

Rabbit Farming: A Potential Approach towards Rural Poverty Alleviation

Md. Ruhul Amin (Corresponding Author)

Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, Comilla University. Bangladesh.

E-mail: rubel_2008iu@yahoo.com

Md. Abu Taleb

Assistant Director (Training), Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD),
Comilla. Bangladesh.

E-mail: taleb_79@yahoo.com

Junaed Rahim

Assistant Director (Research), Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD),
Comilla. Bangladesh.

E-mail: junaed_bard@yahoo.com

Abstract

In the context of our country livestock plays a vital role in the economy of our country. Moreover, the major supply of protein comes from the livestock sector of our country. According to the department of livestock services about 36 percent of the total animal protein comes from the livestock products in our every day life. Countries 25 percent peoples are directly engaged in livestock sector, and 50 percent peoples are partly associated in livestock production. Last year, the contribution of livestock sub-sector to the GDP was 2.95 percent, which was estimated about 17.32 percent GDP to agriculture. Last year, the growth of livestock in GDP was 7.23 percent. In this back drop production of animal species has become a vital factor. Rabbit farming as a source of income has not yet gained popularity among the common people of our country. The rural people of our country can be involved in rabbit farming for changing their socio-economic status. As rabbit farming is easily manageable and sustainable it has a bright future potential in our country as a source of income as well as a source of protein.

1. Introduction:

Bangladesh is an over populated country tattered with a number of problems among which poverty stands prominent. Still most of the people of our country are living in the rural areas. Therefore, development efforts have been concentrated in the rural areas with the salient aim of alleviating poverty through involving rural families in income generating activities. This common panacea of rural poverty has been running over decades in our country. Farming of animal species like poultry, goat and cattle is one of the means through which rural families can increase their family income as well as consumption of family diet. To a significant extent we depend on cattle, goat and poultry for supply of meat, which occupies a major portion of our daily consumption of diet. Therefore, livestock species in our country play a significant role in both household rural family income and regular consumption of nutritious diet. But farming of rabbit as a means of alternative nutritious diet and source of rural family income has not been yet made popular in our country.

2. Rabbit farming: A past view

Since the dawn of civilization human beings started rearing different animal species with different purposes. With the passage of time, sprout from the innovative brain of human beings, rearing of specific animal species have taken the form of farming. "But rabbit domestication dates back no further than the present millennium", But the purpose of rabbit domestication in the earlier stages was rather diversified.

Domestication of rabbit was directed either as game or pet animal or to a limited extent as a diet. "Several breeds of rabbit were known in the 16th century and this is the first record we have of controlled breeding. Domestication can therefore be traced to the middle ages. This was probably the work mainly of monks, since it provided them with a more delicious dish than the tougher wild rabbit". In the recent times rabbit farming for production of meat in the European countries like Australia and New Zealand has become one of the fastest growing new industries providing a potential source of income diversification in the rural areas. Considering the significance of rabbit farming as a source of income for rural people World Rabbit Science Association was established with a view to promote it in a greater context and a number of FAO countries offered interest in this regard.

3. Rabbit Breeding in the context of Bangladesh:

The socio economic background of our country demands innovative approaches for alleviating rural poverty. And it can be done to a greater extent by involving the rural families in income generating activities. Rabbit mostly fed upon green forage has the potential of improving family consumption of protein diet of many of the poor rural families while at the same time helping them in uplifting their family income through farming. In our country people are not habituated with the consumption of rabbit meat and it has not yet been made a regular diet. The main reason has been marked as a superstition although rabbits depend mainly on green forages and are pure than poultry. In this regard the words of Paul Auriol¹ is worth quoting "Of course rabbit cannot be eaten by certain people for religious reasons but the more usual motive for rejecting rabbit meat is ignorance. Rabbits are prolific in reproduction capable of 4-5 births per year with a litter size of 6-8. This represents about 300kgs of meat produced by one doe in a year, assuming an average mature weight of about 2.5kgs. Under small holder farming, a farmer might keep only four does and one buck which would translate to approximately 1200kgs of meat per year. Rabbit meat is in fact very bland and can be prepared in a great variety of ways. Nutritionally speaking, it is one of the very best meats." It has been said that rabbit meat tastes as like as mutton and can be eaten for its being pure. "Even with the theoretical lower energy cost when cattle are raised for both milk and beef, rabbit meat is still more economical in terms of feed energy than beef. Rabbit meat production is therefore an attractive proposition, especially when the aim is to produce quality animal protein". In many LDC countries government and non-government organizations have initiated rabbit farming with a view to alleviating poverty. It can also bring phenomenal change in the lot of rural people of our country.

Rabbit farming has the minimum economic risk and less expensive than poultry or cattle farming. It requires minimum space, which is more suitable to the rural atmosphere of our country. "To the farmers if a breeding cow, goat or pig dies, this is a major loss. In Asia rabbits have a competitive edge over poultry because they do not depend on cereal grains, not to mention concerns about risks from Asian Bird Influenza". Characteristically rabbits have a short generation interval, high production quality, rapid multiplication that makes them more suitable in our country as meat producing small livestock. Moreover, the fur of rabbits along with its meat can be exported to foreign countries at good prices.

4. A Case of Mymensingh:

In *Mymensingh* district rabbit farming seems likely on the increase as poultry farming. A report published in the Daily Star News paper reveals the potentials of this prospective sector. A report prepared by the *Mymensingh* correspondent shows that rabbit farming gets its footing in *Mukttagacha* in 1997 with 10 pairs, distributed among ten families. Gradually it spread to other villages in the Upazila. It was also reported that

one kg of rabbit meat is of tk 110 to 120 in the country and tk 250 in foreign markets. The potential foreign markets are Australia, Middle East, UK, US, Mexico, Japan and Russia. Fashionable leather products can also be produced out of rabbit fur. A single rabbit fur costs 25 tk for processing in any tannery of Dhaka where as it can be sold at tk. 250 in the outer countries, the report said. Moreover, quoting from a source of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), the report reveals that the rabbit stool has been termed as “cold fertilizer” for vegetable fields and can also be used as fish feed. The poor families can be benefited and earn profit through rearing rabbit and it has been proved from the case of *Muktagacha* where now 1800 families in 30 villages are engaged in rearing rabbit.

5. Future Prospects:

The large number of population in our country is fed by the output of farmers who produce crops and rear cattle, goat and poultry. Therefore to maximize food production in our country every possible avenue needs to be explored. Traditional farming pattern in our country like cattle and poultry cannot satisfy the widespread demand of meat as they require too much space for poor villagers of our country. Therefore to add new dimension to the traditional farming pattern participation of rural people needs to be ensured. “Families should be encouraged to either consume rabbit meat on a regular basis or sell rabbits as a cash crop in order to purchase food of higher quality to the nutritional status of the family diet.”(Lukafahr S.D. 2007). Motivation and dissemination of information can inspire the poor farmers to come forward to rear rabbit.

“The present challenge is to take the rabbit to a higher level to usher in a new era that involves formulation of new and improved models for development projects to provide even greater benefits for limited – resource families, especially when initiated as a vehicle to alleviate poverty” (Lukafahr S.D. 2007).

To sum up, proper motivation and approach by the both government and non-government sectors can lead rabbit farming to grow up as a sustainable industry in our country. But still a number of factors need to be explored and solved before promoting rabbit production on a greater scale. Therefore, for setting up a dynamic and viable rabbit farming industry, further systematic research is needed which can contribute a lot to heal the plague of poverty.

6. *Shah Mintu*: A Case of Rabbit Rearing in Comilla

Shah Mintu, a young man from Comilla started rearing rabbit as a hobby. Initially he started his rearing not as a farm keeping only one pair of White rabbit in his home. Gradually he noticed that rabbits are easy to rear and grow in a faster rate than other domestic animals. Then the concept of rearing rabbit as a source of income came to his mind. He started rearing rabbit in an organizing manner and within a year he got four pair of rabbits from his earlier one pair. He started selling pairs of rabbit at 300 tk. He said that rabbits are used for their wool, fur, and meat. They are also used as specimens in different laboratories for testing different biological examinations. Their breeds usually determine in which way they need to be used. And so, before starting a rabbit farm, it is important that a prospective rabbit breeder should know to whom he should sell his rabbits. Will it be to restaurants, meat shops, individual purchasers, laboratories or breeders? He also said that in our country rabbits are not usually taken as food but it still has the potentiality to use in different ways. According to him if proper eagerness could be created among people it could be a better source of income for the poor people and could easily be reared as other domestic species. The following table shows how gradually he got the rabbit enterprise:

Sl. No	Year of Rearing	Number of Rabbits Reared	Expenditure for Rearing in Tk (Approximate)	Income form Selling in Tk (Approximate)
01	2006-07	5 pairs	500	1500
02	2007-08	10 pairs	800	3000

04	2008-09	15 pairs	1000	6000
05	2009-10	16 pairs	1100	6500

(Source: *Field Survey and Interview, 2010*)

Initially in 2006 he started with one pair of rabbit and in the same year he increased the number of pairs from one to five. The amount of expenditure mentioned by him was based upon his assumption. He mentioned that rabbit rearing required very small amount of expenditure compared to the number of rabbits and other domestic animal species. Gradually the number of rabbits increased from 2006 to 2010 which helped him to enhance his income generating activities. According to him rabbits could easily be managed and easy to rear. "The thing is that it had not been yet made a popular domestic animal in our country. People are not aware of the rabbit rearing as a source of income", he said.

7. Recommendations:

"The livestock sector has been playing an immense role to supply the required protein to the common mass of the country. With an annual growth rate of over 8% since 1993, the contribution of the live stock sub-sector to GDP and agricultural sub-sector as a whole is currently 3.2% and 10.11% respectively (Internet)." Therefore the rabbit farming has much potential to develop as a commercial sub-sector with employment and income generating opportunities both in the rural and urban areas. A large number of enterprises – cattle, poultry and dairy farms have grown in the private sector in the recent times. In the same way rabbit farming could be flourished for the betterment of the common people of our country. The following steps could be taken to motivate the poor people to rear rabbit on a commercial basis:

1. The rearing of rabbit and meat consumption has not yet been made popular in our country. First of all potentiality of its economic value needs to be disseminated among the poor villagers.
2. Initiatives from government and non government sectors needs to be taken to motivate the people.
3. Some programmes can be taken to lift up the initiatives which include providing training, micro credit and other logistics support.
4. If not as a domestic meat consumption the rabbit rearing can be aimed at as an exporting breed and supply of nutrition to other countries.
5. The fur of rabbit can be of great source of making leather product. Therefore, attempts should be taken to popularize it among the people living in the rural areas.

8. Reference:

1. Lebas. F etl, 'the rabbit: husbandry, health and production', 1986.
2. Lukefahr S.D. "Strategies for the development of small and medium scale rabbit farming in South East Asia, (Paper presented at the international Conference on Rabbit Production, Bogor, Indonesia, July 24-25, 2007)
3. *The Daily Star*, Saturday, January 15, 2005- "A Prospective Sector" _____
4. http://www.discoverybangladesh.com/meetbangladesh/fisheries_livestock.html _____

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:**

<http://www.iiste.org/Journals/>

The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a fast manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

