

SMS for Good Shepherding – Providing Information When and Where it is needed



Anthra (www.anthra.org) is a non-profit organization working primarily on issues of livestock development in the wider context of sustainable natural resource use. Its focus areas are livestock production and farming systems, crops and fodder varieties, livestock and plant genetic resources, medicinal plants and health care traditions, land and water use and the protection, documentation and sharing of indigenous knowledge. Anthra primarily works with small and marginal farmers – *dalits*, *adivasis*, pastoralists, and particularly with women from these marginalized communities.

In its work with migratory shepherd communities in Maharashtra, access to information on disease occurrence and remedial measures emerged as a constraint for shepherds on the move. Keeping in mind that many shepherds carried with them mobile phones as they migrated with their sheep in search of grazing, Anthra developed an innovative and simple SMS service to disseminate information regarding current diseases and remedial measures, including herbal and ethno-veterinary medicines that shepherds could easily access. Shepherds wishing to receive this information register their mobile numbers at the Anthra office, which thereafter sends fortnightly updates on probable seasonal diseases, symptoms, remedies and precautions that shepherds can take to prevent the out-break and spread of disease amongst their flocks. Information is sent out in the local language, making it easy for shepherds to understand and share the information among their groups.

Some of the shepherds mentioned how they had stored the messages received and refer to this collated information as an easy guide. They further added that they looked forward to each fortnightly information update and sharing and discussing this information.

For shepherds on the move, charging their mobile phones was often extremely difficult, and could only be done on cost at towns or large villages along the migratory route. Anthra, facilitated access to a Pune based company manufacturing solar lights with a built-in mobile charger. This served the dual purpose of providing a powerful night-light that kept predators away, and also enabled shepherds to easily recharge their mobile phones.

SOUTH ASIA
Pro Poor Livestock Policy Programme

A joint initiative of NDDB and FAO

Photo Credit: Anthra, Pune, Maharashtra