

Abstract

Livestock industry provides for a major source of livelihood for many people worldwide, particularly the rural poor in developing countries. Ill-health is a major constraint to livestock production and development in rural and peri-urban communities where a half of the world's livestock population is found. Most of these communities live in marginal areas affected with endemic pathogens, vectors and diseases. These areas are not easily accessible to modern veterinary information and services and people are less economically endowed albeit coping with enormous animal health problems. The survival mechanisms and strategies are simply based on people's own local and inherent centuries' old knowledge that has withstood the test of time in all aspects of human evolutionary life. Any attempts to improve the lives of these people through livestock industry, must therefore begin by understanding and recognizing the evolution, application and management of ethnoveterinary medicine in their cultural lifestyle. This approach offers sustainable strategies directed towards developing sound and appropriate animal health care systems suitable and relevant to rural communities in improving livestock performance and production and hence, livelihood. In addition, there would be environmental conservation and management strategies for achieving sustainability, availability, accessibility and affordability of existing ethno-remedies and ethno-practitioners. Strategizing community development programmes by building on ethno-knowledge concepts as known and practiced by people, it is by no doubt that feasible and sustainable development programmes will be successfully planned, developed, implemented and managed without external input. To effect and maintain a community-based sustainable livestock production system, it is crucial to learn, evaluate and without being biased and ethnocentric, promote and integrate the beneficial facets of traditional animal health care practices into current primary livestock health care delivery services. This paper reviews and highlights some historical developments in understanding and recourse to ethnoveterinary medicine and the way forward.