

Replication of the Bangladesh Smallholder Poultry Model. Case from Malawi

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Reverse the poverty spiral:

Anastasia used to sell a few chickens in October-November to cover their basic needs for food. But not this year, the income from the sale of eggs from her 5 BA-hens more than covers the family's need for cash income. Now, they have planned to sell 2 chickens in December instead to buy fertiliser to the newly planted maize. Next year will be even better, because...

Summary

The smallholder concept developed in Bangladesh is currently in an adaptation process being tailored to Malawi conditions. The prospective for a successful adaptation is promising: the scavenging feed resource base in the villages are better than in Bangladesh, there is a very poor target group amounting to 37 % of the village population, the villagers have accepted the technology and the key rearer (smallholder) operation seems to be viable.

The adaptation process is rather complicated and requires hard work and commitment. All stakeholders have to be involved and be convinced that the poorest segment of the village population is capable to contribute and to manage an income generating activity based on loans.

Introduction

A small flock of hens can be the beginning of a process in which the poverty spiral is reversed. The technology is simple and known, but to create an environment in which the slightly improved technology is applied and to secure a viable investment is a rather complicated and difficult process.

This paper presents the process of adaptation of the Bangladesh model to the Malawi Smallholder Poultry Model. The process is a generalisation of the experiences from the first phase of the innovation and dissemination process.

Essentials

The smallholder poultry concept is developed in Bangladesh and is currently, through an adaptation process, being tailored to Malawi conditions. In this process it is important to have a clear understanding of the basic elements of the concept or the essentials, which are

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prerequisites for a successful adaptation. The three most important essentials are shown below:

1. The beneficiaries, the target group, shall be the poorest segment of the village population and in particular, women;
2. The scavenging feed resource base shall be sufficient to reduce the cost of supplementary feed per egg produced to be less than that in commercial egg production;
3. The concept must comprise an enabling environment, inter alia; all input supplies including micro-credit and services shall be timely available in the village.

The rationale behind these essentials is:

A daily income of MK 5, the value of one egg, can have a substantial influence on a very poor family's livelihood while the impact on a better off family will be minimal. Furthermore, experience shows that the entire family benefits more from an income belonging to a woman than an income belonging to a man;

The smallholders cannot compete with the commercial sector on productivity, i.e. egg yield, because the same management skills and the same production facilities are not available in the village. They can only compete on the input costs by taking advantage of the free-cost feed available in the surroundings; the scavenging feed resource base.

The smallholders are shifting from a no input/low output system to a small input/higher output system. The latter implies a risk both on input cost and on investment. In order to minimise these risks it is essential that inputs such as feed, improved quality of chickens, vaccine, medicine and services such as veterinary services, extension services and access to micro-credits are available within the village at appropriate times. These inputs and services constitute the enabling environment.

Comparative advantages

The products from the smallholder concept are table eggs and chickens for meat purposes. The table eggs are the same product as those produced by the commercial layer farmers while the chickens are a different product than those produced by commercial broiler farms. It is the commercial sector that is setting the price for eggs. A commercial poultry production in rural villages has to be based on the advantages of the village environment and not just to replicate the commercial system prevailing in the sub-urban areas; a replication often tried, but also often failed.

The comparative advantages can be divided into two groups:

1. The existing comparative advantages in rural villages; and
2. The comparative advantages created by the concept.

Natural advantages

The main natural advantage is the scavenging feed resource base (SFRB). In commercial poultry production the feed cost constitutes about 70 to 80% of the total operational cost. At village level the SFRB is often sufficient to provide more than 50% of the feed needed; a substantial advantage.

Cheap local building materials can reduce the investment cost and cheap labour can also reduce the investment as well as the operational costs.

Conceptual advantages

The conceptual advantages are comparative advantages as a consequence of the demand from a number of smallholders, key rearers, established in the village. The conceptual advantages are as such closely related to creating an enabling environment.

The key rearers demand that supplementary feed must be available in small quantities, that improved chickens or hatching eggs from improved breeds must be available at the time they have broody hens, that they have access to reliable and timely vaccination services, that they have access to reliable and timely medicine and they demand a marketing mechanism to sell their products. Furthermore, access to micro-credit is an essential element in this context. The model components, other than the key rearer, are as such based on conceptual comparative advantages.

Constraints

1. Objectives

It may be a wrong strategy to call the concept a smallholder *poultry* model because it is a general misunderstanding to related the objectives of the concept to poultry production, e.g. egg production instead of relating the objectives to poverty alleviation. This was also the case in Malawi and the approach to formulate a Malawi model focused at the beginning mainly on disciplines related to poultry production and less on the socio-economic parameters.

The objective with the concept is poverty alleviation and poultry is only an instrument in the process of reversing the poverty spiral. It is important that this objective is clear and understood by the stakeholders already in the conception phase in order to prioritise the socio-economic disciplines in the project formulation.

2. Target group

It is surprising so many, organisations and individuals, that have a policy to target the poorest, but either on purpose or in reality exclude the poorest segment of the population. Common phrases are: the poorest do not have the capability to learn, the poorest are lazy, the poorest have chosen to live in poverty or it is better to start with the better off and then the poorest segment will benefit through a trickle-down effect, an approach, which has been rejected long ago.

The truth may be that it is troublesome to have the poorest segment as the target group, it demands a lot of work and commitment and the project staff do not have the experiences in working with the poorest segment of the population. However, the example from Bangladesh clearly shows the poorest segment both has the capability and the willingness to work their way out of the poverty circle if they get the opportunity.

In Malawi the project has been through the same obstacles, the donor supported projects which were assumed to support the smallholder poultry concept had on purpose excluded the poorest segment, the local decision makers were reluctant in targeting exclusively the very poor and the same reluctance was observed in the village community. The turning point was a very committed project staff that understand the objective of the Bangladesh concept and was willing to try to involve the poorest segment of the village population in the programme and they worked hard and committed in order to reach the poorest segment of the village population.

The results from two full-scale test villages have been promising, in one of the villages there was only one family out of 55 potential ones that did not contribute with savings and participation in group activities. In the other village there were three families out of 35 that not want to participate or contribute.

3. Easiness

The smallholder poultry concept is at the first sight a very simple concept and an obvious entry tool in poverty alleviation programmes. This should not be a constriction, but a common mistake is to perceive that it is easy to adapt the concept to other conditions. However, it is not just a simple matter of establishing a chicken rearer and a number of smallholders (key rearers) and organise a vaccination programme.

An often overseen element is the socio-economic parameters and often it is completely neglected that the target group is the poorest segment of the village population. Another element is the sustainability; the enabling environment shall be maintained on pure business conditions. That is important.

Even though the components constituting the concept all are simple it has to be realised that the interaction between the components is a complicated matter. Furthermore, the target group, constituting the poorest segment of the village population, is one of the essentials of the concept and to approach this group is far from being a simple activity.

4. Cultural, social, demographical and infrastructural environment

A common objection with regard to replication of the Bangladesh concept is the differences in the cultural and the social environment between the two countries. It is of course a relevant objection and differences exist. The fundamental question is: are the basic behaviours the same for the poorest segment of a population, independent of cultural and social differences?

Preliminary observations indicate that the main part of the poorest segment of the village population want to and is able to work themselves out of poverty if they get the opportunity. This behaviour seems to be independent of cultural differences and this observation is also supported by experiences from replication of the Grameen bank concept. Amartya Sen 1999 in his book 'Development as Freedom' also describe similarities in the behaviour of the very poor in his capability approach to poverty alleviation.

The above does not imply that cultural differences are of minor importance, but only that the target group response when exposed to the concept is very similar. The approach to organise and implement the concept has to be adapted to the prevailing conditions in a specific country and that is a complicated process.

1. Conclusive remarks

2. The poorest segment of the village population is creditworthy and has the capability to reverse the poverty spiral;
3. Poultry is an unique entry point for the poorest to start an income generating activity;
4. Establishment of an enabling environment at village level is the cornerstone in the Bangladesh model;
5. A committed core staff is the most essential element in the adaptation process;
6. Stakeholder awareness activities is time consuming but a necessary process;
7. Preliminary results from Malawi indicate that the target group (the poorest segment of the village population) behave similar to the target group in Bangladesh;
8. The adaptation process in Malawi has revealed the complexities of the concept and that socio-economic activities are essential for activating the target group;
9. The Bangladesh model can be simplified as long as the enabling environment is an integral part of the concept.