

The global poverty reduction agenda: What are the implications for animal health research and development?

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It is generally recognised that poverty is the greatest constraint to global harmony and the well being of the peoples of the world. Poverty is a problem of extraordinary proportion, with almost half of the world's 6 billion people living on less than US\$ 2 per day. But this is not a static situation, and during the next 25 years, the human population is predicted to grow by a further 2 billion, 97% of which will be in the countries of the developing world. These are dramatic figures. And it is these figures and trends that were behind the creation of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), centred on reducing the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half between 1990 and 2015. An ambitious target indeed.

So where do livestock and their diseases fit into this picture, and how can improved animal health contribute to our meeting the MDG targets? It has been estimated that livestock form a component of the livelihoods of 70% of the world's poor. Livestock are important in supporting the livelihoods not only of poor farmers, but also of consumers, traders and labourers throughout the developing world, and of the national economies of many developing countries through international trading in their livestock products. Growing markets, both domestic and international, can provide a poverty reduction mechanism, particularly for poor farmers. However animal diseases, or the threat of them, are an every day occurrence to these groups of people.

While exposed to a wide array of risks related to animal disease, many developing countries, and the poor livestock keepers in them, often have a reduced capacity to cope. Those existing close to the survival threshold tend to be more risk averse, and so less likely to "take a chance" on preventive disease technologies. More importantly, low income and few assets mean that the poor have few options available for managing crises, are less resilient to shocks and are slower to recover. Livestock diseases are particularly damaging since they threaten one of the few assets that the poor keep on hand for dealing with other shocks.

This presentation will review our understanding of the distribution and dynamics of poverty, the diverse roles of livestock to poor countries and the poorer sectors of society in them, and the diverse impacts of animal diseases and of interventions to control them. The presentation will discuss the merits of prioritisation of animal health constraints for optimal impact on poverty reduction, and the increasingly complex impact assessment methodologies that contribute to such evaluations. In discussing these issues, the presentation will pay particular attention to the combined roles of veterinary epidemiology and agricultural economics in fostering greater understanding of the impacts of diseases and their control on poverty.

Teasing out priorities is one thing, and this in itself is an evolving and somewhat controversial science, but acting on them is quite another. How well are veterinarians and others in the animal health arena responding to these continental and global challenges, and how do their efforts fit in with the other growing and diversifying challenges and opportunities for the veterinary profession?