largely use traditional medicines. Consequently, they are not willing to request treatment services, especially if they have to pay for medicines etc. Superstition is also widespread and some of the tribal people do not believe in selling milk. They do not even use milk for home consumption and milk is used to feed the calves. Awareness of AI is very low as a dairy industry is not very well developed except in small pockets around towns. Cattle are non-descript and owners are not prepared to use AI.

Due to poor awareness it is difficult for 'modern' livestock services and AI to penetrate in the tribal areas. Despite these difficulties, one of the VASs in the tribal area, who originates from the district, reported that he received huge respect from the people, which was his main motivation for staying in the area.

Against this general background, some of the key constraints faced by VASs working in tribal areas and their families are: lack of basic services such as medical care in case of emergencies, education, electricity, and transport. However, staying in areas closer to small towns in the tribal belt mitigated some of these constraints. While VASs working in high potential regions had the opportunity to earn from private practice, this opportunity to increase income was not available in tribal areas.

Ranking of constraints

The above mentioned constraints are all very critical and addressing them would go a long way in increasing the effectiveness of the services provided by the veterinarians. However, in reality it is not possible to address all the constraints at the same time. Thus, it was important to understand the two or three issues which were regarded as most crucial. The VASs ranked the following issues as most crucial:

- Shortage of support staff (attendants)
- Lack of diagnostic tool kits
- Poor extension (lack of awareness of farmers)
- Few opportunities for upgrading of skills

The first three issues were unanimously regarded as main constraints in all places. However, in Kakinada, a very dairy intensive area, upgrading of skills also came up as an important issue.

3.2 Suggestions for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Service Delivery

Following the discussion on constraints, suggestions on enhancing the effectiveness of service delivery were elicited. The VASs are the direct link with the livestock owners and the senior

officers at the district and state level. Thus, they are in the unique position of making suggestions which might be simple and can be easily made operational. The suggestions involved simple organizational changes and / or co-ordination with other agencies and organizations working in the area.

Coordination with other agencies/organizations/departments

Since fodder seed distribution is a big issue, it was suggested that the gram panchayats or the agricultural officer should be given the responsibility to distribute fodder seeds. Providing fodder seeds through dairy cooperatives is another option.

With respect to synergy with other actors in the field, the notion was that NGOs like BAIF and JKT are a threat to the Animal Husbandry Department because they compete for the same public funds. In the views of veterinarians, government support to NGOs for service delivery creates a non-level playing field between Gopalamitras and the NGO supported animal health workers. It was suggested that support to NGOs should be restricted for working in the low potential remote and marginal areas while leaving other areas for Gopalamitras.

In some areas there is scope to co-ordinate with private dairy companies. In areas where these are active there is a high demand for services but these dairies do not have the necessary infrastructure and organizational set-up to cater to these services needs. This presents an opportunity for co-ordination with the dairy companies to provide services against payment.

Enhancing awareness

A veterinary extension wing should be established at the district level to cover the public relations aspects regarding vaccination schedules etc.

Approaches for tribal areas

Instead of emphasising AI in tribal areas, where dairy production is not widely practiced, more attention should be placed on rearing Ongole bulls, which are more suitable for the bull-calf production system.

There is urgent need to train village women in first aid at the Panchayat level and increase extension activities in these areas. This can be accomplished by organizing tribal households in small groups and providing initial support using funds from Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA). Further, the veterinarians working in tribal areas should be provided transportation facility/funds from ITDA.

Other suggestions

VASs have to manage a large number of registers and that there are redundancies in the paper work. Overall, the opinion was that record-keeping should be streamlined and reduced.

Furthermore, restructuring of budgetary allocation was suggested, with higher allocation of funds for basic items such as cotton wool, ointment, iodine etc. and lower or no provision of medicines, especially in areas of intensive dairy production.

3.3 Views on the Gopalamitra System

During the initial phases of launch of Gopalamitra program, there was some resentment towards them as they cut into the private practice of government veterinarians. Also, the veterinarians perceived that their social status was adversely affected as a much less qualified technician could perform many of the tasks that they were performing.

Overtime, however, the veterinarians have come to realize that they cannot cater to all the service needs and it is possible to develop synergistic partnerships with Gopalmitras. But, there is need for role clarity between the Gopalmitras and the VASs. The Gopalmitras should be recognized as an extended arm of veterinarians and proper systems put in place to strengthen the ties between them and the veterinarians. Several VASs who had been working closely with the Gopalmitras have begun to appreciate their role in reaching out to the livestock keepers.

4. Recommendations for the Department of Animal Husbandry

Based on the insights provided by the VASs, following suggestions were made:

Operational issues

Some of the key issues where some changes can significantly increase the effectiveness of the department are:

- Improve co-ordination with the related departments and agencies
- Get NGO's to work in areas the department has not been / is not able to reach
- Align the number of animal health centres with the livestock population

Policy issues

Role of veterinarians: On the one hand, the number of veterinarians is declining, whereas on the other hand, demand for quality services as well as the area covered by the AHD VASs is increasing. There is a need to rationalize these two opposing realities. In this context, the role of the veterinarian has to change. This can be done by strengthening the para-veterinary system and integrating the para-veterinarians into the department by creating stronger links with the veterinarians. This will enable a further reach by the VASs as well as enhance the quality of services provided by the para-veterinarian through strong technical support from the VAS.

Furthermore, diagnostic kits and upgrading of the skills of the VASs is required so that they can provide quality services. At the same time, incentive mechanisms need to be effective to spur the VASs to perform better. In order to encourage better provision of services in the tribal areas there should be special incentives, such as faster promotions and financial allowances, for working in these areas.

Focus of the Department: The focus of the department is predominantly on AI and on meeting AI targets. However, although AI and breed development are important, other issues also need to be receive attention. For example, more attention should be paid to the specific needs and issues related to small ruminant and poultry sectors.

Extension: Special attention has to be given to extension. There is no proper extension mechanism for animal husbandry in the state, but raising awareness among farmers is crucial. Specifically the focus of extension should be on creating awareness about AI, on the need for and timing of vaccination, and on creating awareness among keepers of small ruminants.

Area specific approach: Ample evidence emerged from the discussions that there cannot be an across the board approach for all the districts in the state. The approach needs to be area specific, adapted to the specific local needs. For example, AI targets in tribal areas are meaningless.

Encourage dairies / user groups / sheep breeders associations: Encouraging market orientation of livestock production will automatically lead to increased demand for services and make the services demand-driven as against the current supply-led approach in several low potential places. Another approach to encouraging the demand for livestock services is to organize livestock owners into user groups. Finally, although sheep breeders associations exist, they are not operational. These associations need to be encouraged to be more active, to organize the shepherds, and to create a voice to articulate their needs.

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:

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