

## POTENTIAL OF LIVESTOCK BASED LIVELIHOOD IN “RARH” – BANKURA

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### PROBLEM

Bankura is largely a rain-fed district and rural livelihoods are primarily based on rice-cattle farming, which is widespread in West Bengal. Households who have access to land cultivate paddy as the primary crop for food, feed and also income. Rice-based cropping system is complemented by livestock sector.

For most of the households who have access to land, cattle form an essential component of farmers' strategy for draught power and to make use of crop residue such as straw for milk production and dung. In such households, livestock keeping is the secondary activity after agriculture. For landless households, wage labour is more important than livestock keeping. These households usually prefer keeping small ruminants and poultry, which provides a source of income in a situation of unemployment and provide a safety net in case of crisis. Livestock's contribution to livelihoods as a source of regular and sustainable income is still limited in the Saltora. This is due to less productive breed in terms of milk, poor access to quality feed and fodder for feeding and poor access to market.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

#### CONTRIBUTION OF LIVESTOCK TO LIVELIHOODS

- **Less than 5% of surveyed households sell milk.** The average milk production is less than 2 litres (L)/day.
- **Household that own land keep cattle mainly as a source of draught power and to a limited extent** for milk production mostly for home consumption. The interest to keep livestock for the first purpose might reduce with the intensification and mechanization of agriculture as observed among medium and large landholders in the case study sites in Saltora.
- Landowners also use livestock, especially cattle and small ruminants, **as a safety net** to cope with income losses in years of low agricultural production, unexpected crisis or to meet large expenses. Similarly, landless households sell animals during periods of unemployment. Because of the **inability to acquire improved breeds, of poor market access and low quality feed farmers are not able to derive regular income from livestock keeping. This discourages landless households**, especially women, to develop livestock farming. It particularly threatens the fragile economy of landless and poor farmers in the district.

#### GRAZING LAND AND FOREST LAND

- Livestock farmers in the study areas in Bankura depend highly on forest and other common property resources for grazing their animals. Villagers reported a decrease in the size and quality of grazing areas in recent years. Notably, afforestation with non-fodder plant species might contribute to a decrease of availability of green feed. The latter mostly affects the poorest groups of farmers of the communities and the landless livestock keepers who do not produce dry fodder nor have enough funds to purchase dry fodder or concentrates.
- Farmers have traditional rights for the use of common-pool resources but lack awareness and means for their maintenance and sustainable management, This has resulted partly from a poor communication between state and community governance structures and among communities. This situation is leading to a slow degradation of these resources
- The only source of dry fodder is rice straw, which when used solely as animal feed might lead to nutritional deficiencies. **There is an acute shortage of good quality green fodder.** Its cultivation on private land is restricted by poor access to water and small land holdings. This is a major constraint in supporting farmers' livelihoods in rain-fed crop-livestock systems.

## BREED AND VETERINARY SERVICES

- Species preference is determined by farmers' economic condition. Indigenous low productive breed and small ruminants are preferred by landless and small landholding households due to low initial investment and low cost of maintenance. Therefore, poor livestock owners practice indiscriminate breeding. **Breed improvement is hindered by the lack of access to good quality bulls** and, as a result, quality-breeding attempts have not met their expectations. **Awareness on Artificial Insemination is negligible among the landless and small land holding farmers.**
- A majority of farmers reported to have **difficulties to access government veterinary services** due to a lack of proximity of public veterinary hospitals. Private services are difficult to afford for a majority of farmers.

## INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- **Limited access to formal credit facilities** among landless, small and medium landholders discourages farmers to invest in improved breeds. The demands and potential for value added services such as livestock insurance against death and diseases has not been fully addressed due to the poor coverage and lack of diversification of services of banking facilities.
- **Limited access to markets** for selling agricultural products and purchasing agricultural inputs is a severe obstacle to the development of crop-livestock farming systems.
- Farmers lack **access to information related to small business development and markets**, especially among women. Livestock keepers have also poor access to knowledge, information and training to improve animal husbandry practices.
- The **landless and small land holding livestock keepers** are often **not adequately represented** in local planning activities. It affects their interest and aspirations associated with livestock keeping.

## PROPOSED POLICY ACTIONS

### GRAZING LAND AND FOREST LAND

- **Promote afforestation with dual-purpose trees e.g. *Butea monosperma* (Palash), a native species, and rotational grazing** on common land and in forests.
- Develop, in partnership with local communities, **land-use options which both contribute to enhance the vegetative cover and meet fodder requirements.**
- Promote livestock activities through an **integrated approach** combining: natural resource management, productivity increase; and livelihood improvement.

### INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- **Support the effective inclusion of landless and small landholders in village planning** and implementation of development activities.
- Facilitate access to formal credit and to market. Link access to credits with other initiatives such as access to breeding, marketing, health services and insurance through Self-Help Groups.

### CAPACITY BUILDING

- Improve access to knowledge, skills and information on animal husbandry by **training village youth as para-vets.**
- **Develop farmer field schools** in villages for men and women.
- Encourage **multiple stakeholder approach** for better coordination and communication leading to a **convergence of programs, planning and actions.**

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*This publication is an output from a research project funded by the Challenge Programme for Water and Food (CPWF).*