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Village livestock promoters: effective, sustainable and scalable supporter for small-scale dairy producers in Nepal?

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Abstract

In Nepal, as in many developing countries, small-scale dairy production has been growing strongly as incomes rise and diets become more diverse. Yet the productivity of dairy production has remained low and its potential for livelihood improvements unfulfilled. The traditional extension system, never very strong on livestock production, has been receiving ever less funding, while the private sector provision of services and inputs has increased greatly, both in reach and diversity of products. However, promotional activities are mostly focused only on specific products and their individual benefits. Approaches for supporting farmers in their efforts to improve overall productivity and profitability of their dairy production are often missing.

The OneCGIAR initiative on Sustainable Animal Productivity for Livelihoods, Nutrition and Gender (SAPLING) is attempting to address this issue by piloting interventions to establish village-level livestock agents in several countries. In Nepal, these agents are known as “Village Livestock Promoters” (VLP) and are located in the eastern lowlands, where dairy production, mainly with buffaloes, is most important. They are linked to local dairy cooperatives and administrations, which provide them with financial support for livestock development work, such as farmer training and recording data for a national genetics database. However, for sustainability VLPs are expected to establish their own businesses, providing services and inputs to their farmers, based on extension activities such as ration balancing with ILRI’s On-Farm Feed Advisor and advice on fertility improvement is expected to increase demand.

First results documenting the process and its effects highlight the approach’s opportunities, but also emphasise the importance of ensuring active support by all stakeholders. For instance, dairy cooperatives in the study area are not always strong enough to support livestock development and some local administrators do not attach a high priority to dairy farmers. Also, careful screening of VLP candidates during their identification is essential to ensure their interests and skills are aligned with the role’s objectives. The roll-out of the VLP intervention will be staggered with a randomised assignment to training batches to enable the causal determination of the approach’s effects.

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