



The Review of Household Poultry Production as a Tool in Poverty Reduction with Focus on Bangladesh and India

Frands Dolberg

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Governments have agreed to halve the number of poor and hungry people in the world by 2015 as expressed in the Millennium Goals¹ and the search in all economic sectors is now on for ideas and experiences that can be translated into pro-poor strategies and policies. Work initiated in Bangladesh in the 1980s using very small poultry units of 5 - 10 adult birds have in recent years caught the attention of the development community. Here, a system is in place which involves people in production, supply and services. It is described as the Bangladesh Model although the components of the model undergo continuous change. The work in Bangladesh began with support from the World Food Programme to poor women and their families and it was demonstrated that poultry production in very small units can alleviate poverty.

The aim of this paper is to review literature that relates to poverty reduction in general and which may provide indicators of process and progress when poultry, in particular, is used as a tool in poverty alleviation. The focus is on experiences from Bangladesh but survey and project work that has been undertaken in India is also examined.

It is concluded that the rationale for a pro-poor livestock policy that embraces smallholder poultry production is logical. It leads to much greater outreach to poor people than most livestock projects so far, which have tended to have a bias towards cattle. The evidence is that greater outreach leads to greater food security. People exchange high value poultry products for cereals or vegetables and marginal, but important, consumption increases are seen of food of animal origin such as milk, meat and fish. This leads to a triple benefit. Poor people take their first steps into the development mainstream, they become better nourished and the demand for animal products goes up.

Government extension programmes are not close to the poor. Animal husbandry and agricultural departments' extension programmes are hardly known or used by most poor people for whom the poultry work is relevant. The work in Bangladesh is closely linked to the presence of NGOs and their capacity to reach out to poor people. So far, no independent producer organisations of poor women poultry producers have emerged. Micro-credit has been an important component in the interventions that the NGOs undertake and it is difficult to distinguish between the benefits from micro-credit and the benefits from poultry production in Bangladesh. In India, there are many NGOs that are much closer to people than the government extension services, but few of them have any poultry expertise of the type discussed in this paper. In spite of more years of experience in Bangladesh, sound knowledge of poultry production could be much better at NGO staff level.

It has not been possible to examine government policies in this paper, but this needs to be done. In Bangladesh the subsidy regime that DLS continues to apply to its own production of day-old chicks

¹ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

does not encourage the private sector or the NGOs to enter into production of day-old chicks for the smallholder sector, although the NGO BRAC has done so.

It is recommended that a survey is also undertaken in India and Nepal. In view of the mandate of the South Asia Hub of FAO's Pro-poor Policy Unit this could comprise:

- (i.) Government policy: in spite of a commercial poultry sector, which is strong in some of the Indian states, there are large sections of the rural population who are untouched by this. This is especially the case in the tribal areas and there is a need to identify, describe and analyse livestock strategies and policies in India at the state and central level to (a) understand the policies and (b) develop proposals to exploit the potential of household poultry and other small animals in supporting and improving the livelihoods of very poor women and their families. This analysis cannot cover all states of India, but may be conducted in a comparative perspective and analyse pro-poor livestock policies in, for example, Kerala which has successfully reduced poverty, and compare those policies with less successful states that have a high incidence of poverty such as Uttar Pradesh, or large tribal population such as Orissa. It is important that the survey does not limit itself to the livestock departments, corporations or private companies, but is aware of the interdepartmental nature of the challenge. This is illustrated by the Women and Child Department's of Union Ministry of Human Resources, Government of India, which has recently announced support for a 'Backyard Poultry Project' for 10 000 women in Kerala².
- (ii.) Organisations with capacity to work with the poor. In India there is a large body of NGO and micro-finance experience of working with poor people on matters such as social mobilisation, awareness raising, gender and other social issues, group formation and micro-finance. Very few have experience of federating groups of very poor women, (or 'of forming federations of groups of very poor women) although it is understood that this has been done by the Dhan Foundation in South India. Similarly, few have experience of working with household poultry. There is a need to identify and analyse the experiences of such organisations to see what can be learned and what type of alliances in support of a pro-poor livestock policy can be established.
- (iii.) Approach and technologies. There is much field based learning behind the components of the Bangladesh Model. These skills and the knowledge to conduct these functions need to be in place for the smallholder approach to be implemented with success. There is a need to analyse which organisations can do what in India and Nepal, and the degree to which understanding, skills and knowledge exist in organisations responsible for policy, field level implementation or research and training.

In short the aim of the survey is to obtain an understanding of the policy, institutional and technology environment that is in place, or needs to be put in place, for poultry to play a role in poverty alleviation.

Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Initiative (PPLPI)

Website: <http://www.fao.org/ag/pplpi.html>

Working Paper pdf (English): <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/projects/en/pplpi/docarc/wp6.pdf>

² http://www.poultrysolutions.com/pserv/DetailedNews?news_id=508 (September 8, 2003).