

NGOs role in livestock improvement - A case of ANTHRA

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ANTHRA is an organization based in India, working towards the development of livelihoods of marginalised communities including pastoralists, dalits and tribal groups. ANTHRA's approach for improving the livelihoods of the farming communities dependant largely on livestock rearing, is being discussed.

The various activities and interventions carried out by ANTHRA are largely community led action research projects. While working with diverse livestock rearing and farming communities, problems are defined, different strategies and approaches are identified and implemented and the experiences are documented which serves as an input for enriching the organisation's activities, strategies and policies. The various interventions carried out by ANTHRA are:

1. Strengthening rural veterinary health care delivery systems through training of Animal Health Workers

In most parts of India, veterinary services are very poor. There is an estimated one veterinarian per 7000 animals. The services are concentrated in the urban and more affluent parts of the country. To make veterinary services available in rural areas, especially, in the more remote and inaccessible parts of the country, it has been necessary to look for alternatives. Local healers and trained Animal Health Workers (AHW) do provide an important interface between rural communities and formal veterinary care systems. Healers and AHWs do provide primary health services and valuable preventive solutions such as deworming and vaccinators. They act as change agents by educating and training rural communities on improved health and management practices.

Healers and Animal Health Workers from the local communities are trained in the use of different systems of medicines. As women are the primary caretakers of the livestock in many households, a large number of women have been trained. These Animal Health Workers have been responsible in bringing down the mortality and morbidity rates of livestock in their villages. In addition, they have formed state level networks

through which they are able to deal with varied issues related to resources, finances, medicines etc

2. Community efforts in conserving livestock diversity.

Most poor rural communities are dependent on local species of livestock. However, government programmes in the past have given scant attention to these breeds. Programmes for preserving the gene pools of the traditional breeds like *Kanchu Mekha* (dwarf variety of goat), *Dangi* breed of cattle and, *Decanni* sheep, are being taken up by the local communities. For instance, conservation of the *Aseel* breed of poultry is being carried out in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, along with Girijan Deepika, a tribal people's group and Yakshi, a resource group.

3. Community biodiversity parks: herbal and fodder nurseries

A number of small bio diversity parks and nurseries have been initiated by involving local communities. Here, local varieties of medicinal, fodder and food crops and local breeds of livestock are being grown and reared, thus promoting preservation.

4. Production of low cost herbal medicines

Healers and health workers affiliated to ANTHRA, produce traditional remedies and market them to rural communities in a ready to use form at affordable prices. To prevent over exploitation of medicinal species on common lands, some of these medicinal plants are raised and harvested from ANTHRA's nurseries.

5. Documentation and dissemination

ANTHRA adopts different methods to reach out to a larger group of farmers. Newsletters and journals are brought out regularly in local Indian languages. Books, posters and other educational materials are also being published in different Indian languages on various aspects pertaining to livestock health management as well as Natural Resource Management. ANTHRA has documented details of over 300 traditional species used as fodder.

In one of its projects, the documentation, validation and dissemination of traditional livestock rearing practices has

been done by bare foot field researchers trained by ANTHRA. This has ensured local communities involvement and participation in the process. As a part of the project, ANTHRA has documented over 700 different traditional remedies used for treating approximately 70 different conditions affecting domestic farm animals and 14 conditions affecting poultry. Extensive directories of the plants and their properties, herbaria and directories of well-known local traditional healers of livestock have been created. The information is shared with the communities in the form of books, newsletters, and other educational materials.

Village outreach programmes are important means of spreading information. Village yatras (campaigns) are held every year in different villages. The topics include livestock health and productivity, natural resource management, social issues and human health. Stalls are also set up at prominent Animal Bazaars. These have become extremely popular among the farmers from different villages. The Animal Health Workers also visit different villages and hold meetings and training programmes and extend their knowledge to other farmers with the help of educational materials designed and produced by the organisation.

6. Policy, research and advocacy

Livelihoods of livestock farmers are greatly affected by the policies at the State, Central and global levels. ANTHRA attempts to analyze different policy documents and analyse their implications on livestock rearing, especially those practiced by poor rural households.

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