

# Introduction

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This practical learning guide is about supporting livestock within the smallholder mixed farming systems around the world. It provides practical ways to understand and improve smallholder animal husbandry under a variety of agricultural and ecological conditions – based on the Endogenous Livestock Development (ELD) approach. *Agriculture* and *culture* are two systems that must work together for the benefit of men and women in rural and urban communities.

The title of this book could be *livestock in a fast changing world*. An estimated 70% of the world's rural as well as urban poor rely on livestock for their livelihoods. Two-thirds of all livestock are found in developing countries, while even developed countries find rural and urban poor livestock keepers with similar needs. Most smallholder farmers under these circumstances practise multi-purpose, low-input methods of livestock keeping.

All livestock and crop farmers today – especially those living in marginalized areas – are faced with rapidly changing socio-economic and ecological conditions. These include unexpected and recurring droughts, floods, extremes of temperature and other effects of climate change. Social changes overlie these environmental impacts because of out-migration of youth, larger production units owned by larger corporate units displacing the small farmer, land grabbing: all of this while there is a trend for improved markets for livestock products and by-products because of growing urban populations.

The writers of this training manual acknowledge that improving animal health and husbandry by rural and urban smallholder livestock keepers is not easily accomplished. All too often the multiple needs of the farmers are often not understood by donors and support providers, traditional practices are too often ignored and the right approaches to training are not taken. Farmers often return from training with new knowledge that does not fit their reality, or do not have the means to put the practices in place. It is commonly found that short courses and demonstration farms are not the total answer and often do not result in lasting change in animal health and production.

Thus, practitioners who provide training need to take a pause in order to see animal rearing through the eyes of the men and women farmers. Training in basic animal husbandry skills must start with that perspective and take into consideration the type of inputs as well as the (traditional) practices and innovations of those who rear the animals. Improved sustainable livestock management is much more than simply crossbreeding animals, providing feed and building shelters for the sake of increasing productivity.

*Sustainable Livestock Management for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security* is primarily written for livestock development practitioners working with limited-resource male and female livestock keepers: livestock development practitioners, animal health and husbandry trainers, extension workers, students in international agriculture and veterinary programmes, community animal health workers and veterinarians. It can be used in rural and urban small group settings and in the formal classroom.

The reader will recognize the two most common types of livestock keeping amongst smallholder families: (i) low-input and diversified livestock keeping; and (ii) more specialized smallholder livestock keeping. The understanding of the role, potential and limitations of each of these livestock keeping systems leads to different but complementary recommendations for supporting them.

The first part of the book (Chapters 1–5) provides a general overview of livestock development and smallholder livestock keeping of the rural (and urban) poor. In Chapter 1, the major trends in the livestock sector as a whole are presented. In Chapter 2, the various livestock development approaches are highlighted, explaining the most common causes of failure in livestock development projects and the potential of three relatively untapped sources of knowledge. In Chapter 3, the ELD approach is presented, highlighting the methodologies, organizations and networks that operate according to these principles. In Chapter 4, a differentiation between the four livestock production systems is highlighted, with smallholder farming and pastoralism the main livestock keeping strategies relevant to the urban and rural poor. In Chapter 5, the key elements of the smallholder livestock keeping systems, and the relevance to poverty alleviation and food security are presented.

In the second part of the book (Chapters 6–10) the two major types of smallholder livestock keeping systems are presented. The characteristics of smallholder low-input and diversified livestock keeping is described in Chapter 6. The characteristics of smallholder with more specialized livestock keeping in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 highlights the challenges and experiences in changing from smallholder low-input and diversified livestock keeping to more specialized livestock keeping. Chapters 9 and 10 present the complementary recommendations for supporting smallholder low-input and diversified (g) and more specialized (lo) livestock keeping.

Chapter 11 of the book is dedicated to experiences of finding pathways to markets, which can enhance smallholder livestock keeping systems. Chapter 12 presents a number of field-based cases of challenges and effective support to livestock keepers. Finally, in the Appendix an over-view of the recommendations in Chapters 9, 10 and 11 is presented.

We hope this practical learning manual will further enhance the effective support to smallholder livestock keepers. With adequate attention to the complex roles of animals within the smallholder systems, they can become an even more vital part of the family farm and provide positive benefits to farm resources. In turn, sustainable livestock production systems can protect the local environment while providing smallholder families with food, income and general well-being.

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