



How private and public sector poultry veterinarians can work better together

This brief offers evidence-backed ways to overcome gaps in operation between government and private-sector poultry veterinarians in Bangladesh to benefit poultry health and farmer livelihoods.



Background

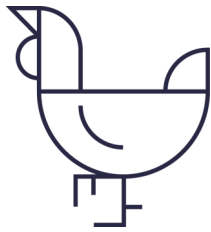
In Bangladesh, both public and private sectors support the poultry industry and collaboration between the two has been discernible since 1960¹. In relation to poultry health and production, national veterinary services are described in the National Poultry Development Policy 2008, while private veterinary services are frequently linked to large poultry companies and provide support to company owned and managed farms, as well as credit and contract farms.

Today's poultry industry in Bangladesh has been shaped by the separate contributions of the public and private sectors, but limited coordination of activities (e.g., feed and chick supply, veterinary care provision, ready-birds selling and food safety of processed chicken products) between the two has created discrepancies across the poultry production and distribution network (PDN). However, collaboration between the sectors is important if the government is to ensure the provision of quality poultry health and production services across all production systems. This brief is based on high-level roundtable discussions on the status of collaboration between the public and private sectors in the poultry sector.

Recommendations

- Instigate public-private **partnerships** with the Government of Bangladesh, World Poultry Science Association, Bangladesh Branch, and Bangladesh Poultry Industries Central Council leading the way.
- Build a **register** of private veterinarians across the regions of Bangladesh.
- Ensure legal veterinary provision through **field-level** collaborations.
- Nurture trust and develop a platform to facilitate **data-sharing**, including on disease outbreaks.
- Agree a poultry disease **restitution scheme** for chicken farmers.
- All partners to generate a farmer **training** module.

Veterinarians in Bangladesh's poultry sector today



Currently chicken farmers usually obtain veterinary services from private veterinarians rather than via government service. However, private sector veterinarians are not available to all poultry farmers as company veterinarians usually provide clinical services only to those farmers who have links with their employer companies, i.e., those companies that supply poultry feeds and day-old chicks. At the same time, due to heavy administrative workloads, government veterinarians cannot provide an optimum service to chicken farmers.

In relation to farm-level data collection, both public and private sectors should have an active role. Government veterinarians can collect and report data on notifiable poultry diseases both manually and using the Bangladesh Animal Health Intelligence System software available at upazila veterinary hospitals. Government veterinarians do not usually collect farm-level data on the incidence of disease in chicken flocks. In the field, private veterinarians from feed and chick producing companies are assigned to collecting farm-level data regularly, and this is reported to the relevant company. Hence, while data collection activities are occurring to some extent, both private and public sectors lack coordinated, sensitive surveillance activities.

Additionally, the need for training provision for farmers on farm-level disease management and data record systems bear importance.

The roundtable participants discussed current roles of veterinarians in both public and private sectors, including potential ways to collaborate.

A way forward

Collaborative interventions

The aforementioned gaps in veterinary provision require a comprehensive synergistic response. Participants mentioned that some associations, for example the World Poultry Science Association, Bangladesh Branch (WPSA-BB), and the Bangladesh Poultry Industries Central Council (BPICC), are working to bridge different poultry related associations with the government regulatory bodies and other stakeholders.

However, more collaborative interventions are required at the field level to overcome problems associated with

the lack of poultry health and production services. Participants suggested standard operating procedures (SOPs) and guidelines, with explanations of the duties of private veterinarians and creating a connection with government tasks, should be developed by the government in collaboration with the private sector and shared with private-sector veterinarians.

Registration and rewards

A more collaborative approach between government and private veterinarians can help to reduce the lack of veterinary provision at field level. To this end, participants suggested that the government could consider setting up a district-level registration system for private veterinarians engaged in veterinary care for poultry, allowing government veterinarians to send cases to private veterinarians if they become too busy with their administrative tasks. Such an initiative would likely help to reduce the number of poultry health service providers without formal training.

The government could implement a reward system for private veterinarians to encourage collaboration with government counterparts, involving both individual and company participation. Together these efforts could lead to improved veterinary care (including laboratory diagnostic facilities) and support other vital poultry industry functions such as data exchange, surveillance activities, and long-term training for commercial chicken farmers.

Data storage

This intersectoral approach could support the development of a structured data recording system, including a common data storage platform by creating an effective network for transferring information on disease outbreaks from the field level to the central epidemiology unit of the government (including for the identification of potential zoonoses, i.e., diseases that can be transferred from animals to people).

Trust and confidentiality

To achieve sustainable collaboration between the sectors, the development of trust and maintaining confidentiality are crucial. In this case, actors can involve WPSA-BB, BPICC or even university researchers.

Poultry farmer training

Collaboration between public and private veterinary services could also work to implement sustainable training programmes, with agreed training modules designed to deliver more confident and educated farmers.

Sharing the disease control burden

Collaboration between the sectors could also benefit farmers economically. At present, only the government veterinary sector is held accountable to support poultry farmers when they lose their flocks in avian influenza outbreaks; the private sector does not support farmers financially when losses occur due to infectious disease. Robust collaboration between the sectors may help to define an effective disease restitution scheme loss due to any disease outbreak. This initiative could also encourage farmers to participate in data sharing, surveillance and vaccination activities.

Such a comprehensive change in existing veterinary services to promote poultry health could lead to well-trained farmers producing safer chicken meat and eggs for consumers. Collaboration will help veterinarians from both the private and public sectors, as well as policymakers, develop the sustainable capacity needed to defeat disease burdens on farms through a combination of:

- improved oversight,
- comprehensive data collection, and
- reliable financial support for farmers.



A comprehensive change in existing veterinary services to promote poultry health could lead to well-trained farmers producing safer chicken meat and eggs for consumers.



Testing for infectious diseases and sharing disease data between private and public veterinarian sectors is vital. *Image: Karine Gatellier.*

The roundtable

The high-level roundtable discussions on which this briefing is based were held in March 2023². The discussions focused on the current state of collaboration between the public and private veterinary sectors in the poultry sector, with the objective of exploring how the scope of collaboration could be both extended and strengthened in support of sustainable development. Roundtable participants included representatives from public and private sectors, civil society and academia. Discussion, moderated by Professor Dr Paritosh Kumar Biswas of Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, took place under the Chatham House rule in which the identity and affiliation of discussants is not revealed. The event was convened by the One Health Poultry Hub, Bangladesh, in collaboration with the Global Health Programme of Chatham House, London, and with the financial support of UK Research and Innovation (see 'Further information' box).

Policy implications

Effective public-private partnerships in the Bangladesh poultry sector can be facilitated by a joint initiative between the public and private poultry sectors. It is recommended that:



1. The Government of Bangladesh instigates public-private partnership in Bangladesh's poultry sector in collaboration with the Bangladesh Poultry Industries Central Council (BPICC) and the World Poultry Science Association, Bangladesh Branch (WPSA-BB).
2. The Government of Bangladesh builds a register of private veterinarians in different companies in different regions.
3. Legal veterinary provision for poultry is ensured through collaboration between private and public veterinarians at field level.
4. Trust between public and private sectors is nurtured to facilitate mutual data-sharing, including of diagnostic test results.
5. Technology is developed to introduce a common and easily-accessible platform for sharing stakeholder data.
6. A win-win situation is created so data sharing and information about disease outbreaks does not negatively affect the enterprises of stakeholders such as private companies and farmers.
7. A poultry disease restitution scheme is agreed for chicken farmers, to benefit both farmers (economically) and consumers (so they can be better assured of safe poultry products).
8. Public and private partners, including informal poultry health service providers such as feed dealers, work together to generate a common training module for poultry farmers.

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. Work for a thesis entitled 'Mind the Gap: An assessment of scope for collaboration between public and private veterinary services for effective disease management in Bangladesh's poultry sector' was conducted as part of the qualitative studies of the One Health Poultry Hub in Bangladesh by Dr Meherjan Islam under the supervision of Professor Md. Ahasanul Hoque, Dr Eve Houghton and Dr Ivo Syndicus. Sixty-two veterinarians (58 male and four female) were interviewed and the findings disseminated. Expert opinions were collected at a roundtable meeting held on 5 March 2023.

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Footnotes:

1. Karmoker Y., 2022. Self sufficiency in protein: Poultry industry in Bangladesh, Business inspection. Available in: <https://businessinspection.com.bd/poultry-industry-in-bangladesh/>
2. <https://cvasu.ac.bd/pages/research-policy-brief>