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How to utilise livestock to propel sustainable development

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) <u>World Livestock: Transforming the livestock sector through</u> <u>the Sustainable Development Goals</u> report, the debate around livestock production has so far been largely focused on how the sector can produce more to satisfy surging demand for animal products and feed a growing global population while at the same time reducing its environmental footprint.



Filip Bunkens via Unsplash

While that is a worthwhile objective, the report highlights the multiple contributions made by the global livestock sector - especially to the lives of millions of poor, animal-dependent small-scale producers in developing countries - but also says that changes in policies and practices are needed in order to optimise those contributions, and argues for a broader and more ambitious approach.

By realigning the livestock sector to better support the UN's 2030 sustainable development agenda, it says that a wider range of benefits can be achieved - these include improved food and nutritional security but also extend into other realms, including access to energy, gender equality, improved environmental management and spreading peace and stability.

Noting that "even the most modern post-industrial societies remain critically reliant on animals for food and nutrition security," Jose Graziano da Silva, FAO director-general said the livestock sector is of "enduring importance" and "can play a key role in improving the lives of millions" by providing food, jobs and income, resilience, and economic opportunities.

"Before all of this can happen, a number of complex interactions need to be addressed," he noted, including that "competition over land for the production of feed can constrain the availability of resources to produce food" and that "promoting a more competitive sector through higher levels of market concentration will likely hamper the capacity of smallproducers to participate in markets."

"There is also an urgent need to stop the improper use of antimicrobials in animal rearing," said Graziano da Silva, referencing the role of antibiotic use in the rise of dangerous antimicrobial resistant micro-organisms.

Meeting these challenges will require countries to look closely at their national livestock sectors and develop policies tailored to local circumstances and designed to promote equitable growth.

In particular, measures will be needed to empower smaller-scale producers to ensure they are primary actors in and beneficiaries of the livestock sector's continued growth.

Overcoming challenges

One key challenge in developing countries is that the livestock sector is highly segmented, with sharply different levels of labour productivity in processing versus production and, within production, between commercial and subsistence farmers.

Sectoral policies should, therefore, emphasise improving labour productivity of small-holders and focus on high-valueadded and labour-intensive activities in order to unlock the sector's "multiplier effect" in job generation and poverty reduction, the report says.

Additionally, rapid livestock growth does not always translate into fast poverty reduction, it warns.

It will also be necessary to acquire a better understanding of the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction, as well as of the factors that can make livestock growth do more to reduce poverty. Policies will necessarily include measures to improve access of smallholders and pastoralists to productive resources, information, technology, training, assets, and credit and to strengthen producer groups.

Trade reforms, investment and innovation will also be needed.

Policies and practices that increase the livestock sector's efficiency and reduce its environmental footprint should be vigorously pursued. For example, FAO studies have estimated that wider adoption of existing best practices and technologies in feeding, health and husbandry, and manure management — including greater use of currently underutilized technologies such as biogas generators — could help the global livestock sector cut its GHG emissions by as much as 30%.

Numbers of note

- Currently, livestock production employs at least 1.3 billion people worldwide.
- About 600 million of the world's poorest households keep livestock as an essential source of income.
- Between 2000 and 2014, global production of meat rose by 39%; milk production increased by 38%.
- Meat production is projected to increase another 19% by 2030, and milk production another 33% in the same period.

• Livestock production accounts for 40% agriculture output in developed countries and 20% of agricultural output in developing countries.

• Animals remain an important source of power. In India, for instance, two-thirds of the country's cultivated area is

ploughed using animal energy, and 14 million animal-drawn carts haul up to 15% of the country's total freight.

• The introduction of advanced genetics, feeding systems, animal health controls and other technologies over the past four decades allowed industrialised countries to reduce their overall land requirements for livestock by 20% while doubling meat production.

• Wider adoption of existing best practices and technologies in feeding, health and husbandry, and manure management - as well as greater use of improved technologies - could help the global livestock sector cut its GHG emissions by as much as 30%.

An alternative use of cow manure

Across the developing world but especially in sub- Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, rural villages and remote areas often lack direct connections to national electricity grids, locking them in poverty and underdevelopment.

But increasing numbers of countries are helping their people escape this energy trap by tapping an unexpected and previously underestimated resource: animal poop.

Poultry, pigs, sheep, cattle and other domesticated animals generate around 85% of the world's animal faecal waste.

Converting all that livestock manure into biogas offers a way to make a renewable fuel source available to more than a billion people for domestic use, giving them access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy, according to World Livestock.

The approach is already widely in use in India and China.

Between 2003 and 2013, China built 42 million small household biogas plants run on chicken and cattle manure that provide light, heating and power, as well as a number of much larger biogas power stations with a daily capacity of 18,000-60,000 kWh.

By 2003, India had already installed some 3.4 million family-size biogas reactors in various isolated parts of the country and in 2015, the number of family-size biogas plants in India was reported to be four million.

Other countries in Asia and in Africa are now exploring the use of biogas to expand household electricity production.

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