

Women and animal traction technology: experiences of the Tanga Draft Animal Project, Tanzania

by

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Abstract

Tanzanian national policies recognise that society cannot develop fully without actively involving women. Women are much more involved in agricultural production and in domestic activities than men, but at present they do not enjoy equal status with men. In particular, they do not have the same opportunities as men to acquire skills in new technologies, such as animal traction. One of the main constraints is women's lack of access to investment capital or loans to purchase draft animals and implements: available loan schemes require securities which women cannot provide. Also, social and cultural factors mitigate against women using animal traction.

In contrast to many development projects, which only pay "lip service" to women's issues, the Draft Animal Project in Tanga Region is involved in several programmes specifically designed to help give women access to investment capital through unsecured loans, and hence to involve them fully in the development and use of animal draft technologies. Key issues for the future include the provision of specialised training opportunities based on the use of women trainers to overcome cultural barriers.

Background

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in Tanzania: this sector employs more than 80% of the country's population of about 24.5 million people, and contributes around 61% of Gross Domestic Product and 75% of foreign earnings. Tanzania's agriculture is mainly based on smallholdings, and only 14% of the land is cultivated by larger enterprises.

Tanga region, in the extreme north-east of Tanzania, covers an area of 2800 km², of which almost 18% (480 500 ha) is cultivated, and about 3% is used for grazing and pasture. The rest of the land is covered by bush, forests and swamps.

With annual rainfall ranging from 600 to 2000 mm, most areas in the region appear to get sufficient rain to sustain rainfed agriculture. But the unreliability of rainy seasons and the relatively low probability of minimum precipitation are major problems for agriculture. Average temperatures range from 5 to 32°C.

The present population is 1.32 million, 86% of which live in rural areas. The average population density for the whole region is 49 people/km². The annual population growth rate (1978 to 1988) is 2.1%, which is slightly less than the national average of 2.8%. Children (0–14 years old) comprise 46.7% of the population, the middle-aged group (15–54 years) 44.9% and the aged group (over 55 years) the remaining 8.4%. The active labour force comprises 41.6% of the total population; 39.4% are engaged in agriculture and 2.2% in industry, including part-time craftsmen.

By 1990 Tanga region had a total of 866 000 cattle and some 3800 donkeys: 160 of the donkeys were imported into the region from neighbouring areas through the efforts of the Tanga Draft Animal Project

Animal traction promotion

By December 1991 the Tanga Draft Animal Project had promoted animal traction to a total of 300 farmers in 120 villages spread over the region; a further 60 farmers had started using the technology, but had stopped, for various reasons, since 1981. Of the existing active farmers, 32 are women (24 as individuals and the rest in organised groups). Active working animals and implements in the region comprise about 450 oxen, 240 donkeys, 270 plows, 170 carts, 25 ridgers, 35 cultivators and 30 harrows. A total of 16 farmers' clubs (self-help "savings and credit" societies) have been organised and supported to assure sustainability of the technology.

A total of 21 demonstration plots are operated and maintained as a means to disseminate suitable crop husbandry practices to farmers. Some 131 local village extensionists have been trained on the technology and are fully involved in providing extension services to farmers. These complement the efforts of 11 seconded extensionists (one being a woman) and 12 animal trainers (two being women) stationed at the project to serve farmers in rural areas.

Position of women in Tanzania

Tanzanian national policies emphasise the need to give adequate attention to the development of women in society. It is recognised that society cannot develop fully without actively involving, and tapping the potential of, the greater portion of the community—the women. Women do almost all the domestic work and play a major role in agricultural production. But they own hardly any land (they thus find it difficult to get loans and are overlooked by agricultural advisors and projects) and are concentrated in the lowest paid occupations.

Women are dramatically under-represented in decision-making bodies (from household level up) because of their poorer education, lack of confidence and greater work load. In addition, male “chauvinism” very often tends to overshadow women’s initiatives and efforts, and poses a threat to further initiatives.

Although the household appears to operate on a team-work basis with regard to family-oriented activities, women and children are generally regarded as “helpers” in achieving goals set by men. Household members’ rights and obligations to each other are determined by their relative positions in a male-dominated age–gender hierarchy. The responsibility for ensuring that households are able to meet their survival needs rests with the household head, who allocates resources such as land, draft animals and equipment and provides purchased inputs for agricultural production.

Because women are not property owners, it is difficult for them to have full control over the use of family resources, especially when their ideas or interests are in conflict with those of the male household head.

The rate of adoption of animal power for farm operations could have been faster if a more appropriate approach had been taken to recognising women as farmers in their own right, independent from men. One major problem is that there has been little progress with regard to women’s access to capital for draft animal investment. Although women are encouraged to apply for loans, banks and other financial institutions have very strict and tough regulations on loans (for example, on compulsory securities) which many women cannot meet.

Many women’s programmes do little more than pay “lip service”, for propaganda reasons, to women’s issues: although projects may decide to include women as a priority, this is often just to be able to meet their own ends rather than to help women to solve their social and economic problems. Worse still, most women in rural areas are not aware of the facilities offered by financial institutions in urban areas. How can one expect them to make full use of such services?

Women and animal traction in Tanga

The Draft Animal Project in Tanga Region initially followed the traditional approach of supporting household heads (in most cases men), the

Women learning to plow during a demonstration arranged by the Tanga Draft Animal Project



Photo: Paul Starkey

assumption being that they would disseminate the acquired skills to all the other members of their families. This approach, however, reached only a few women, and the impact on them was negligible. By 1987 it was, in the main, only male household members who had access to the technology, and worked with draft animals and implements.

There are several reasons why the men have not involved the women in animal traction. For example:

Physical factors. Draft animals are regarded as wild animals, to be confronted by men who are deemed to be somehow stronger and more courageous than women.

Cultural barriers. Along the coastal belt (which is mainly Muslim), women cannot stay away from the house for long periods without the prior consent of their parents or husbands. Because using animal traction technology would keep them away, it contradicts the cultural norms and values.

Status. Women have no power of disposition over the household's resources and means of production (land, capital, labour, know-how, etc).

Something needs to be done to boost the social and economic position of this disadvantaged group in society.

Since 1988 the Draft Animal Project has been striving, through publicity meetings, demonstrations, open discussions and interventions during extension work, to encourage women to make full use of this technology. Women are now convinced that draft animals can relieve their day-to-day burden of supporting their families. Female members of farming families, women household heads and women's groups are approached actively and shown how they can benefit socially and economically. Some examples of the success of this approach are presented below.

Since November 1990 two women's groups and two individual women farmers have been working on a road regravelling scheme run by the Norwegian sponsored rural roads maintenance programme (RRM), in cooperation with the Draft Animal Project. RRM finances the procurement of the required draft animals and implements. It does this in cooperation with the special fund for promoting self-help activities, sponsored by the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD). The sponsored farmers are contracted by RRM and are obliged to work for a reasonable time while servicing the loan. No security is required from the women, and loan recovery is effected through monthly deductions from their wages. The women do all the work themselves, from excavating the

gravel to spreading it on the road. This arrangement not only gives the women gainful employment (albeit seasonal), but also helps them to acquire investment capital. The scheme has also attracted more farmers to draft animal technology.

The Draft Animal Project has created a small "revolving fund" from its own resources to help needy women farmers who are in a position to repay extended short-term loans. The women enter into a contract with the project and a loan recovery schedule is mutually agreed between the two parties. Five women's groups and 22 individual women farmers have been assisted by this programme.

Other organisations have also started to show an interest in assisting women farmers in the region, in cooperation with the Draft Animal Project. For example, the GTZ-supported Village Development Programme has assisted one women's group by financing the purchase of draft animals and implements. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has just become active in the country, concentrating mainly on small projects. It has already shown interest in exploring ways of assisting women farmers in the region. Existing farmers' clubs, organised as self-help "credit and savings" societies, are a potential source of initial investment as well as the working capital. As women are active members of these clubs, they can share this advantage with their fellow male members.

The Draft Animal Project's efforts have shown that good progress can be made towards extending the use of draft animal power if women have access to capital for initial investment.

Some key issues

Strategies for development of women

Without proper strategies the move to accelerate the involvement of women in development, by giving them easy access to initial investment capital (at least for their mini-projects), will never materialise. Most programmes seem to be initiated in the name of "female emancipation" by people who do not want to be seen to be unaffected by the propaganda and pressure surrounding the International Decade for Women. Because there are no appropriate strategies directed at women, these "propagandist" programmes mainly end up benefiting men (as usual).

If we are to be serious about the development of women, women should be approached and fully involved as a group independent from men: women's particular social and economic characteristics must be considered and, if possible,

incorporated into the planning and implementation of the programmes. For example, because women are not sole property owners at household level, asking them to provide securities for bank loans is both pointless and an obstacle to full utilisation of what are sometimes known as "soft bank loans for women development".

Sustainability

If the use of animal traction is to be sustained and expanded among women, the sociological aspects of animal traction need to be addressed at least as much as the technical and economic issues.

Status of animal traction

Some planners and policy-makers discourage the promotion of animal traction technology; they perceive it as merely an archaic technology to be used only as a "hobby" or as a last resort, even when it is demonstrably appropriate under prevailing social and economic conditions. This deprives women of opportunities to engage in income-saving and income-generating activities through, for example, the use of draft animals for contract work on rural road regravelling, plowing and transport.

Training

When planning training in animal traction technology, thought should be given to the particular needs of women. For example, women might feel more confident about learning to use animal traction if they were taught by women trainers. Also, many husbands and parents are hesitant to allow their

wives or daughters to stay away from the farm or home during training with male trainers, and the use of women trainers might alleviate this problem.

Conclusion

Experience of development projects has proved that projects that are not gender-specific do not treat women and men equally. On the contrary, women are often not given the same opportunities as men, even though they are much more involved in agricultural production and domestic activities. It is therefore justified to pay specific attention, and give explicit support, to women to enable them to use draft animal technology efficiently.

The major constraint to the full involvement of women in draft animal use is lack of access to draft animals and implements, due to the lack of investment capital and to male "chauvinism". Specific measures must be designed and implemented to address these problems and to involve women fully in this technology. Women need to be trained in the use of animal traction either by including them in existing programmes or by designing specific women's programmes. The prevailing social and economic situation in most of our societies confirms the impression that animal traction is a useful and appropriate technology, with many advantages to women; if properly utilised, this technology could lead to important increases in women's incomes and to improved nutrition for their household members.

A woman farmer, who was trained by the Tanga Draft Animal Project, using donkeys for weeding



Photo: Paul Starkey