



Improving policy awareness among Bangladesh's poultry farmers

Poor compliance with regulations on farms raises disease threats and damages livelihoods. This brief offers evidence-backed ways to strengthen policy implementation to benefit birds and people.



Background

In Bangladesh, the livestock sector contributes 1.9% to the gross domestic product of the national economy, and poultry meat accounts for 37% of all meat eaten. Bangladesh is Asia's fastest-urbanising country and poultry production has seen rapid intensification, changes which have been accompanied by the development of policies for intensive¹ poultry farming (specifically chicken and duck), slaughtering and trading. These policies have been designed to provide instructions and guidelines to a range of people involved in poultry production, including men and women farmers, traders, feed dealers and animal health experts, to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development of the poultry sector. However, many stakeholders have little awareness of the policies, and of those who have some awareness many are not following them.

Mismatches between policies and their feasibility for implementation are contributing to non-compliance, creating inefficiencies and increasing the risk of disease outbreaks. These factors impact food safety, and lead to risks to human health. They also impact farmers' economic viability. Many older policies are no longer relevant and new challenges from intensification are resulting in few or no health benefits for people or birds or other positive impacts. Moreover, governance and monitoring of small-to medium-scale farms is weak, making it more difficult to apply policies at a local level. As a result, it is important to explore potential ways to improve knowledge of, and compliance with, policies among public and private livestock professionals and farmers.

Recommendations

- Improve collaboration between the Department of Livestock Services (DLS), private companies and **mass media** to raise policy knowledge levels and reach remote men and women farmers.
- Target farmers with easy-to-understand **communication tools** about safe and government-approved poultry farming practices.
- Incentivise farmers by offering **benefits** in return for policy compliance.
- Establish and reward **model farmers**.
- Clarify where **responsibility** lies in policy awareness activities and in policy implementation.
- Increase **collaboration** between public and private sectors to improve policy awareness and compliance.

Learning from research and a roundtable



This brief is based on field research and a high-level roundtable on stakeholder policy awareness and potential collaboration between public and private poultry sectors in Bangladesh.

Building stakeholder awareness

The poultry industry comprises men (mostly) and women farmers, feed dealers, middlemen, veterinarians (public and private) and personnel from feed, breeding and drug companies. Policy awareness among stakeholders varies, with little awareness among farmers, some awareness among feed dealers and fuller but still incomplete knowledge among veterinarians. Difficulties completing the farm registration process² contribute to farmers' reluctance to engage with government and comply with policies.

Roundtable participants agreed that government officers working in the field have a key role in raising farmer awareness of the benefits of understanding and abiding by the rules. They also recommended that veterinarians and dealers be taught about relevant policies (e.g., Animal Disease Act, Animal Feed Act and antimicrobial use guidelines) as these stakeholders are best placed to pass the information on to farmers. They suggested increasing awareness by: securing the help of local politicians to reach small-scale farmers; running media campaigns, e.g., TV public service announcements; developing mobile apps; working with private-sector vets; and establishing a dedicated body to run awareness programmes—monitoring, evaluating and learning from resulting policy implementation.

Good communication between local and central levels was agreed to be essential so that the Department of Livestock Services (DLS) can be responsive. Currently, there is a lack of communication between rural/grassroots-level farmers and the DLS which needs to be overcome and trusting communication channels established.

Supporting policy implementation

It is critical that government officers have tools to support policy implementation and facilitate policy compliance. Roundtable participants proposed: introducing policy standards comprising rules to support and conform to a policy; and developing policy guidelines, based on DLS policies, laws and regulations. Guidelines should focus on only key points for each policy to avoid confusion or message overload, and they should be distributed by DLS to farmers. Participants also proposed communication materials, such as leaflets and posters, and social media posts.

Encouraging farmers

In Bangladesh, farmers tend to seek financial and other support, such as free veterinary services, medicines and vaccines, from government. They are often more responsive when direct benefits (rather than indirect ones) are offered. Incentives to encourage poultry farmer compliance could include, for example, free vaccines and diagnostic tests and health care services if DLS has sufficient funds to achieve good coverage.

Supporting model farmers so neighbouring farmers can see the economic benefits of following guidelines could encourage policy compliance, and is more likely to succeed than a sole focus on punishment. Government could support the establishment of special retail shops that sell the products of model farmers, including eggs, milk and meat, enabling them to get good prices while also encouraging them to pursue safe farming. There may be scope for local politician involvement with this approach.

Further information

The GCRF One Health Poultry Hub is an impact-driven research and development programme working to help meet Asia's growing demand for chicken meat and eggs while minimising risk to local and global public health. The research and roundtable informing this briefing took place between January 2022 and March 2023.

Work for a thesis, 'An assessment of poultry policies and guidelines and stakeholder practices: Expectations vs realities', was conducted as part of policy studies for the One Health Poultry Hub in Bangladesh by Dr Syeda Munira Dilshad under the supervision of Professor Md. Ahasanul Hoque, Professor Robyn Alders and Dr Ivo Syndicus. Forty-two farmers and seven upazila livestock officers were interviewed in seven upazilas of Chattogram. A roundtable meeting was held on 5 March 2023.

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Footnotes:

1. A system where birds are kept inside a poultry house and where feed, water and medicine are provided.

2. The Animal Disease Act-2005, states that people undertaking commercial farming (flock size >1,000 birds) must apply for registration to the DLS.