



# An Indian state sets example for innovative use of mobile veterinary services

In remote areas of India, access to veterinary services is often difficult. Often tribal livestock farmers have to travel far from their villages when there is a dire need of treatment for their animals. This has adversely affected livestock farming in tribal regions which are often located in remote locations. Until recently, lack of infrastructure in these areas has impeded the delivery of basic veterinary services. The infrastructure is not well-organised and fragmented, making it difficult for targeted service delivery. Moreover, security in these areas has been a matter of concern. Considering these detailed and widespread factors, the region has not experienced many development activities.

Birsa Yuva Seva Samiti (BYSS), established by Dr. Bablu Sundi with the help of his friend Dr. S.S. Kulu, made an effort to provide veterinary services in remote rural areas through a mobile van. The van was converted into a mobile veterinary ambulance. With the help of the van, BYSS reached several remote areas and provided veterinary care.

The non-profit company, Global Alliance for Livestock Veterinary Medicines (GALVmed) had been looking for an opportunity to enable service delivery in this difficult context. As there were very few permanent veterinary establishments, veterinarians or a supportive infrastructure, it was envisaged that mobile veterinary services could support a viable supply chain and ensure delivery of good quality veterinary treatment in these remote areas, providing relief to tribal livestock farmers. A mobile service could also act as a multi-purpose utility-raising awareness of livestock diseases and treatment, and providing access to a market for livestock vaccines and medicines while becoming the primary method of delivering veterinary services. It was also anticipated that a team of veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals would efficiently deliver animal health care services to larger areas through this project.

Dr Bablu Sundi, being a veterinarian with a tribal background, understood the grassroots needs. He therefore did not restrict himself to veterinary work exclusively, but also expanded into animal health care service delivery and agriculture advisory services. This combination was highly innovative.

The model for the VETmark mobile veterinary service is based on the one established by the NGO Birsa Yuva Seva Samiti (BYSS) who converted a truck for use as a mobile veterinary ambulance. This prototype is delivering veterinary and agro-based services in the districts of East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum and Saraikela Kharsawan in Jharkhand state.

The mobile service could also be used for helping backyard farmers in selling their products to urban markets. With the thought of combining these services GALVmed and Hester Biosciences joined hands with BYSS. This bringing together of veterinary and marketing initiatives were termed VETmark.

As part of VETmark, the BYSS initiative has been expanded. It is now delivering veterinary services in these districts as well as providing tools for awareness generation, such as pocket projectors for video shows with the support of GALVmed. And with the help of Hester Biosciences Ltd, the timely delivery of medicines and vaccines has been ensured.

Specifically BYSS now offers animal health care services to all smallholder farmers raising poultry, goats, sheep, pigs, cattle and buffalos. The services comprise treatment, vaccination and advice on nutrition and husbandry practices for all animal types.

The team has not only extended veterinary services with a mobile agroveter clinic, but now also represents farmers at local markets – ensuring that their in-demand indigenous poultry receive the best price possible in the market relative to commercial broilers and other poultry. Historically this service would be provided by traders or other intermediaries; however, the fair market value for indigenous birds may not have been delivered to the villagers.

BYSS, led by Dr Sundi, established a clinic in Dumaria Block of East Singhbhum in 2013. The same year, they started an ambulance service for sick animals.

Commenting on the project, Dr Rahul Srivastava, GALVmed's Market Development Manager for South Asia said, "Considering the difficulties in service delivery to smallholder livestock keepers in remote areas, we found the innovation initiated by Dr Sundi to be interesting, and decided to use the mobile van as a means of sustainable animal health care products and door-to-door service delivery. The results of this partnership is quite satisfactory."

After receiving support from GALVmed, Dr Sundi started providing additional services through VETmark. These additional services included sharing information about governmental and non-governmental projects related to animal husbandry and animal produce as well as raising awareness of seasonal diseases in birds and other livestock, and their treatment. He also gave livestock health, nutrition and management training to the master trainers using a projector.

In the last few years, Dr Sundi has expanded his team by involving local educated unemployed youths, with the help of GALVmed and Hester. According to Dr Sundi, with the help of his ten team members, the VETmark initiative has been a beneficial one to the rural smallholder farmers in Jharkhand. From August 2016 to June 2017, a total of 120,300 backyard birds and 17,510 goats were vaccinated against ND and PPR disease, respectively. Approximately 10,694 birds, 8,824 goats, 2,500 pigs and 2,977 cattle were also dewormed during this time. Dr Sundi and his team also vaccinated poultry and other livestock against fowl pox, black quarter, haemorrhagic septicaemia, foot and mouth disease, and enterotoxaemia.



Under the VETmark project, an easy mechanism for helping villagers sell their poultry has been established. The poultry and livestock farmers who could not profit from their livestock when there was no animal health service are now seeing the benefits of this initiative. The BYSS vaccinators purchase the chickens from the villagers and sell them at town or city markets. This protects the farmers from middlemen and ensures that they receive a fair price for their produce. They also don't have to travel to markets, which are often far from their homes.

"I could undertake the initiative as I understood the locality and its people well," said Dr Sundi. "Most outsiders would find it difficult to work here because of political and infrastructural issues. Involving the local youth in this work has provided an added advantage."

Through the support he has been getting from GALVmed and Hester combined with demand from villagers, Dr Sundi aspires to take the VETmark initiative to every village of Jharkhand.

He exemplifies the success that can be achieved when veterinarians actively participate in service delivery at the grassroots and broaden the scope of services.



Written by Deepak Bhadana with editorial inputs from Saloni Srivastava. Photos by ALTERNATIVES