

THE GOAT AS A TOOL IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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1. Introduction

With regard to livestock's contribution to poverty alleviation and livelihood improvement, a comprehensive review of 800 livestock projects (Ashley et al., 1999) found big problems in creating positive impact among the poor and it was argued in the review that livestock development professionals and governments were biased towards large animals and their owners, who typically are not among the poorest and certainly not women.

Common for development projects targeting the poorest are that the investment and operational costs shall be low. A concept based on a small flock of hens has been developed in Bangladesh targeting the poorest segment and women of the village population, a concept in which the process of participating is a learning process to start other income generating activities. The hens are as such secondary in this process. The hens can be replaced with goats, or other low cost activities, and the learning process will still be the same. The conceptual framework for using poultry in poverty alleviation is described by Jensen and Dolberg (2003).

The pillars in this concept are:

1. Community groups;
2. Training and technical support;
3. Establishing of an enabling environment at village level;
4. Establishing opportunities for the participants to take the next step out of poverty.

2. Poverty within the village

Even in a very poor village there are there people who are poorer than other. This segment is often named the poorest of the poor. Especially the donor organisations have a policy and a strategy to recognise this segment as their target group. However, in reality this segment is seldom included in development programmes, probably because it is difficult to identify this segment and it requires a lot of work to implement a development programme for this segment.

The poorest segment is normally very little involved in the village activities and the reasons for that are several:

1. Their main concern is to provide for the next meal and they use most of their time on that;
2. The other villages more or less exclude the poorest segment in the village activities and village organisations such as participation in community groups;
3. The poorest segment is ashamed of being poor and poorly dressed;
4. The poorest segment knows from experience that development programmes are not for them but for the more resourcefully.

A great proportion of female headed households belong to this segment, they are illiterate and belong to the most vulnerable. However, experiences show that this segment can be very powerful and contribute to the development of a village, they don't need to be a burden but can be an asset if they get the opportunity, Jensen (2001)

3. Smallholder livestock as an educational tool.

A single goat or a few hens will not lift a poor family out of poverty, but to participate in a well planned development project based on either a goat or a few hens can be and should be an educational process in which the participants learn to establish income generating activities.

The poorest segment has often no experiences with participating in community groups, they do not know how to use the public services available and they are often afraid of taking loans, unless they are forced to do so in order to survive, because they know the consequences of not repaying the loan in due time.

The basic principles in design of a development project targeting the poorest segment of the village population are:

1. Methods to identify and select the poorest segment as participants in the project;
2. Select activities which are familiar to this segment, in this respect are goats and a small flock of hens ideal, because even the poorest are familiar with management of especially hens and goats;
3. Establish the participants in community groups;
4. Training programmes not only for livestock management but also in using public and private service providers;
5. Establishing an enabling environment in which the risk of operating a smallholder operation is minimised in particular to prevent outbreak of diseases and further, it shall give the opportunities to establish other income generating activities.

The donor support to the project shall be used to establish the project organisation and training and not to give the participants free goods, they shall pay the market price for all input supplies; otherwise the programme will never be sustainable. Micro credit is often mentioned as an essential element in the project. However, experiences indicate that traditional micro credits are not workable for livestock in rural areas because the period is rather long before the smallholder operation have a positive cash flow and the interest burden is then too high. Bangladesh is, in this respect, an exception, probably because the low administrative cost of managing a micro credit programme. Other programmes than traditional micro credit programmes are heifer and goat exchange programmes in which the participants are given a goat or a heifer and are obliged to pass over the first offspring to another family.

As mentioned, the process of participating in the development programme shall be an educational process and the ideal would be if the participants also have the opportunity to use the gained experiences to start other income generating activities. In order to do so the development projects should be coordinated in such a way that the enabling environment is designed for all the villagers and a development project

targeting the poorest shall be an integral part of other projects related to agricultural development.

4. Community groups

Below is an abstract from a paper present at an IFAD workshop in Fuiggi, Italy in 2001y by Hans Askov Jensen. The paper is mainly based on experiences with community groups in Bangladesh and Malawi.

“Community groups are common instruments to be used in dissemination of technologies. Establishment of community groups as an integral part of the institutional capacity building is an essential element in the Grameen micro-credit programmes and in Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee’s (BRAC) Rural Development Programme in Bangladesh. Both institutions are NGOs and BRAC has 3.85 million members while Grameen has 2.4 millions (year 20001). The set up is now replicated in other countries.

Establishment of community groups is time consuming and costly, especially in cases where the group members belong to the poorest segment of the rural population and in particular women. That is probably the main reason why many community groups are established without participation of the poorest segment.

In Malawi, many of the villages are organised with a Village Livestock Committee (VLC) and under the VLC is a sub-group for poultry in which it was supposed to find the poorest of the villagers. An in-depth analyses revealed that the poorest segment (about 30%) of the village population where completely isolated from the VLC-groups and other village activities. About 70% of the female-headed households belong to this segment of the invisible. It is important not to consider the villagers as a uniform group, because the poorest segment will then be omitted in community group approaches.”

Gibbons (1999) asked 'Why target poor women' and answered, there are several reasons for targeting poor women:

- Poor women have proven to be better loan clients than poor men;
- Poor women's earnings have a greater impact on family welfare;
- Women are likely to be empowered through their greater economic contribution to the household.

It is not only Gibbons who has made these observations, also BRAC use the same arguments in their rural development strategies.

Lessons learned from Malawi:

- 1) PRA (Participatory Rapid Appraisal) is a good instrument to identify the poorest segment of the village population;
- 2) The village community doesn't necessarily include the poorest segment of the village population in poverty alleviation activities;
- 3) Female headed households belongs mainly to the poorest segment of the village population;
- 4) Formation of village groups encompassing the poorest segment of the village population requires hard work and commitment; virtually all beneficiaries have to be individually supported;

- 5) The poorest segment of the village population has the capability and the willingness to participate in and to contribute to group activities, but they have to be convinced that they are the target group and that they can comprehend the consequences of taking a loan.

The ownership of the group is as such an essential element and the open question is: Will the poorest segment experience the ownership if the better off segment also is represented in the group. Experiences from Bangladesh indicate that the better off segment jeopardise the empowerments of the poorest segment by taking the lead in the group. However, the target is to integrate the poorest segment in existing community groups and in this respect, it is important, to involve and convince the local authorities that the poorest can be an assets and not a burden in developing the village. The experiences from Malawi indicate that the poorest, at the end, were accepted by the other segments and became active members of the local society.

Community groups are one of the best tools in transferring new (or old) technologies. It should be obviously that it is not possible for the governmental extension services in developing countries, where more than 70% of the population lives in rural areas and by far the most are occupied with agriculture, to provide the technical service to all. The farmers field school approach, based on community groups, with technical issues can be an effective extension service provider, but also other aspects can be transferred through community groups such as: human health, human right, nourishment and specific subject for the local community.

A project, as the goat package, can be the tool to commence a development process in which networks are established and the villagers are encouraged to find opportunities to improve their livelihood, not only economically but also socially and humanly.

5. Enabling environment

In most of the development projects related to smallholder the participants 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 important that all inputs needed are timely available when needed.

A weak link in improving the production efficiency is the availability of vaccines, medicine and veterinary services. A smallholder can not use a whole day, due to the long distance, to get a single animal vaccinated or treated for diseases. In a number of developing countries the problem is solved by training of para-vets or animal health workers. They are linked to a veterinary service centre, public or private, and they charge a small fee for providing the more basic veterinary services.

Other income generating activities are feed sellers who have a small shop in the village and are linked to a commercial feed factory. Marketing can in some places be a problem. Again such a problem is also a potential for creating small income generating activities. Growing fodder plants for sale may also in some places be income generating activities.

The small enterprises shall target all the villagers, not only the project participants, and provide job opportunnities for e.g. the landless.

Establishing an enabling environment must be an integral part of a project. However, when established, the operation and maintaining activities constituting the enabling environment must be pure business operation with full cost recovery.

Creating an enabling environment gives the target group the opportunity to establish income generating activities. However, other groups than the direct target group can benefit from the programme:

1. the enabling environment gives all the villagers access to farm input supplies and services;
2. the concept pave the way for disbursement of micro-credit in a cost-effective way;
3. the village groups will facilitate easier formation of associations through formalised village livestock groups;
4. the concept helps people acquire the skills that are required for a business set-up to distribute input supplies to the villages;
5. the concept can form the basis for a marketing organisation for farm products;
6. the established beneficiary groups can be used by other NGOs, having the same target groups, to implement other activities, such as informal education for drop-out children from primary schools, extension activities, family planning, HIV/Aids prevention, human rights etc.

In short, the initiatives will add to the social capital of the people (Dowla, 2001 and Karlan, 2002)

6. Empowerment and improved livelihood

One of the most workable definitions of “Empowerment” is the World Banks definition:

“Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make effective choices and transform those choices into desired action and outcomes. Central to this process is actions which both build on individual and collective assets of the poor, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organisational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.”

The training and participation in community groups is the tool to increase the capacity of both the individual and the group. The enabling environment, either established or to be established, is the instrument to transform a desired choice into action and outcome.

The participants are through training and experiences from the group work learning to make effective choices. However, it seems that development projects often focus more on management to increase the production efficiency than on creating an enabling environment in which the poorest can take the next step out of poverty, in fact, a common problem in many livestock development programmes.

It is not only the financial capital that influence improvement of poor families livelihood, but also food security, a place to live, education and networks are factors that have a positive impact on the families livelihood. Frands Dolberg have from the literature produced the five forms of social capital shown below.

Natural	Food security situation, ownership or rent of land, homestead and livestock
Physical	Living: house or no house, quality of house and clothes
Financial	Access to funds: money lender, relatives, micro-finance or formal bank
Human	Confidence, motivation, education, nourishment, human right , health and fitness
Social	Family, social network outside family, membership of groups and organizations

Source: Dolberg (2003).

The positive impact on the poor families livelihood comes from several sources:

1. **Financial capital** from sales of meat, hides and animals;
2. **Natural capital** from manure and protecting the environment through improved management and growing fodder plants;
3. **Human capital** through improved nourishment from milk and meat;
4. **Social capital** through establishing of networks in the community groups and the cooperation with local service providers.

A single goat will not lift a poor family out of poverty, but participating in the project is an educational process during which the individuals increase their capability to take the next step out of poverty.

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