

Report Rest of Asia MSP

The online MSP for the rest of Asia took place on the 9th and 10th of Sep 2020 at 11:00 am Rome Time .

The meeting was well attended by stake holders representing different groups ; civil society, donor groups, research institutions , the government and the private sector . Several GASL partners , CIRAD, VSF, ILRI, LIFE network , HPI , Donkey Sanctuary participated either as panelists , contributors to the inputs or from the audience.

The sessions were organized as discussions and short presentations which the panelists were requested to present on answering the key questions ; what has been the effect of COVID 19 on different types of livestock systems and livestock holders? , what has been the response to the pandemic to support livestock holders and finally what is the way forward?.

The audience were requested to contribute by answering poll questions as well as ask questions to the panelists as well as the organizers .

Mr. Fritz Schneider opened the session by giving an introduction to GASL .

Nitya Ghotge introduced the workshop with a short presentation where she called “Asia a crowded continent “ . She pointed out to the fact that human populations and livestock populations had increased greatly in the last 30 years resulting in a growing demand for livestock products . This had translated into shifts in livestock rearing patterns to industrial systems and long supply chains . Consequently , small farmers were squeezed out , there was greater environmental pollution, increased emissions and a decrease in animal welfare and animal health standards in several countries of the continent. Asia in fact was a hotspot for zoonotic diseases with Swine flu, Avian flu , ASF and Covid 19 having originated here in the last 17 years.

The first panelist was Dr. Katinka De Balogh , veterinary epidemiologist with the FAO , Bangkok, her presentation touched on the problems different sections of livestock holders faced due to the pandemic . She felt that as of now the pandemic had affected all sections of livestock keepers with varied impact with several disruptions in value chains which had negative socio economic consequences but the effect as yet was largely unquantified .She also touched on the reasons why she felt Asia was a hot spot for zoonotic diseases amongst which included , rapid population increase , increased demand for livestock produce , risky consumption patters . The method she felt to reduce the effects was through early detection, rapid response, sustained control.

Dr. Sunil Gamage from the Animal Husbandry Department of Sri Lanka , presented a rather bright picture in Sri Lanka , where he maintained that due to the combined efforts of the Government and Industry , the damage to the sector was fairly small .

Dr. Ruijun Long of Lanzhou University China and a professor of Pastoralism was the third panelist. He spoke of the effects of the pandemic on Yak herders in Tibet . Although , China has effectively contained the virus , several problems still exist . Herdsmen were impacted quite badly due to the pandemic with disruptions in supplies . Markets improved as the price of livestock went up when imports stopped. However, the purchasing power of people was poor .The government is likely to step in with cash subsidies , lowering of feed prices, alternate feed sources to help herdsmen .

Antoin Lury of AVSF made the next presentation where he spoke of the effects of the pandemic in three different countries , Mongolia, where there was no overt presence of COVID 19 but supply chains for cashmere were severely impacted due to the lockdown. Laos, where traditional livestock holders did comparatively better because their dependance on external sources of inputs and markets was low and Cambodia which because its borders were shut actually saw a boost in local production as foreign inputs did not flood the market

The final presentation was by Natasha Maru who is with the Pastres project as a PhD candidate. She spoke about the impact of the COVID 19 on India's pastoralists who number more than 40 million people. Since they are largely not visible to the state , in many areas they did not receive any of the support that the Government was offering to agriculturists and other livestock holders.

The second day began with the release of the book "Immunologically Yours " by Balaram Sahu a veterinarian in the state of Orissa India. Dr. Balaram Sahu , works with the government of Orissa, runs a mobile school on veterinary health for para professionals where he supports and endorses ethnoveterinary practices. The book "Immunologically Yours" was written during the lockdown and is an easy to understand well written volume explaining disease and immunity in simple language .

Ilse Köhler Rollefson gave a presentation where she summed up the previous days sessions and also requested the audience to mull over the question of whether there were trade offs between efficiency and resilience . Quoting from an article by Roger Martin she said *"Resilient systems are typically characterized by the very features—diversity and redundancy, or slack—that efficiency seeks to destroy."*

The first panelist was Abi Vanak with a presentation on One health . Abi is an ecologist and he used maps to illustrate the burden and impact of zoonotic diseases. He stressed on the need to pay attention and protect environmental health as a very important step to prevent future zoonotic outbreaks .

The next presentation was by Flavie Goutard an epidemiologist with CIRAD who is with the GREASE a platform for understanding **OH / Ecohealth** issues in South east Asia . She spoke about the poor surveillance and lack of diagnostic facilities in the livestock sector. She emphasized the need for understanding the origin, the emergence and the spread of epidemics and spike of the Agro-ecology and Safe food System Transitions (ASSET) project between 2020 and 2025, aiming at supporting the transition of food and agricultural systems towards more sustainable systems in Southeast Asia. Discussions from the audience also focused on "ethical surveillance" .

Following this, Rahul Srivastav a veterinarian with Hester Biosciences a company that makes vaccines gave a presentation of the impact of the pandemic on different sections of livestock holders in India . According to him due to the pandemic the organized poultry and dairy sectors in India fared badly due to disruption in supply chains and markets . Poultry more so because of rumours which began in January 2020 which said the pandemic was spread though the consumption of meat especially chicken . On the other hand , goat rearers , small holders , backyard farmers fared better as they were not linked to external supplies or markets . The price of goat meat remained constant and even rose after the initial lockdowns were lifted. Traders suffered as traditional markets were shut down. He also mentioned that in the absence of regular veterinary inputs due to lockdowns , ethno -veterinary practices were back in use and its use in fact spread .

Chanda Nimbkar made the next presentation where she gave several practical suggestions for the way forward. They include , increased awareness amongst livestock keepers , farmers, butchers, traders . Increased diagnostics and disease reporting and better facilities for livestock product processing, storage and marketing.

The MSP ended with a small message from Dailey bai a Raika pastoralist from Rajasthan who maintained that livestock keepers needed to be supported as several people returned to rearing livestock as other livelihoods in cities disappeared during the lock down in India.

The poll questions

1. **Is there a role veterinarians play in preventing and controlling the spread of epidemics and pandemics?** Almost all the participants answered yes
2. **Do you think there will be more pandemics? Do you think they can be prevented?** Most answered unfortunately, yes but hopefully we will learn how to better respond. People also felt there was greater need to work together , strengthen partnerships and collaborative efforts .
3. **Are traditional systems more resilient** : traditional systems seem to be more resilient as they are more diversified however many participants felt that traditional holders are also socio economically weaker and more vulnerable
4. **Should wet markets be banned** . Most respondents said no but there is tremendous scope for improvement
5. **Is Biosecurity possible for only large industrial units** .This had mixed responses although some participants mentioned that there could be some kinds of regulations which could be specially designed for small units and small livestock holders.