

ABSTRACT

Livestock and Gender: Achieving poverty alleviation and food security through livestock policies that benefit women

This abstract is based on a full-length paper written by Jemimah Njuki and Beth Miller in 2012. The paper is one of a series of economic papers commissioned by GALVmed and produced by a team from the Royal Veterinary College, University of London, led by Jonathan Rushton. The series aimed to address the overarching question: Africa, economics, and poverty – what do livestock add and how can this contribution be improved?

Introduction

This paper first reviews gender¹ issues at the intersection of livestock production, human health and nutrition, development of private sector businesses and policy. It goes on to make a series of recommendations for the integration of gender equality goals throughout the livestock value chain.

The livestock sector in Africa is dominated by small-scale production. Whilst it has the potential to generate income and employment, produce nutritious food and contribute to a more resilient environment this cannot occur, argue the authors, without intentional pro-poor and pro-women policies.

Framing of women in livestock

Women's roles in livestock production in Africa have often been framed as being 'helpers' to male head of household. This is, however, misleading; a more accurate depiction is of women who, although overburdened, under-rewarded, vulnerable and poor, play the central role of providing food security and household well-being.

A framework for analysing the role of livestock

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) promotes development that is sustainable ecologically, institutionally, socially and economically to produce positive livelihood outcomes. It uses the pentagon of five capital assets that are available to rural people: natural, physical, social, human and financial.

The gendered SLF illuminates gender dynamics by acknowledging that gender dynamics become visible by acknowledging that households consist of individual members and applying the framework for women and men separately. Important questions to address are: who does what, who benefits and who has access to and control over resources?

To achieve meaningful analysis of the livestock sector, a shift is needed in focus from the animals to the people who depend on them for their livelihoods. The gendered Sustainable Livelihoods approach is a useful tool to do this.

Trends affecting gender issues in livestock development

Some of the major trends influencing gender issues in livestock development in the future include population growth, urbanization, migration of rural men in search of off-farm employment and an increase in female-headed households. Pastoralists are becoming increasingly settled and, due to declining land available for grazing, livestock intensification will continue. Climate change is predicted to accelerate erratic

¹ Gender is defined as the socially constructed behavioural norms and responsibilities for men and women.

weather in Africa with an increase in droughts and floods. Future livestock production and demand for livestock products is likely to be heavily moderated by socio-economic considerations, such as increased concerns for human health and animal welfare, and by pressure for low carbon livestock development and other environmental legislation. Contract farming and supermarkets look set to see significant growth, which frequently bypass women and the poor. Traditional or informal markets are often easier for women to access, and can be better managed with greater official recognition, as with Kenya's raw milk market.

Gender and roles of livestock

Livestock as assets: Livestock are important assets for the rural poor. They can be productive assets, financial assets (e.g. storing wealth), can build social and political capital through gifting, and can build natural capital through use of manure as fertiliser. This versatility complicates livestock development interventions, however, as different households may have different reasons for keeping livestock: regarding livestock only as financial assets will therefore achieve neither poverty reduction nor production goals.

Livestock tend to be an easier asset for women to acquire than land: women can generally own and sell poultry and small ruminants, but cattle may be limited to men. Women can acquire livestock through inheritance, markets or groups working on development projects; the relative informality of livestock property rights, compared to land or other physical or financial assets, can be a double-edged sword when ownership is challenged.

Use of livestock assets has to be negotiated within each household and within the context of customs and individual relationships. Men generally have the final say and use of force is culturally sanctioned in Africa: women tend to be an average of 15 years younger than their husbands, less educated, raised to defer to men and undervalue themselves and their work, and are often unable to recognize or assert their concerns, preferences or rights.

The modern capitalist economy depends on clearly defined and enforceable property rights for individuals and groups, in addition to well-managed public goods. Traditionally, women themselves were seen as property of the husband, but these views are slowly changing. Although gender barriers are coming down across Africa, the problem of property grabbing following the death of a husband is increasing and leaving more women destitute. Increasing women's control over assets, mainly land, physical and financial assets, has positive effects on food security, child nutrition and education, as well as women's own well-being. But whilst increasing individual women's control over assets is important, women are not a homogenous group. Other social categories such as ethnicity, class and age often interact with gender to intensify barriers to economic participation and advancement. The disadvantages facing most women will not be addressed through individual rights alone, but through challenges to all types of institutional discrimination.

Livestock and income: The importance of livestock in contributing to household income varies by region and production system. For women, income from the sale of small stock and products, such as eggs and milk, enable the purchase of other foods, including grain, health care and basic household sustenance. Most studies on the role of livestock do not, however, capture the income differentials between men and women; neither do they capture income managed by women and the differences in expenditure of this income between men and women.

Livestock, status and self-esteem: Livestock ownership can confer higher status and self-esteem, which in turn leads to greater financial success. Women with low status tend to have weaker control over household resources, tighter time constraints, less access to information and health services, poorer mental health and

lower self-esteem. Societies that have more gender equity tend to have more productive agriculture, but more productive agriculture may also help reduce gender inequality.

Livestock and nutrition: Livestock interventions are often assumed to promote food security through alleviation of child malnutrition. Flawed data collection designs of most studies, however, make it difficult to draw any conclusions. The only livestock interventions associated with clear improvements in dietary intake and nutritional status are those in which either women played a critical role in the intervention, or the interventions included an explicit nutrition education component. Livestock products controlled by women are more likely to be consumed by the family than products controlled by men: if women do not own the livestock, they may not have decision making authority over the use of products either for home consumption or sale.

Nutritional education: One challenge to food and nutrition security in Africa is food taboos, which are widely observed in rural areas, especially around consumption of animal source foods. Although there are food taboos for both men and women, impact is greatest on pregnant women: they face more numerous proscriptions which often involve the most nutritious food. Education is correlated with abandoning harmful taboos; a survey in Ethiopia showed that observation of food taboos dropped 75% in women who attended secondary school. Poverty also limits opportunities to consume livestock products in both urban and rural areas as livestock products are generally relatively expensive.

Livestock and disease: Zoonoses are human diseases of animal origin. Alterations in livestock systems may potentially increase the risk of individual and household exposure to zoonotic disease, from direct contact with animals while performing dairy activities and ingestion of milk products, and indirectly from other diseases. Owing to their close proximity to animals and their handling of raw animal products, women are often more exposed to zoonotic diseases than men and, when sick, do not receive the same level of care as male members of the family. Sixty per cent of all diseases are zoonotic: animal source foods are the single most common source of food poisoning and most of the recent emerging diseases have jumped species from animal hosts. Although much of the animal-associated disease burden is preventable, treatable or controllable, women's active participation will be essential.

Veterinary public health: This tends to be weak in Africa and ignores women both as sources of information and means to protect the human population.

Key constraints in livestock production, marketing and processing

Livestock policies and market systems were designed without women's participation and perspective and, therefore, often produce gender specific constraints. These are in addition to the barriers that all poor small-scale producers encounter, such as poor animal health delivery, inadequate infrastructure to get products to markets and variable quality of animal medicine in the marketplace. Examples of gender specific constraints include:

Livestock and the gender division of labour: Women may contribute a huge amount of labour to household livestock activities, but their control over the income is site and production system specific. Livestock provides a real opportunity for women to increase their income in some situations; in other situations, however, it merely leads to a significant increase in women's workload without affecting their control over the additional resources. This depends on the relationship between men and women, the influence of tradition, economics and often the presence of a non-governmental organisation or local leader willing to promote the benefits of gender equality among men.

Access to technologies, inputs and services: Women have access to fewer productive assets, such as land, tools, water and technology, inputs such as vaccines, medicines and feed, financial services, animal health services, information and time compared to men of the same class and ethnicity. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30% for crops as well as livestock.

Land: Women's access to and control over land resources is lower than men and their tenure is more insecure. Most women access land through their husband and lose it in case of death or divorce. Across Africa, there have been efforts to enhance women's land ownership through legal action. Though land ownership is not a prerequisite for keeping livestock, access to grazing lands or forage is essential for ruminant feed.

Water: Livestock keeping is a major consumer of water, the consumption of which is increasing with increasing demands for livestock products. Water availability determines the type of livestock production system, the labour burden on women for caring for animals, especially transporting water, or bringing them to water sources. For example, in mixed crop-livestock production in East Africa, when irrigated forages are introduced the workload for women often increases as women are responsible for cutting and transporting the feed to the homestead.

Extension services, information and training: Agricultural extension strategies have traditionally focused on increasing production of cash crops by providing men with training, information and access to inputs and services. Further, in the overwhelming majority of countries, extension services have been staffed predominantly by men. In addition, both public and private extension and veterinary services have focused more on large scale and commercial producers, neglecting small-scale producers and women. Men often resent or oppose women's participation in livestock training unless time is spent demonstrating the importance of women's work to their own well-being, such as through gender training workshops and with the support of local authority figures.

Use of improved inputs and technologies: Evidence suggests that policy makers or even men in villages may not recognize women's role in management of animal health, including recognition, treatment and prevention of disease. Women do purchase and use livestock medications and supplements, so vendors and distributors who reach out to women with advertising and information will have greater impact.

Patterns of market participation: Women face specific challenges to market participation compared to men of the same class, age and ethnicity. Most women have limited mobility: they need to stay near the home to provide child care, animal care and other domestic services, are less likely to own transport and have less cash available for public transport. They may also face harassment or assault during travel, and husbands may be reluctant to give wives permission to travel because they fear infidelity or dishonour. In some cultures the market and other public spaces are considered 'male' and therefore women are discouraged or forbidden from direct access; although they have adapted by using intermediaries, they do lose control of the selling price.

Generally, women have less experience in markets than men, so they may be offered lower prices. When women do sell livestock or products for cash, it is usually in the informal market: men are more active and women less so the further markets are from home and the more formal the setting. However, market norms can change over time: as a result of an increase in households headed by women, women can play an increasingly prominent role in livestock management and marketing. This can increase their workload but also their independence.

Women, livestock income and economic empowerment: In dairy markets, women's greatest challenge is keeping the income they have traditionally enjoyed; as markets become more formal and commercial, income tends to shift to men. Many women traditionally sold milk and dairy products through informal markets for cash which they kept and used for household purchases. However, in East Africa, milk sold to chilling plants is paid by a weekly cheque to the head of household, usually the husband, even when the woman is the main operator of the enterprise. Women's economic empowerment is routinely cited as an objective for livestock interventions, but the definition must include their ability to earn income and the power to make and act on decisions. Small scale poultry production often follows this pattern as well, and income shifts to men as it becomes more lucrative.

Participation in marketing co-operatives: Group membership and collective action enhances the ability of poor men and women livestock keepers to access resources and influence decision-making. Men and women, however, often belong to different groups: men's groups tend to be more market oriented, women's more informal and are more likely to deal with family welfare.

Due to the perishable nature of livestock products and small marketable surplus, the role of farmer organizations is likely to be far more critical in the case of livestock products than crops. Organized female farmers are, therefore, central to realizing the potential of the livestock sector for poverty reduction. Many small-scale women-centred agricultural cooperatives have emerged to pool resources, establish economies of scale and create greater collective bargaining power for resources, land rights and market access. They often need outside assistance, however, due to weak organizational skills, especially to become formal cooperatives.

Participation beyond the farm - processing: Compared to men, women tend to be paid less and take part in less financially rewarding livestock processing activities. In most countries livestock is a stronger stimulus for economic growth than crops, fruits and vegetables, manufacturing and service sectors, and the benefits of livestock sector growth are usually more equally distributed because of a web of indirect linkages across distribution, processing and marketing activities.

Gender and livestock data

One of the main challenges for policy makers in Africa has been surveys or census data that assume that households are groups of individuals who have the same preferences and fully pool their resources. This model has been rejected in both developed and developing countries, with important implications for policy; an alternative, the collective model, allows for difference of opinion regarding economic and other decisions among household members.

The gender dimensions of asset ownership, including livestock and control of livestock products, and their implications are not reflected in agricultural censuses due to a lack of awareness of the assumptions about men and women in the African household. Therefore, it is rare to find data indicating the distribution of assets among household members, so policies cannot be developed to strengthen the most vulnerable. Data collection is often targeted at heads of households, with the assumption that he is the owner of livestock and other assets. Rarely is data on assets and livestock ownership targeted at other individuals within the households and especially women.

Recommendations for integration of gender equality throughout livestock value chains

Based on the preceding review and analysis, a series of recommendations are made for better integration of gender equality throughout livestock value chains.

Make livestock policy more people centred: The full integration of gender equality goals as well as smallholder participation will make livestock policy more effective at increasing production, income generation, food security and protecting and enhancing public health. Substitution of the words ‘men and women’ for farmers, producers or processors can help reinforce the notion that gender differences matter and must be accounted for.

Make gender-aware agricultural policy decisions: Virtually any agricultural policy related to natural resources, technology, infrastructure or markets will affect men and women differently because they play different roles and experience different constraints and opportunities in the sector. Good agricultural policy requires an understanding of the gender dimensions at stake.

Women’s voices in decision making levels: Women’s voices should be heard at all levels in decision-making through their groups and co-operatives, as members of boards of co-operatives, as policy makers, researchers and extension managers in the livestock sector.

Gender analysis in the livestock sector: Increasingly, both the donor community and national governments require gender analysis before making agricultural sector investments. Gender analysis means an understanding of typical current behaviour of men and women within the household, community and country, and the likely impacts of the intervention on the gender roles and responsibilities.

Disaggregating livestock data by sex in national statistics: Efforts to systematically integrate gender variables in livestock data collection need to be scaled continent-wide. This will ensure that sex disaggregated data is available for all countries and is used to design gendered policies for the livestock sector.

Use sex disaggregated data to inform policy and livestock development programs: Livestock development programs should always start with a gender analysis to understand the specific constraints and opportunities that exist for men and women. Interventions must address these constraints, reduce gender inequalities and ensure equitable and sustainable benefits to men, women and the socially marginalised.

Reduce gender disparities in access to resources to support livestock development: Effective livestock development must begin with dismantling discrimination against women in access to agricultural resources, education, extension and financial services, property rights and labour markets.

Gender focused research and training agenda for the sector: The research agenda should focus on livestock owned by women, in labour saving technology for women, technology for home processing of dairy products, prioritization of small ruminants and poultry, and mechanisms for listening to women’s priorities and understanding their context. And livestock training should integrate approaches that reduce gender inequalities and involve women in different aspects of livestock development.

Broaden partnerships between and within governments, and with NGOs and the private sector: Cooperation and coordination with appropriate ministries and other organizations to mainstream gender equality throughout the livestock sector is essential although it is recognised that this is difficult to achieve. Partnerships in the livestock sector, especially at the policy formulation level, need to be broadened to include more actors. Inclusion of NGOs that have experience implementing gender and women focused livestock programs can bring in much needed insights to livestock policy development.

Use a food systems approach: Women’s role as producers, processors and especially purchasers and preparers of animal source foods means that nutritional campaigns must target them. As purchasers of family food, women must be able to have the means to buy wholesome food, so their income streams must

be protected and expanded: policies affecting informal markets for milk, poultry and 'street food', while protecting public health, must also provide women and men with the means to comply with standards, to ensure their livelihoods.

Livestock and gender learning network: There is no single comprehensive and searchable space for information on livestock and gender, yet the need is increasing as more and more institutions seek to mainstream gender and are looking for models, tools and expertise. A livestock and gender network is needed to facilitate sharing of information and experience.

Conclusion

Integrating gender equality goals throughout the livestock value chain will take intentional effort, budget and a willingness to move beyond the sureties of the past. It will, however, give the livestock sector the best opportunity to enhance productivity and food security, and forge collaborations with other sectors to ensure its rightful place in the future of African agriculture.