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WOMEN'S ROLE IN ENHANCING INNOVATION IN LIVESTOCK FARMING: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Livestock accrues benefits to women that include food, income and insurance against crop failure. This gives rise to the need for gender-friendly policies that promote and encourage women to own livestock. Women remain in the ranks of poor livestock keepers, although they make up two-thirds of the population of livestock keepers. Factors that influence livestock productivity among women range from rights to land, access to high yield breeds, application of new technologies and practices, access to education and extension services, and rigid cultural systems among others. These factors handled in a gender sensitive manner would go a long way to realise increase in livestock production and income.

INTRODUCTION

This paper draws from studies conducted in various parts of the world to identify challenges that women face in livestock farming. It seeks to influence women's capacity to participate in, and profit from animal husbandry. Addressing gender disparities in livestock production means understanding its relevance and addressing different issues such as needs, livelihoods, priorities, interests, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and ability. Gender is a critical issue that crosscuts livestock production. By understanding the various roles that gender plays in livestock production, we can improve their outcomes and effectiveness.

The paper posits that many countries, especially in Africa still face challenges with enacting legislation that relates to actionable access and control of resources at community and household levels for women. There is urgent need to support projects that serve as entry points for women and aim at capacity building, to augment women's knowledge and skills; with the desired end being improved livelihoods and economic growth for their communities and families. The study has further provided recommendations for possible solutions, best practices and initiatives for gender approach to support comprehensive, sustainable social and economic development.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study uses the gender perspective to present livestock as a source of livelihood as developed by the International Livestock Research Institute. This point of view takes a livelihood approach that impinges importance on assets, markets and other institutions. The framework hypothesises three pathways out of poverty: securing current and future assets, improving and sustaining the agricultural systems' productivity important in livestock farming and facilitating greater participation of the poor in livestock-related markets. This framework has been used before to explore livestock as a source of women's livelihood (ILRI, 2010).

WOMEN AND ACCESS TO ASSETS

In most developing countries, rural populations are heavily dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Livestock is also a key asset for rural livelihoods. (AGA, 2013). Rural women are major participants and play a crucial role in livestock farming and are responsible for many daily tasks. Rural women and men, depending on the region and livestock sub-sector, often have specific knowledge about different aspects of animal husbandry. But women's access to adequate knowledge, improved technologies, financial services, and other relevant social services remains a critical issue. The livestock sector has predominantly been trending upward, with the small-scale production systems experiencing growth thereby supporting livelihoods and subsidising the gross domestic product significantly (WCILD, 2016). The main users of the locally adapted livestock breeds are women. They play a central role in animal resource management, thereby conserving them. They are usually responsible for the breeding decisions with a preference for animals that are disease resistant and easy to manage thereby reducing their workload (Köhler-Rollefson, 2012).

Despite women's involvement in livestock farming, gender roles are customarily prejudiced against rural women who face many obstacles unlike men in obtaining the necessary tools that help them reach their full potential in the livestock sector. Women have limited access to resources, hardly any extension services and limited participation in decision-making. They enjoy a smaller share of the income derived from livestock farming compared to their male counterparts. Recognising and integrating these diverse roles and specific dynamics into projects and programs can improve their outcomes and effectiveness.

Gender disparities also have negative consequences on the women's ability to earn a stable income and have an adverse impact on the household income earned from livestock production. The nature and work of the women who operate within the livestock sector make them susceptible to various health and safety issues such as the heightened exposure to zoonotic diseases (Patel et al., 2016). Another challenge that women face in the livestock sub-sector is limited access to natural resources and control. Despite women being crucial contributors to agriculture and food security, their management of biodiversity, energy, water and land remains way lower than the men. Ownership of livestock is particularly attractive to women in societies where, due to cultural norms, women's access to land and mobility is restricted. The land user's ability are hampered as they are unable to upgrade and develop livestock activities, since they often lack grazing land and also lack collateral for investments (AGA, 2013).

Women have limited access to technologies, training and extension services. Culture limits women's mobility and freedom to leave their homes. So, they are systematically challenged from taking part in extension meetings or group activities. Women are often left out of the male-dominated networks and training. The women's lower status and input to households restrict their control and decision-making power over assets and income. In many rural areas where cultural and social norms are unyielding, women are not engaged in the decision-making process.

Limited access to financial services is another challenge for women that results from many factors. SIDA (2015) notes the lack of collateral, customary rules and limited credit schemes designed for women as part of the challenge. These constraints narrow the business scope preventing women from hiring needed employees or forcing them to use obsolete technology. Ensuring women have control and access to resources such as land, livestock, markets, information and

credit strengthens their influence and social empowerment. This paper attempts to encourage governments to design livestock policies with a targeted gender approach that will encourage poverty reduction and food security.

Despite their major role in the management of livestock assets, women have poor access to markets and play a limited role in the commercialisation of livestock and livestock products. This tendency often arises due to various factors including low levels of literacy, customary practices that prevent women from freely leaving the house, their marketing strategies and information inadequacy. Thus, a market imbalance exists between the sexes in the benefits accrued from livestock-related income (Patel et al., 2016).

EXPLORING WOMEN'S ROLE IN INCREASING AND SUSTAINING LIVESTOCK PRODUCTIVITY

The relationship between women and the productivity of livestock is a growing area of interest among scholars due to the different purposes for which women keep livestock. Some women keep livestock for non-productive cultural reasons, they have livestock because culture dictates. On the other hand, others have livestock for food, security and income; which are productive. However, the non-productive reasons usually outweigh the productive ones hence posing a challenge in improving livestock productivity. Other studies have also shown that livestock farms managed and operated by women for non-productive use do better than male-owned ones (ILRI, 2010). The lack of rights influences how these women engage in productive livestock activities such as investments and income generation, oscillating them towards non-productive livestock farming at the expense of productive farming. To address this phenomenon, various interventions need to be put in place such as encouraging the rearing of high yielding breeds, and applying of new technologies or practices (SIDA, 2015).

Köhler-Rollefson (2012) posits that three-quarters of Asian women's household responsibilities include managing livestock. Related studies show 90 percent of Nepal women as engaged in livestock production compared to 75 percent of the men (Herath, 2009). A study conducted in Central and Eastern Kenya by Njuki (2004) indicates that more women are responsible for the feeding of cattle while men concentrate on watering and disease management. Identifying the different roles undertaken by women in livestock farming is vital in recognising the various challenges they face; giving room for developing projects and programs tailored to their specific needs.

PROMOTION OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LIVESTOCK MARKETS

Keeping of livestock has a myriad of benefits that accrue to it. The animals reared are a source of food and fibre and can also be sold to the market for their meat and other by-products. The income earned can be used to access other commodities needed by the livestock keepers. The same animals (livestock) act as insurance against crop failure; that is, considering that they also produce dairy products which contribute towards nutrition. With the exception of cattle that requires rangelands, most livestock require small spaces for rearing. Livestock also provides manure used to produce biogas and provides excellent means of transport as well. Some keep goats to control weeds, as well as for their meat and protein benefits. Empowered women can gain access to land and are able to make choices that grow the economy and enhance food security (International Animal Agriculture, 2016).

With small holding farmers accounting for 80% of Africa's agricultural output, women are the backbone of rural and national economies and by extension development. They constitute 75 percent of the world's agricultural labour force in some parts of the world. They also make up two-thirds of the 600 million poor livestock keepers (Kohler-Rollefson, 2012). It is imperative that policy makers appreciate the role that women play considering their sheer numbers. In as much as they make up the largest agricultural workforce, they still fill the ranks of the poorest among livestock keepers.

The notion of benefits-sharing would work well as it assumes that goods and services are resulting from the benefits the environment provides to its range of potential users (Uprety, 2006; Costenbader, 2011). Benefits-sharing in this context applies to proper sharing of environment benefits (like the grasslands) among farmers who benefit from its pastures, and the lands are likewise rejuvenated from organic manure from the livestock resulting in a win-win situation and also reducing conflict on reserve lands because of legitimate multiple land use. Promoting and supporting sustainable rangeland management can accomplish this result, enhancing nutrient recycling, soil fertility, preserving other forms of biodiversity and wildlife. Making specific political choices to design benefit sharing mechanisms that seek the most promise would be a win and no regrets solution (University of California, 2016).

More than half the world's lands are used for livestock related production (Stanford Report, 2010). Policy influences the consequences of livestock production, which varies with the policy context and institutions involved and the production systems. One challenge women have faced under livestock farming has to do with access to grasslands. Many of these lands have been placed under conservation which has resulted in conflict with authorities over the lands use. The lands teeming with wildlife have been encroached upon in a search for pasture for the livestock. However, encouraging the women to perform integrated livestock farming is a part of the solution. The women can utilise paddocks, or better yet zero-graze the livestock which is then fed from the wastes generated from the farm produce. Zero-grazing also reduces the need for expanses of land and more livestock can be kept in smaller spaces and are easier to take care of. This way, women are not constrained for land and can produce more with less.

COMMERCIAL LIVESTOCK FARMING: MARKETING AND EXPORTS

The Horn of Africa has benefited from donor programs that have made significant investments in livestock in pastoralist areas. Attention has since extended to live animal exports from the region. Commercialisation of agricultural outputs and by extension the export trade are a force in driving out poverty and at worst reducing its effects/levels. This hinges on the assumption that a linear relationship exists between access to superior export markets and poverty alleviation according to Aklilu & Cately (2009).

A study commissioned by the Inter-governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) Livestock Policy Initiative and instituted by FAO challenges the understanding that pastoralists are universally poor. The IGAD report states that the poverty indicators that are used in such studies have no bearing on the pastoral setting. Even so, they found livestock holdings to be a better poverty measure than household incomes. This calls for policy-makers to appreciate better this concept and its economics logic to be able to plan better (Ibid). This makes a case for encouraging women to get more involved in livestock farming and appreciating that livestock farming is not a sentence to abject poverty.

Most pastoral cultures keep livestock for reasons such as social status. The men under these settings have the final word on matters related to the animals and the women and in some cases, children are limited to providing labour. In the off-chance the women own any livestock; it is basically on a subsistence basis. A change in attitude among women would be easy to inculcate if they could collectively as a group be given animals to rear for commercial returns. Considering they already play the role of labour, this should not create a ripple in their social setting. The incomes generated would go a long way to collectively empower the women. In the event that women make any proxy sales, the proceeds are still handed to the men who are culturally entitled to the assets with women having a passive role.

The women's limited power and influence are in part contributed to by their lack of wealth or stock ownership. Limited access to markets and information, risk tolerance, their levels of vulnerability and low business acumen among others equally work against them. However, these factors can be worked on for the betterment of the women to reduce their passive response and reluctance to markets and exports. The strategy should employ poverty-focused approaches targeting pastoralist areas as this would support and explicitly encourage herd growth among the poorer families, empowering them in the process; developing secondary infrastructure like roads, mobile phone communications to levels similar to the non-pastoral areas and development of markets where none exists. Easier access to traders offers reduced transaction costs and would also render trade monopolies less likely, making the poorer herders more bankable. Financial facilities should be tailored to their aspirations, along with preventing avoidable animal deaths with clear policies and appropriate veterinary services (Aklilu & Catley, 2009).

CONCLUSION

For women to benefit from livestock farming, the nature of support should be well defined to appreciate their makeup as the largest livestock farming labour force who perform the bulk of the work. It thus stands to note that empowered women have generational benefits that tap into the household, not usually the case with men. As a result, there exists a saying that if you educate a woman, you educate the entire village, to support what several studies have established. That said whatever actions are taken have to consider the impediments to women's development without rocking cultural settings. It should also note the different needs women have. It calls for more involvement of women in the making and implementation of these solutions and policies to create practical resolutions with far reaching results.

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