

Random Thoughts

Livestock Rearing for Poverty Reduction

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Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) latest report, *The State of Food and Agriculture (FAO 2009)*, has so far gone largely unnoticed even though it has come out at a crucial point in time. *Jacques Diouf*, Director General FAO, has himself aptly pointed out that the world is currently going through a financial turbulence which has led to a serious setback. However, he also very forcefully reminds everyone, this financial turbulence '*must not be allowed to mask the global food crisis that has shaken the international agricultural economy*', underscoring the 'fragility of the global agricultural system'. This 'global food crisis' has thrown spanners in the calculations of India's very own efforts to reach out to a GDP growth rate of 9 per cent, as the agriculture sector's performance continues to be below par, quarter after quarter. The instability of the global agricultural system has very serious implications for India and we can ill afford not to examine seriously various aspects of food and agriculture sector, as thrown up by this FAO report.

Bringing Livestock sector Centre stage

One major departure which was made soon after separation of Uttarakhand from Uttar Pradesh was to recognize the centrality of forest in our developmental thinking, especially not looking at Forests as a constraining factor and leverage the possibilities it offered for accelerating our economic development in the rural areas. Many a initiatives undertaken and creation of many a

institutions post-2000 have their roots in this major re-think. What I wish to particularly highlight in this column is the fact that the policy-planners have not been able to hitherto appreciate the need to pay a far more greater attention to the Livestock sector, when it comes to addressing the issue of disturbingly high rural poverty levels in this state. Even though new institutions like the Livestock Development Board and the Sheep & Wool Development Board were constituted and a highly successful and innovative project, the Rural Poultry project (Kuroiler, Pantnagar), provided succour to hundreds of poverty stricken families courtesy our Watershed and IFAD projects, the hard fact remains that the rationale for undertaking these initiatives certainly was not this realization. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding the success stories, the Livestock sector continues to remain in the periphery of the attention of policy planners. The FAO report makes out a very cogent case for paying immediate attention to re-inventing and re-energizing the Livestock sector, even over Horticulture and other allied sectors.

Key to poverty reduction strategy ?

Uttarakhand has 6.21 lakh rural families (comprising 47.42 percent of total rural families) which fall under BPL category. Needless to mention that these BPL families belong to either landless or small and marginal farmers (constituting 89 percent of all land-holders). The average size of landholding in the state is 0.95 ha as against the national average of 1.57 ha. Any strategy for rural poverty alleviation logically has to first address those rural families which are assets-less i.e. the land-less and the small and marginal land-holders.

The FAO report highlights three over-arching messages which deserve careful attention of all policy planners and development functionaries (*Livestock rearing-key to poverty reduction strategies; Gavin Wall, The Hindu, March 10*). Firstly, it points out that although livestock products make important contributions

to food security and poverty reduction for many low-income families, the policy and institutional framework in many countries have failed to serve the needs of these poorest households and to get them onto 'the conveyor belt of development'.

A lack of public services in animal health that reach out to the poorest in rural areas and a failure to link small holder livestock-keepers to better paying markets have been cited as two major examples of common failure. A careful examination of the rationale of establishment of the Uttarakhand Livestock Board would reveal that while it certainly is a qualitative improvement over the artificial insemination services inherited from UP days it still fails to qualify to be called reaching out to the poorest in the rural areas. The linkage of small holder livestock keepers to better paying markets is what Dr Kurien's Amul pattern of co-operative dairying precisely succeeded in achieving and considering that the UP Hills successfully replicated the Amul pattern of cooperative dairying (Aanchal, earlier Parag of PCDF) without being part of Operation Flood (World Bank) is indeed quite remarkable. However, its relatively modest achievements in non-Turai regions remains something which even NDDDB failed to address. The two initiatives are again examples of support to intensive and commercial livestock rearing, both in the provision of services and in facilitating access to markets. In the rural poultry (Kuroiler) project design the lack of provision of services is not only in-built but also stated to be its strength over the Venkatesh model, and its market is expected to be its immediate neighbourhood (including the rearing poor family).

Pastoralists : Victims and Contributors

Any forest-centric development strategy has to necessarily closely look both at (a) the factors which contribute to degradation of natural resources, and (b) the best practices incorporating community management and sustainable use of natural resources

which have also supported and sustained small holder livestock rearing. Livestock producers, including traditional pastoralists forced to practice transhumance in a mountain region like Uttarakhand e.g. the tribal communities like the Bhotias, Jads and other Khas communities in the central Himalayas, become victims of natural resource degradation as well as contributors to it, in one go. One major fall out of the strict implementation of the celebrated Gowdaburman case of December 1996 and related orders issued by the Central Empowered Committee, notifications of new Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Parks and Biosphere Reserves (Protected Areas) has only manifested itself in increased restrictions on seasonal movements of flocks, harassment by the villagers of their traditional camping grounds, primarily thanks to the phenomenon of increasing population and inexorable opening up of hitherto closed recesses of Higher Himalayas. Considerable reduction in the number of ruminant flocks, especially the wool-bearing sheep has been noticed during the past two decades, forcing the poorest sections of hill herdsman into destitution and unemployment.

Corrective actions, both at the Central and States' level, as policy interventions or programmatic supports, are few in numbers and sluggish in their implementation. Weak instrumentalities, institutional as well as financial incentives, are either nearly absent or overlooked due to inherent insensitivities. The on-going turf-war existing between the Ministries of Tribal Affairs and Environment and Forests on *The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006*, poor co-ordination at the field level between social welfare, rural development and panchayati raj departments on the one hand and forest department and revenue departments, on the other, have seen hardly any tangible benefits accruing to the forest dependent populations.

Studies have shown that the ambiguity around the definition of the term 'forest' has facilitated easy transition of the boundaries and uses of forests to non-forest categories. Despite the recommendations of an official committee (2005) an uncertainty characterizes practice on valuation of forests, as well as the legal and institutional framework for forest governance and these ambiguities give precedence to the interest of the industries over the interest of the communities and environment (*The Strange Valuation of Forests in India; EPW, Vol XLV No 9, Feb 27, 2010*). The poorest section, affected the worst, does not even get to know of all these changes as he is no where in the picture, being either mobile with his flocks or too poor even to care. No wonder Uttarakhand has lost more than one lakh sheep during the past one decade and the wool-based sectors, shepherds, handicrafts and tribal weavers are down and out. Sheep and Wool Board constituted to address some of these issues remains bogged down with man-power, resources issues and indifferent attention of the powers that be. Jhum-cultivation practice in the North Indian states deserve an early resolution which will have to be a 'mix of public goods related to environmental protection, ecosystem services and incentive for private investment to improve animal productivity'. First and foremost it assumes a harmonious reconciliation between the Ministries looking after the interests of the tribals / indigenous people and environmental priorities respectively.

The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) and the guidelines for the use of its over-accumulated funds - use must factor-in the distress and destitution caused to the poorest, as is contemplated in the case of Environment Management Plans (EMPs) for the 'project affected families'. The concept of 'projected affected families', does not necessarily take care of the pastoralists and the poor herdsmen, who have no spokesman for them (being non-sedentary) and who get equally, if not more, affected by the construction of the hydro-electric power projects on the mountain-rivers. These hydro-

electric projects, their EMPs, by-pass such poor communities and thus aggravate poverty levels of the mountain regions.

Poor Animal Health Services :

The third important overarching message highlighted by the FAO report under review concerns a near criminal neglect of animal health systems in a majority of countries, India and Uttarakhand being no exceptions. The animal health services, as rightly pointed out, ‘not only combat animal diseases that cause mortality and reduce animal productivity, they also protect human health because of the risk of animal to human disease transmission’. Thanks to the health –risks engendered by the ‘Swine-flu’ and the pandemic threat caused by the ‘Avian-flu’ during the recent past the universal importance of improving the animal health regime has been realized but even this realization has failed to translate itself into some tangible and effective improvement in the situation.

Nearer home, the resistance of private colonization interest resulting in shifting of the Rural Poultry project (Kuroiler) from SIRD Rudrapur to the Pantnagar University premises, resulting in some avoidable delays and avoidable public expenditure, and non-establishment of mandatory ‘quarantine’ mechanism at the Lipulekh pass in the Byans valley resulting in poor herdsmen and tribal traders staring helplessly at a financially ruinous inaction, are cases in point. Not only the state animal health system did not have the competence or capacity to address these two small stand-alone-situations the most unfortunate part was that even at the highest policy level there wasn’t the faintest of evidence towards the acknowledgement of the irreparable losses suffered by the poor.

In any strategy devised to address poverty alleviation via the livestock route, say for example like the rural poultry (Kuroiler) project in Uttarakhand, what has to be additionally factored in is the fact that *‘the poor face different risks and thus have different*

incentives and capacities to respond than do the intensive commercial farmers'. In other words, the animal health service providers in responding to the specific needs of the poor livestock-rearers will have to shoulder the additional challenge of *'recognizing the difference between their stakeholders and developing mechanism to reach them all'*. The existing animal health services, in other words, woefully inadequate as they already are focused on intensive commercial farmers, are also ill equipped and ill-structured to address the animal health requirements of atomized and highly disorganized poor livestock-holders. But, does an out an out poverty alleviation poultry-design like the one devised by the Keggfarm (Kuroiler), with a near next- to- nil post –DOC- delivery costs, retain it's a low-cost/no-frills rationale or these too will have to undertake some re-think in consonance of specialized animal health service recommendations made for the poor rural poultry-men ? Certainly, a paradigm-shift seems due in restructuring and realigning the existing animal health service delivery mechanisms, perhaps both for the rural poor as well as those who are commercially better organized. Could a single new structure address both the developmental streams i.e. atomized as well as commercially organized ?

M.P.G. Kurup Recommendations :

Commenting on these three major findings Gavin Wall rightly concludes that moving forward will simply not be possible by relying on individuals alone or a single string of actions and *'progress requires attention from all actors in the social, environmental, animal health, human health and agriculture sectors; that means public, private and community organizations being actively engaged together. The livestock sector is far too important to accept anything else.'*

Any serious observer of the animal husbandry sector would immediately react and label these recommendations - a Huge Call,

which indeed it is. Where do we begin in Uttarakhand, that is the question ? The writer of this column having been long involved with the animal husbandry/dairy development sectors in UP and later in Uttarakhand would like to go back in time and revert back to the penultimate year of the Diversified Agriculture Support Project (DASP), a World Bank aided project in UP days which spilled over to the newly formed Uttaranchal in 2000-2003.

Dr. M.P.G. Kurup, who had earlier served and headed the National Dairy Development Board's (NDDDB) Animal Breeding Division, was requested to undertake a Sector Analysis of the Livestock Sector. Dr. Kurup submitted his Report in May 2003 and in the context of the task on hand there is no better way to start than to turn to the recommendations made by him. How do these recommendations appear, full seven years down the line, especially in context of a multi-disciplinary approach recommended by the FAO ?

Chapters 5 and 6, of Dr. Kurup Report, respectively covering Policy Perspective for the Livestock Sector and set of recommendations under six major heads deserve immediate and serious attention of all those who are directly or indirectly involved with poverty alleviation, not merely animal husbandry sector. The six major heads covered by Dr. Kurup consist of (i) Role of Government, (ii) Livestock Service Delivery, (iii) Grey Areas in Service Delivery, (iv) Production Support Institutions, (v) Dairy Development and (vi) Production Enhancement.

Uttarakhand Livestock Development Board :

An article in Garhwal Post is hardly the place to discuss the relevance of recommendations made by a Veterinary Consultant of the eminence of Dr. Kurup but suffice here to observe that his recommendations are woven around his core-belief that '*the rural poor need to be enabled to use livestock production as the*

instrument to enhance household income, supplement family nutrition and to protect rural livelihood systems' for which he has suggested several specific strategies. Dr. Kurup, who was the top livestock strategist of NDDDB, an institution which operationalized Operation Flood (the White Revolution), turned around the Indian rural dairy development sector making India the highest milk producer in the world by relegating the USA to the second spot, certainly deserves to be considered with all seriousness his recommendations richly deserve. What certainly needs to be mentioned here, and noticed by the readers, is the fact that Dr. Kurup's recommendations precede those now made by the FAO by more than six years, which does not come as a surprise to this writer, at least !

Finally, a belated big Thank You to Dr. Kurup from this writer, both for his pragmatic and far-sighted recommendations on re-vamping of the livestock sector of Uttarakhand, as also for his help in resurrection of the 'Kashi Goshala on-the-Panchkoshi' in Benares, which he did gratis way back in 1984, just out of his sheer love and dedication for the dairy development sector.

Uttarakhand Livestock Development Board, a major innovation in itself, must also be enabled to evolve as a fully autonomous body, responsible for livestock development 'across all species' (*with the solitary exception of the Uttarakhand Sheep and Wool Development Board, for the sheep and wool sector, in view of its specific requirements and linkages*) if it is to be used as the main instrument to execute the mission of 'livestock rearing for poverty reduction in Uttarakhand.'

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