

# Chapter 19

## Gender Roles in Livestock Management: Experiences and Lessons from Projects in the African Highlands

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### Introduction

Livestock were a key component in defining status in African communities before the coming of capitalism. Previously people held the mistaken view that “the importance of livestock reflects limited opportunities for cultivation, and rainfall is too unreliable to permit a pastoral economy” (O’Conner 1966). This mistaken view has led to a great dearth of information about livestock production and its importance in the way of life of most African communities. A close examination shows that livestock are considered very valuable; many grain producers regularly convert their grain into livestock, especially in times of uncertainty. Most communities that are able to raise cattle, camels, or goats do so to the fullest extent possible. Among East Africans wealth and cattle are interrelated as cattle represent money, as well as being used for subsistence, and are only slaughtered and eaten on special occasions.

This picture of the value of livestock is changing, however. The time has passed when livestock were used as currency with cattle constituting an almost exclusive hallmark of wealth. Modernisation has brought pressure to accumulate capital in the form of cash rather than livestock, and the pressure on land and the need to modernise agricultural production mean that livestock are no longer as highly valued as in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The political structures have also had a negative impact on livestock ownership; capitalism insists on intensive production, and the time when livestock were kept for aesthetics is long past. Nevertheless, for rural communities, livestock are still very important for household income and wealth.

There are many rural development projects concerned with livestock and agriculture, but few focus on issues of gender and management of livestock, especially in mountain ecosystems. The way that societies construct roles around the biological differences between men and women affects natural resource management. Projects concerned with livestock rearing and general production rarely address the adaptations made by women, and in most cases it is assumed that it is the men who are conversant with the rearing of livestock.

This chapter describes some of the main observations made about gender roles in livestock management during the implementation of a gender and livestock project from the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), an international non-government organisation based in Rugby, UK, that operates all over the world. In Kenya (East Africa), ITDG is active among the Akamba of Machakos and Makueni Districts, the Adkars and Nattoo of Turkana District, the Gabbara of Marsabit District, and the Samburu of Baragoi. Different aspects of gender relations in livestock management were noted in the communities in the project areas. The author describes the relationship to the different livestock roles allocated to men and women in these communities. Most of the observations were made in 1994 as a part of an ITDG project; a few were made in separate research programmes.

### **The ITDG Approach to Rural Development**

In Kenya, as in the other countries where ITDG works, the main aims are as follow.

- To raise awareness of the constraints, inequalities, and vulnerabilities that exist among poor people
- To highlight the technological capacity of disadvantaged groups of people and to improve the use of technologies by giving these groups more control over their lives –thus helping them to contribute to the sustainable development of their communities
- To address women's vulnerability in terms of low socioeconomic status, less political representation, heavier work burdens as a result of arduous domestic tasks and responsibilities, and cultural and religious constraints
- To show that economic hardship and vulnerability severely constrain people's abilities to make choices in life, including technological choices; ITDG works towards enabling both women and men to have equal access to technological choices which could improve their lives
- To recognise that women as well as men have wide-ranging, but undervalued and often unrecognised, technical skills and capacity
- To recognise that violence against women is widespread and cannot be ignored; violence increases vulnerability and restricts women's capacity to choose

The fundamental approach used by ITDG recognises the fact that gender roles are not given but social and ascribed; but nevertheless, such roles may contribute to the relative disadvantage of one sex in relation to the other. Raising gender awareness of constraints, inequalities, and vulnerability where they exist, and highlighting the technical capacities of disadvantaged groups of people, will improve the quality of ITDG's work in all areas.

Internationally ITDG considers gender awareness as a key issue in planning and assessing development projects – a safeguard to ensure equal opportunities for all members of the community, in particular women, who are often marginalised. But are the programmes actually considering gender in all its aspects, or just focusing on the involvement of women? What are the benefits to a development programme of including gender analysis in its planning, monitoring, and evaluation programmes? Is it just a fad of the nineties? There are many answers to these questions, but one important point is that a project is likely to fail in its aims if it discriminates against a group of people who make up more than half the target population.

The ITDG country programme in Kenya has a commitment to gender awareness. By examining ITDG's Kenya projects closely, we hoped to find out how these translated into practice and to answer some of the questions posed above. In this way we hoped to come up with a methodology of approach that is more effective for assessment of progress. The observations reported here are the findings from different mountain communities.

## **Gender and Livestock Management**

### *Gender and technology*

Research has shown that specific spheres of activity become the specialised domains of different genders as they increase their knowledge and skill over time. As a result, knowledge and skills held by women often differ from those held by men. Although women's knowledge and skills dominate certain technologies, many women face barriers to the access and control of essential items (Grundin et al. 1994). Such factors must be taken into account in any consideration of the role of gender and gender awareness. It is not just a question of assessing the 'involvement' of women, but one of access, control, and benefit. The kinds of relationships that exist between men and women will affect hierarchies of access, use, and control, resulting in different perceptions and priorities for the innovation and use of technology by women and men.

### *The Turkana project*

ITDG works with the Nattoo and Ngisericho Adakars, two very mobile livestock communities in the north of Turkana in Lokitaung division. These communities

move according to water and pasture availability and the security situation. The main aims of the project are to improve food security, livestock productivity, and the self-reliance of these pastoral Turkana. As a part of this, the project looked at the implications of different types of work for all members of the community. The different roles associated with livestock were investigated to see whether men and women of all ages were involved in and benefited from all stages of the work in an appropriate manner.

The roles of both men and women in society were looked at before the project activities started. The assumption was that any involvement of people in development activities can result in a change in gender roles. Male elders have a strong authority and take the major decisions on the family and herding groups; although women still have a significant position within the society. Women have a clear voice as they are free to talk in front of men and be represented at the community 'tree'. This made it easier for ITDG to encourage an increased role for women in decision-making.

Turkana women play a key role in maintaining household food security. Each married woman is responsible for feeding the members of her day house or 'ekol' (i.e., children, husband, and dependants). She prepares, stores, cooks, and serves all food, whether animal products, or purchased or aid food.

Women play a significant role in the general management of livestock, although men maintain structural authority. Traditionally women tend to milk and water the animals and are solely responsible for the smaller ones. They are usually the first to notice sick animals, and then bring this to the attention of their husband or father.

Women are taking up new responsibilities as much as the men are, and are also very active once trained. Women have gained valuable skills. This has increased their status in the group, and some roles previously allocated to men have been released to skilled women (such as some initial treatment of livestock). As a result of the search for capital, many men have migrated to towns leaving women as the sole livestock keepers. Women have become responsible for animal health care, and are usually part of discussions about herd marketing and family labour. Even so, the study found that women have only a limited role in treating animals with modern drugs.

### *The Samburu Baragoi project: ethno-veterinary knowledge (EVK)*

ITDG has been working with the Samburu in Baragoi since 1989. The original aims of the programme were to assist local pastoralists in animal health care strategies by working with livestock product marketing and improving animal health. Women and men were trained separately in animal health because it was found that their roles in day-to-day life were quite distinct.

The training programme began with a group of men, after which a group of women was trained with the agreement of the men. Training in the diseases of small stock was encouraged because of the frequent absence of men and 'morani' (the young male warriors) from households, which left women to cope with the health of the livestock. At first the men thought that women were not strong enough to carry out the heavier tasks such as holding cattle down for treatment, but women have been known to do such things in the absence of their male relatives.

Women now go to purchase drugs more often than men, and if they have been trained they take a more active role in animal treatment. They are often the first to notice sickness in an animal. Men and women will often diagnose together, but the man will usually make the final decision and supervise the treatment. However, the knowledge of a skilled woman who has received training will be respected, and her opinion will be sought. Some women are recognised to be experts in specific areas (e.g., birthing or retained placentas, or with small stock or cattle).

So far all the training in animal health has used local names and local understanding of treatment as a basis. There is an urgent need to record knowledge of traditional treatments of animal diseases (ethno-veterinary knowledge or EVK) before it is lost. Moreover this knowledge is still very much needed and used by the poorer members of communities who cannot afford 'modern' drugs.

The keepers (owners) of traditional knowledge in formal terms are male, however research in Baragoi has begun to look at the utilisation of EVK by different socio-economic groups, many of which include women. Women also have everyday knowledge of traditional treatments and herbs, although they might not be referred to as traditional healers. There is a difference between men and women in terms of knowledge and dispensation of treatment. Often men and women will have the same general awareness of diseases and basic treatments, but it is women who go to collect the herbs and grasses if they grow close by (if far away, the morani are sent) and then mix them (under supervision of the man). If the problem is serious, however, the man will treat the animal. Gender is therefore important in the analysis of EVK.

### *The Yaa Galbo of Marsabit Gabbra project*

ITDG works with members of the Yaa Galbo clan in Marsabit Gabbra in a project called Decentralised Animal Health (DAH). This is an institutionalised service support for livestock health. Other areas of need are water supply and issues related to livestock product marketing.

Women are responsible for the house and home, and can sell milk products, but men are still in charge of any cash sales of animals or other products. In most

households, decisions on whether to sell, slaughter, consume, lend, or give an animal – and which animal – are usually taken jointly between the senior man and woman. Women are free to make decisions about veterinary matters in the absence of men. Men slaughter and skin the animals, but women are the butchers. Women also do the daily cooking and process meat into jerky and other products. A woman takes all decisions related to milk and to most of the meat and hides produced by the household. Women are generally considered to be more expert at milking (especially sheep); men are thought to be less patient and gentle. Gabbra women take most decisions related to small stock and consider that keeping such animals is the best way to meet their needs. They also need camels to carry water and to move house, and for milk.

### *Maasai housing*

In this project it was clear that women's workload was increasing compared to that of men. Women said that men do less work now because they trade and visit town, whereas the women now herd as well. Some women who could afford it had even employed shepherds (younger men) to look after their herds while they were being trained or were working with the women's group. Women's daily tasks have increased

#### **A typical day in the life of a Maasai woman (without construction, building, or marketing activities!)**

- 6.00 Wake up, make fire, put on tea to boil, milk cows
- 7.00 Drink tea and feed children, sweep home and wash dishes
- 8.00 Go to cattle enclosure and separate cows from calves, let cows graze
- 9.00 Return to sheep and goat pen and separate the goats from the kids
- 10.00 Prepare boiled milk and clean gourds; cook ugali and vegetables for family.  
Make beds, clean house
- 11.00 Walk to collect water (average five miles one way). Takes about two hours
- 2.00 Often very tired so may rest for half an hour, children return from school, eat lunch
- 2.30 Wash up and clean up again after lunch
- 3.00 Rush to collect firewood from nearby to keep up stock in house, and leave it to dry
- 4.00 Put tea on to boil again for the children and men, and prepare meat and milk for dinner
- 5.00 The goats and sheep come home, and are put with the kids and lambs
- 6.00 Separate goats from kids, and pen up separately. Calves come home
- 7.00 Cows come home, milk cows
- 8.00 Separate cows and calves
- 9.00 Eat dinner
- 10.00 Clean, wash up, put children to bed. Talk with husband
- 11.00 Go to bed

in number and duration with the changes resulting from settlement, and many of the women felt that they work much harder than in the past. During building and construction women have to shelve their traditional duties for another day, only ensuring that the essentials (water, cooking) are completed. They will then try to catch up on their tasks the next day, or ask their daughter-in-law to assist.

### *Farmers projects in Ukambani*

ITDG has been working with poor marginalised farmers in Ukambani since 1988 in the more arid areas of settled farming where crop agriculture is not predictable and farmers depend much on livestock.

The main aims of the work in Ukambani were to

- understand the constraints for resource-poor producers of livestock,
- develop an appropriate and self-sustaining network,
- share information and knowledge with other similar groups,
- increase livestock productivity, and
- strengthen liaison between the 'wasaidizi' (assistant para-vets) and the community

In Ukambani both men and women participate in the rearing of dairy cows and goats. Generally it is men who have control of the money used to purchase livestock, i.e., goats and cows for breeding and initiating herds. This is because men control the money generally and are the ultimate owners of the livestock and the land on which the livestock are reared.

The most common practice for rearing livestock that the respondents knew about was extensive grazing. This involves taking livestock out to graze wherever pasture is found and bringing them home in the evening. The system is becoming increasingly less feasible since communal land is decreasing as a result of the main form of land tenure being individual with issuing of freehold titles. Nowadays, in most of Kola, only teenage children take livestock to graze extensively and only during the school holidays. Households that are members of a Konza group ranch also practise extensive grazing.

Tethering of livestock is another common feature of production management. This was more widespread among the farmers in Kola where many gardens were full of green crops than in Kathekani where very little cultivation had taken place. Tethering is meant to stop the animals from spoiling crops. Animals are usually tethered in an area where they are able to graze, they are moved to several locations or are provided with fodder where they are tethered. Some livestock were managed without any

grazing; fodder and water are brought to the animals, which are milked in the morning and in the evening.

Other production activities include dipping animals once a fortnight to prevent ticks. Both women and men farmers in Kola seemed to be well aware of dipping requirements and dipped their animals. This was not so in Kathekani, however. In principle, both women and men performed most of the activities for production. However, in practice in most of the households observed, the men had migrated to towns for off-farm employment and women performed most of the production processes alone.

In most households, men, when present, tended to avoid the most arduous and repetitive tasks such as milking and caring for sick animals. Women do most of these, yet they lack the necessary training and access to money to purchase the necessary materials. Men are very much in control of all transactions dealing with the sale of goats and milk, and have exclusive rights in the slaughter of goats.

There is an almost acknowledged law throughout Ukambani that women should never slaughter a large animal for whatever purpose. The society acts as a check to ensure that women dare not revoke this law. Women are, however, free to slaughter chickens, and they have full control of any money they obtain selling them.

## **Conclusions**

Although women have knowledge and experience of almost all aspects of management of livestock, it is the men who have the upper hand in decision-making and control over household livestock resources. Equality of access to resources does not guarantee control over benefits, and this is one reason why development programmes need to be more perceptive in bringing about empowerment. Without equality of control, women are unable to benefit from the improvements from the development endeavour. A gender sensitive approach to the evaluation of livestock development programmes should help ensure equity.

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