

Improving a successful model

The Livestock Breeders Co-operative Societies (LIBCOs) are playing an important element in reconstructing the livestock industry in northern Sri Lanka – and their role is likely to increase.

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Small-scale farmers in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, like elsewhere, collaborate with each other in many different ways, forming groups and working to improve their livelihoods and sustainably manage their natural resources. These groups include a total of 212 farmer organisations (FOs) in the Jaffna district alone, together with “specialised” groups like the Mushroom Producers and Sales Society, or the Seed Production Co-operative Society of Jaffna Peninsula Limited. While all groups are based on community ties and traditions, trust between members, and a set of rules and regulations, it is also possible to see some differences. The FOs are village based societies, while co-operatives cover a much larger area, and frequently focus on one commodity. Co-operatives have been set up by government departments, and receive technical support. The smaller FOs, by contrast, are the results of farmers’ initiatives and, in comparison, have weaker administrative structures.



Photo: A. Vakeesan

Livestock and LIBCOs One of the best examples of the co-operative model is seen in the eleven LIBCOs operating in the district. While all of them work independently, they collectively support farmers by handling the purchase of the necessary inputs, marketing their products, running training courses and providing loans. These efforts help explain the impressive recovery of the livestock sector after a three-decade long civil war, which now produces 11 million litres of milk, 485 tons of meat, and 35 million eggs every year.

A few strategies have proved essential, such as their decision to encourage member farmers to save part of their profits to give them the capital they need to try out new initiatives. LIBCOs also help members get bank loans, providing the necessary guarantee and helping during the process. During the distribution of livestock (mainly goats and poultry) to resettled farmers, LIBCOs train beneficiaries on low-risk health care operations, helping them to raise healthy livestock. The LIBCOs have also organised a “month old chick programme”, helping households headed by women and low-income families become part of the production and commercialisation process.

LIBCOs face several specific challenges, compared to other farmer groups. Since they do not own any land, it is difficult to build permanent infrastructure, set up model livestock farms and expand their activities. All of them lack information, and the involvement of the Department of Animal Production and Health in their training activities could be stronger. A general worry is that, in spite of the clear economic benefits, youth are not very involved in livestock rearing. Members see an urgent need to rejuvenate the sector and to involve the “future pillars” of the livestock industry in Jaffna. And LIBCOs do not have many monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

These are the difficulties that are currently being tackled as part of a process that builds on the experience of all farmers’ groups, and which will, without a doubt, lead to even better results.

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