Performance of Community-based Animal Health Workers in the Delivery of Livestock Health Services

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ABSTRACT

Since the liberalization of animal health services in Kenya in the early 1990s, community-based animal health workers (CBAHWs) have become an important alternative animal health delivery channel in the country’s marginal areas. However, professional veterinary practitioners have questioned the effectiveness of CBAHW programmes in animal health service delivery in Kenya. This is partly due to lack of information about their performance and partly because CBAHW programmes were implemented before the necessary changes in the existing legal, policy and institutional frameworks had been made. This study was designed to provide such information. In this regard, the productivity of livestock herds among farmers who utilized the services of CBAHWs was compared to that of livestock belonging to farmers who utilized the services of professional veterinarians. The annual live births per mature female (birth ratio) and the proportion of young stock to mature females (breeding index) was computed over a period of 3 years in cattle and goat herds under care of CBAHWs and professional veterinarians. The birth ratios in cattle and goats under CBAHWs were not significantly different from those under the care of professional veterinarians (p > 0.05). Furthermore, the breeding index of cattle and goats under the two categories was not statistically different. Besides the CBAHWs providing clinical services, they also created positive externalities through participatory learning enjoyed by neighbouring livestock keepers, who later dispensed with their services. Policy attention is therefore needed to enhance the participation of CBAHWs in animal health service delivery and to appropriately integrate their activities into the existing formal animal health delivery system in Kenya. Interventions that improve the professional development of these workers, with emphasis on areas pertaining to care of young stock, would not only promote the sustainability of CBAHW programmes but would also improve livestock productivity in the country’s marginal areas.

Keywords: community animal health workers, animal health service delivery, marginal areas, breeding index, birth ratio

Abbreviations: CBAHW, community-based animal health worker; CBS, Central Bureau of Statistics; NGO, non-governmental organization; KETRI, Kenya Trypanosomiasis Research Institute; IPAR, Institute of Policy Analysis and Research; IFPRI, International Food Policy and Research Institute; BI, breeding index; BR, birth ratio; KVB, Kenya Veterinary Board; VO, veterinary officer; AHA, animal health assistant; SD, standard deviation; ITDG, Intermediate Technology and Development Group
INTRODUCTION

The livestock health sector in many developing countries is currently undergoing restructuring as part of the ongoing global policy of economic liberalization. One widely publicized grass-roots initiative to improve livestock health services delivery in marginal areas of Africa has been the introduction of community-based animal health workers (CBAHWs). The primary objective of the CBAHW programme is to supplement the existing but overstretched professional animal health delivery system in marginal areas of many developing countries.

By utilizing existing traditional knowledge, the CBAHW model encourages the participation of local communities in the design and delivery of animal health care services. The CBAHW initiative also empowers the local people to determine the type of animal health services that they receive. This approach has been shown to provide a unique framework for the full privatization of animal health services in the marginal areas of Africa (De Haan and Bekure, 1991; Holden, 1997; Akabwai et al., 2000).

As a recent concept, however, the CBAHW approach has been implemented contrary to the existing legal, policy and institutional frameworks in animal health care delivery in many developing countries. Examples include experiences from Afghanistan (Leyland, 1993), Chad (Peters, 1993), Kenya (Blakeway, 1993) and Sudan (Dahir, 1993). Other are the village animal health workers in Nepal (Moktan et al., 1990), the Anyamara veterinary technicians in southern Peru (Johnson and Chahuares, 1990) and the village-based parasite control programme for swamp buffalo in Thailand (Meemerk, 1988). In implementing these community-based programmes, different approaches have been adopted in different countries, presumably to tailor the programmes to the specific needs of livestock farmers in varied environments. Although numerous terms have been used to describe these differing programmes, Hüttner and colleagues (2001) and Oakeley (2001) emphasized that most of them share similar features and goals such as: (1) selection of individuals for training by communities within which they work; (2) technical training in animal health requiring only a short period, usually less than a month; (3) low-cost strategies concentrating mainly on important livestock health and management issues of the farming community; (4) payment for services provided coming directly from clients.

Owing to their limited training and literacy, the CBAHWs have often been perceived by professional veterinarians as a threat to the provision of animal health services. As a result, there has been poor cooperation and, at times, hostile reaction from the formal veterinary service providers. This has left CBAHW programmes with little formal support and reliance mainly on structures set by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that initiated them (Sikana et al., 1992). The suspicion of CBAHWs by professionals has been further compounded by the general lack of information about their effectiveness. In many areas where these programmes have been developed, few studies have been undertaken to assess their impact. As a result, the CBAHW programmes, although crucial to livestock keepers in arid and semi-arid environments, have remained controversial components of the privatization exercise in marginal areas of Africa (Oakeley, 2001; FAO, 1997).