

Visions and Opportunities
Poultry in Poverty Alleviation in Malawi

By

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Introduction

Worldwide, more than a billion people live in extreme poverty and the pressing question is: how can development assistance be most effective at reducing poverty? The smallholder poultry concept, developed in Bangladesh, is one of the tools that have proven to be effective in reducing poverty in rural areas. Most notably, poultry production has proven to be a unique starting point for the poorest segment of the village population.

The vision for the Malawi smallholder poultry concept is to have the model established in 80% of the villages before 2010. To reach that target, a three-pronged strategy will be applied:

1. creation of an enabling environment at village level;
2. creation of community groups;
3. capacity buildings.

The target group will be the poorest segment of the village population with preference to female-headed households.

Visions

Enabling environment

An enabling environment means access to credit and access to all inputs and services, required to minimise the risks in investment in income generating activities. Access means, in the main, that things needed shall be available within the village. The main elements in the enabling environment for the Malawi smallholder poultry model are:

1. access to poultry health service;
2. access to feed;
3. access to improved hens;
4. access to credit.

Marketing is normally not a problem for the poorer segment of the village population; on the contrary, *the problem is that the poor do not have a marketing problem* - they have nothing to sell. However, if the production of eggs and chickens was to exceed

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the demand within the village, then marketing will be one of the activities constituting the enabling environment.

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

Community groups

Experiences, especially from Bangladesh, show that the poorest of the poor are creditworthy, can manage a loan and make rational investment if they get the opportunity and if they can comprehend the consequences. However, experiences from other countries also show that it is a difficult process to reach a level where the poor can comprehend the consequences and are willing to take the risk to invest in an income generating activity. It is always a risk to take a loan.

Establishing of community groups, composed of socially identical beneficiaries, seems to be a valuable tool in empowering the poor. In the group they support each other, they become aware of their own forces and rights, and they are enlightened about their possibilities to work themselves and their families out of poverty.

The process of establishing community groups and facilitate group support is not easy; it is time consuming and requires commitments. However, the empowerment, which is one of the group activities, is an important element in teaching the group to make full utilisation of the enabling environment and reverse the poverty spiral.

A village group, composed of socially identical members, is an excellent entity to disseminate improved technology, a cost-effective entity to disseminate extension messages, and a secure entity for disbursement of loans. In fact such a group can be very powerful.

The involvement of the project in the group activities is temporary, in Bangladesh only 2 to 3 years. After that, intention is that the groups shall be an integral part of the existing Village Livestock Groups (VLGs) and the beneficiaries should have the capability to utilise the enabling environment and take loans to start other income generating activities.

Capacity building

In the inception phase it is important to have a vision of the end-of-project situation: with the one eye to see the project in a bird-eye perspective, while simultaneously with the other eye to see the poor from a grass roots perspective.

All stakeholders shall be involved in the pilot phase and the implementing set-up shall be a mirror of the organisation to be responsible for the wider application of the concept.

Human resource development is often the most important activities in the pilot phase as well as in the dissemination phase.

Bangladesh is fortunate in having NGOs with a capacity and a capability to implement poverty alleviation programmes in a larger scale. In most other countries this capacity building needs to be a component in the programme. In this respect it is important from the very beginning to have a strategy for transition of the implementing organisation into a sustainable organisation independent of donor support.

Tentatively, the strategy in Malawi is to build up an implementing organisation based on area offices to be responsible for all the village-level activities. A strategy for transition of these area offices into a sustainable organisation is not yet in place, but one solution could be that the beneficiaries are integrated in the Village Livestock Group (VLG). Thereafter the VLGs can organise themselves into an association, which in turn can take over the activities performed from the area offices.

The preliminary strategies for capacity buildings are:

1. to facilitate the institutional set up for implementing the Malawi smallholder poultry model;
2. to institutionalise the implementing organisation;
3. to build in a transition mechanism in which development in a specific area is continued after phasing out of the donor support;
4. to establish the framework for human resource development in which the curriculum is tailored to specific assignments;
5. to support training and education for staff and beneficiaries in the project period;
6. to facilitate integration of research and education institutions in development and in implementation of the project.

Implementing organisation

The implementing organisation is not yet established and the following outlines have to be considered as preliminary and subjected to discussion.

In the pilot phase, and probably in the first phase of the Sector Programme Support (SPS), the implementing organisation will be a project organisation with Department of Animal Health and Industries (DAHI) as the responsible agency and with Danida Agricultural Sector Programme Support (DASPS) as the implementing organisation.

In Bangladesh, the Department of Livestock Services is the executing agency and selected NGOs are responsible for the implementation of the programme. The same NGO structure is not available in Malawi. Consequently, the project shall have a build-in mechanism to establish a sustainable structure for wider application of the Malawi smallholder poultry model. One possibility is that all, or some, of the stakeholders with a “business” interest in dissemination of the model (credit, supply and marketing, NGOs with the very poor as the target group) form an NGO to be responsible for the implementation.

Opportunities

The main opportunity is development of an effective tool in poverty alleviation. In Bangladesh, 200,000 new households are established every year for a donor support of less than 100 US \$ per household, not given to the beneficiaries, but used to capacity building and human resource development. Impact surveys show that just two year after the programme is implemented, the number of beneficiaries living below the poverty line is reduced from more than 80% to below 50%.

However, other groups than the direct target group also benefit from the programme:

1. the enabling environment gives all the villages access to farm input supplies and services;
2. the concept paved the road for disbursement of micro-credits in a cost-effective way;
3. the village groups will easier facilitate formation of associations through VLGs;
4. the concept paved the road 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 etc.

Specific opportunities

Supplies: The project will establish outlets for supplies, such as feed, vaccine and medicine, at village level. As illustrated in figure 5 the demand for these commodities will be more than enough to justify a commercial supply and distribution networks when 1,000 villages are involved in the model.

Marketing: It is expected that with full-scale production about 50% of the produced eggs and chickens be marketed inside the village. This leaves a substantial amount of these commodities to be market outside the villages as illustrated in figure 5.

Credit: In each village encompassed in the programme, the beneficiaries will be organised in a group suitable for disbursement of micro-credit.

Poverty alleviation: The beneficiary groups are also a unique entity for NGOs who have poverty alleviation as objective. It can be the same activities as encompassed in the poultry model or it can be complementary activities in the empowerment programme.

Closing remarks

Quote from the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in Shaping the 21st century: "Development assistance is more about supporting good institutions and policies than providing capital. Money is important, of course, but effective aid should bring a package of finance and ideas - and one of the keys is finding the right combination of the two to address different situations and problems"

Figures

Explanatory text

1. The target is to integrate the poorest segment into the village community and thereby enhance the numbers of villagers contributing to the development of the village.
2. Experiences from Bangladesh clearly show that the village activity level is increased after empowerment of the poorer segment and establishing the enabling environment.

Figure 1. Integration of the target group into the village community

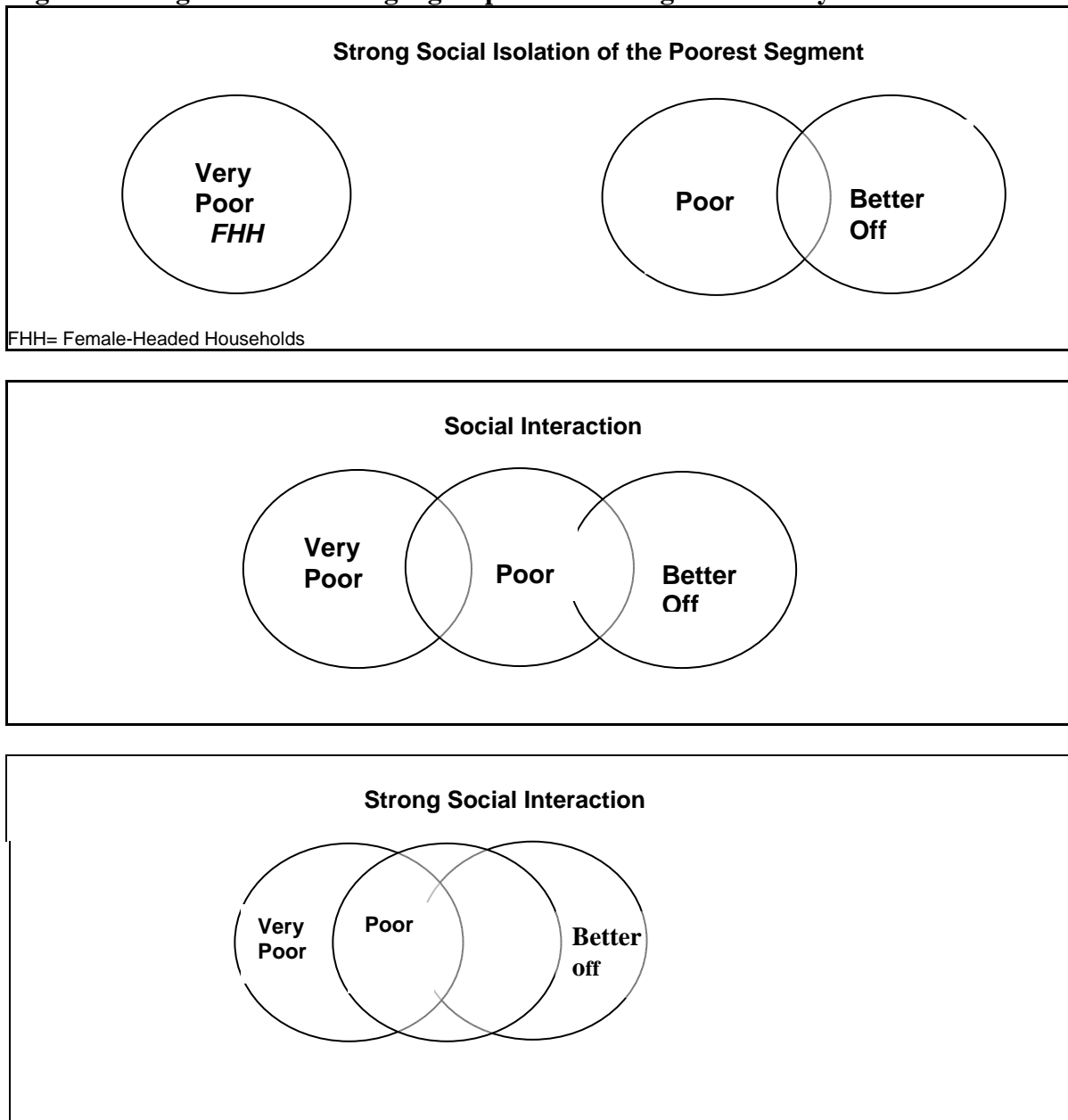


Figure 2 Visions and Opportunities seen from the village

Poorest segment

Poor and Better off

