

ASAP closing conference 13 September 2011

Since late 2006, DCA-VET has implemented the livestock part of the ASAP (Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program) in 25 provinces of Afghanistan. Funded by USAID through Chemonics, the project components included establishment and support of the network of Veterinary Field Units (VFUs), herd health extension, cashmere value chain development, and public private partnership. The project is ending on 30^t September 2011.

A final review workshop was held on 13 September 2011 in order to share the key lessons and transition strategy of the project with stakeholders. The 38 workshop participants comprised of government officials, donors, private sector and NGO partners.

Opening speeches

During the opening part of the sessions representatives of MAIL (Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock) and USAID stressed the importance of livestock development for the Afghan rural society. They depicted the system of private VFUs providing demand-driven animal health services as a success story unmatched by other development programmes. In total, there are now over 1150 VFUs all over Afghanistan. All actors were aroused to exert concerted efforts to ensure sustainability of the VFU network.

ASAP achievements

Representatives of ASAP and DCA-VET presented the main results of the ASAP livestock project. ASAP supported 450 VFUs in 25 provinces of Afghanistan. From December 2006 till now more than 30 million animals were vaccinated and almost 20 million were treated for various diseases. Total gross sales by all VFUs amounted to over 10 million US Dollar. 165 new paravets were trained and 900 extension trainings were conducted. Four extension packages (on small ruminants, large ruminants, poultry and the role of women) were developed and shared with the farmers. These extension activities of ASAP have resulted in a considerable increase in VFU activities since 2007. Vast efforts were devoted to develop a cashmere value chain. 230,000 farmers have been trained in cashmere harvesting, leading to improved income for farmers as well as VFUs.

Gender

Gender is an important topic for ASAP as well as DCA-VET. Through ASAP 10 female paravets were educated. Besides, 17 female cashmere master trainers and 440 field trainers were trained, who reached 116,000 female farmers with their messages on cashmere harvesting. By women-to-women extension programs, 8 women groups were empowered. As women play a significant role in livestock management, working on the income for women improves the livelihood of the women. And by increasing the women's capacity to pay for the veterinary services it also improves sustainability of the VFUs.

The way forward

In one of the concluding speeches, the importance of vaccination on animal health was stressed. Through the ASAP programme, the DCA-VET vaccine distribution system was privatized and transferred to the commercial entity VetServ. This ensures a reliable support of quality vaccines to the VFUs independent of donor and NGO support.

In the other speech on the future of veterinary services in Afghanistan, three important keys of the way forward were depicted:

- Go out in the fields and enquire the farmers about their needs
- Create enough earning capacity for the VFUs
- Develop and maintain a reliable public-private partnership

Closing the conference, Dr Jorgen Hansen, Senior Advisor to MAIL, summarized his personal experiences: *“Looking back, six years ago when I came to Afghanistan, there were lots of challenges and resistance to the privatization process of the sector. Today, we can confidently say that the foundation is established in a better way than any developing country in the world. We are now in a time where private veterinary field units are the sole providers of veterinary services all over the country.”* Looking ahead there is still a long journey remaining, but the way forward is paved with several promising initiatives.

Published 26 September 2011