

# Gender and animal traction: a challenging perspective

by

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## Abstract

*In sub-Saharan Africa migration of males from rural to urban areas and increased schooling of children has placed an increasing burden of agricultural labour on women's shoulders. Women in eastern and southern Africa constitute 60–70% of farmers and produce about 80% of the food. However, the contribution of women to the economic welfare of the peasant family remains a neglected topic in the analysis of agricultural production. Animal traction technology introduced to women is often inappropriate because women have not been consulted during design and planning.*

*In general, women's daily lives are dominated by the need to acquire basic necessities first. For women to benefit and participate fully in an animal traction project, these constraining factors have to be recognised explicitly: a gender-sensitive planning approach has to be adopted. Project planning should incorporate a detailed gender analysis and gender awareness needs to be emphasised in all levels and activities of a project or programme. Involvement of women as a group independent from men can be an effective method of ensuring women's full participation. However, care should be taken not to define women's advancement only as a concern of women, but as one which particularly requires cooperation and a change of attitudes by both men and women. This paper suggests practical steps which can be taken to achieve this and discusses the related policy issues.*

## Historical perspective

Sub-Saharan Africa has undergone tremendous changes during the last century: colonialism is gone, market economies progress, subsistence agriculture has made room for cash-crop production and advanced technology is being introduced into all sectors of society. Despite this, some things seem to remain the same. The division of labour in rural areas has not changed much since the beginning of the century. In about 1900, W S Bazeley, Native Commissioner to Umtali in Southern Rhodesia said "Women are required

under the present system to grow food for the greater part of the native population"

(Schmidt, 1992). This shows that as soon as men left the rural areas to enter wage employment and a growing number of children spent the better part of the day in school, an increasing burden of agricultural labour fell on women's shoulders. Tasks that had previously been accomplished with the help of other household members, men or children, were done by women alone. Even in 1944 it was estimated that women did as much as 80% of agricultural work (Schmidt, 1992). This pattern has not altered despite all the other changes in the region.

Animal traction is not an end in itself, but a means for intensified agriculture and increased production. With a rapid rate of population increase and high pressure on arable land, increased food production is one of the main concerns and priorities of the governments and peoples of sub-Saharan Africa. Improved technology and better management have been suggested as mechanisms to reach increased production. Improved timeliness when cultivating with animal power and the larger amount of land that can be cultivated greatly increases yields. The use of draft power also alleviates farmers from some of the hard manual labour tasks. These are the two main reasons for using animal traction in agricultural production.

Then who are the farmers and the producers of food and cash crops in eastern and southern Africa? Women in eastern and southern Africa produce about 80% of the food. However, men produce a larger proportion of the so-called cash crops and produce more, relative to the area, than women. Women constitute 60–70% of farmers, but cultivate a smaller area than men. The technology that women use is often simple, such as hand hoes; men may own or have access to draft animals.

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### Invisible female farmers

The role and the contribution of women to the economic welfare of the peasant family remains a neglected topic in the analysis of agricultural production. Women are in many ways the invisible agricultural producers. Invisible to 'developers', invisible to extensionists, invisible to those who disseminate agricultural technologies like animal draft power. Development programmes and the promotion of animal draft technology have been directed mostly at male farmers, forgetting that the majority of farmers are women.

Women, along with men, are subjects of development, but development so far has had a different impact on women relative to men. Although women are not a homogenous group, their weak economic positions result from an overwhelming concentration of their economic activity in the unrecorded domestic sector, the unpaid labour on the farm or other family enterprises (of their husbands') and labour done with patron-client relationship. Thus, the traditional division of labour between sexes has been one of the basic factors causing the unequal share of women in the development process, because it restricts women to the domestic sphere and to tasks that are traditionally 'female'.

Many of the problems with development planning and programming arise from traditional theories of development, which overemphasise economic concerns as opposed to the human resources and well-being. National development planning, within which animal traction programmes are implemented, has also often been ineffective due to lack of consciousness of the interdependence of the social and economic aspects of development. The situation has been compounded by gender inequalities that are manifested in all aspects of life.

This is especially important because women are not an isolated group in society, and the well-being of men and children is closely linked and dependent upon women's well-being. Therefore, it is imperative that women contribute effectively to and benefit fully from development for both their own well-being and that of men and children. A number of researchers in the area of gender issues stress the fact that unless, and until, women are given wider access to economic and political

power, food insecurity and malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa will continue to increase. This is partly attributed to lack of access to and control over factors of production, including technologies such as animal traction (Jazairy, Alamgir and Panuccio, 1992).

The point at issue is the need to be aware that women operate within wider social and economic processes. In practice, these processes have the potential to constrain women from adequate performance even in their readily visible role as mothers. For example, poverty, the state of want or of lack of access to the basic necessities of life is, first and foremost, an economic and political problem. Thus, at the domestic level, a poor woman who is faced with the hungry eyes of her children cannot be expected to participate effectively in a project that does not address the poverty of her economic situation and priorities even if she recognises the intrinsic benefits of that particular project. In reality, her daily life is dominated by the need to acquire basic necessities first. This means that for women to benefit and participate fully in an animal traction project, such constraining factors have to be taken into consideration.

### Gender planning

Thus, for animal traction projects with specific gender components to have long-term impact, women have to be perceived both as active agents of change as well as beneficiaries in the development process. Project impact should be measured both in terms of the division, by gender, of labour and resources within households as well as by division of returns to labour.

Methodologies for surveying and data analysis for purposes of planning and project design tend to be gender biased. For example, Jazairy, Alamgir and Panuccio (1992), point out the general assumption made by development planners that household heads are male, regardless of who is supporting the family. As a result, government and development agencies, which administer primarily to men have failed to make substantial investments that would increase female productivity. For example, concentration of animal traction use on cash and export crops, which are dominated by men, as opposed to traditional food crops grown by women, mainly for home consumption.

One strategy for reaching out to women to ensure full participation in animal traction projects specifically and in development generally as proposed by Makwanda (1994), is to involve women as a group independent from men. The same strategy is advocated by Marshall and Sizya (1994). Through organising women into groups they gained access to and were able to control draft animal technology.

On one hand, we have to recognise that 'women only' projects in one sense demonstrate the underprivileged status of women in society. It is because women have been neglected in development that they have to be given special attention in order to address the imbalance. On the other hand, care should be taken not to define women's advancement only as a concern of women, but as one which particularly requires cooperation and a change of attitudes by both men and women. In some circumstances, for example in sex-segregated environments, based on either tradition or religion, women-only projects are the only option.

Typical animal traction projects are introduced as a means of improving smallholder farmers' productivity and improvement on agricultural output and income. It has, however, become increasingly clear that targeting project benefits to the rural population generally and hoping that women within the communities in question will get their share, simply does not work. Moreover, the design of such projects does not take into consideration the nature of tasks to be performed by each gender within households. The time and labour requirements of such projects do not take into account the already overburdened schedules for women.

### **Women's participation in animal traction projects**

In a number of cases, animal traction projects have tended to allow men to expand the amount of land under cultivation for cash crops and reduce their workload in land preparation, while increasing women's workloads in transplanting, weeding, harvesting and transporting produce from the field. This point cannot be overemphasised as it has been elaborated upon by a number of researchers (Rwelamira, 1993; Doran, 1994; Marshall and Sizya, 1994; Sylwander, 1994 and

Thrupp, Cliff and Estes, 1994). This, and similar negative effects of animal traction technology on women necessitate a reorientation of animal traction programmes to serve women better. Affirmative action type strategies aimed at simply providing oxen and animal traction implements will not suffice. An holistic approach which calls for the re-examination of the past and current socio-economic and political institutions within which women operate is essential.

### **A policy issue**

Women are central to Africa's agricultural performance and food security. All the case studies that present data on the subject of women's roles in agriculture report that women are a key resource in food farming and provide a substantial part of agricultural labour for crops grown primarily for sale. Moreover, there are indications that with increasing male migration in search of waged work outside the food and agriculture sector, women's responsibilities in food and agriculture are expanding. However, despite the well-documented key role of women in food and agriculture, there is still a gap in the policy and technical support necessary for improving the value of women's labour in this sector. The evidence is that women still mostly carry out hoeing and other manual operations and even where agriculture is commercialised, the demand for labour is mostly for non-mechanised tasks (weeding, tea and coffee picking, etc).

The gender gap in agricultural policy and technical support derives in part from the historical policy bias in countries which have favoured the development of commercial agriculture aimed for the export sector (initially coffee, tea and later hybrid maize) and the neglect of the small farm sector which produces food for up to 80% of the population.

Within the above scenario, animal traction projects or project components addressing gender issues will make little headway in changing the status quo, if the national policies and institutional environment is not conducive. The International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) project experiences suggest, inter alia, a comprehensive approach for addressing issues related to gender and food production and security. Macro-economic and agricultural policies and programmes that will

help rural women to make the best use of the resources available to them should be in-built into all rural development projects (Jazairy, Alamgir and Panuccio, 1992).

### **Agricultural extension and training**

Traditionally, national extension and training institutions and curricula in developing countries are not particularly sensitive to gender issues. They are mainly based on western models and are staffed almost exclusively by men and offer services to men. Projects also suffer when information and training are given only to male heads of households. Advice on production, inputs and use of specific technologies like animal traction are often transmitted incorrectly from husbands to wives.

Sensitivity in animal traction training programmes is also essential for women with young families, who tend to be least flexible. For women between 18 and 45 years of age, child care and household demands limit the potential for learning new skills and new activities. To target this most productive age group of the female labour force, training programmes have to be based locally and for a short duration at a time. Hocking (1994) reported successes of mobile ox-plowing courses for women in the Western Province of Zambia. This strategy could be applied elsewhere to increase women's participation in animal traction courses.

### **Access to agricultural inputs and credit**

Women need to save and borrow in the formal financial sector. However, formal credit systems are not geared to small farmers generally, and women who lack title deeds to their land or other assets to pledge as collateral are worse off. Several African countries have small-scale credit programmes under way to provide credit with less reliance on land as collateral and more on peer pressure and the ability to pay. For women to participate fully in animal traction projects they need credit to purchase equipment as well as hire or buy animals. Special loan schemes are necessary to circumvent the obstacles.

### **Female-headed households**

The incidence of households headed by women and the growth in their number has emerged as an important indicator of poverty. It is estimated that

31% of rural households in Africa are female-headed. The capacity of such households to own and use animal traction and other resources effectively has significantly decreased over the years. Male migration has increased labour shortages, especially for land preparation, and has reduced productivity. The absence of male labour has increased women's reliance on child labour (boys) which has led to children being withdrawn from school in some instances.

In South Africa, an IFAD special programming mission reported that the use of oxen for plowing had been reduced because of male migration. Females who become de facto heads of households as a result of male migration are affected in several specific ways. First, they are often limited in their access to agricultural technical support and services because of the assumption in extension practice that men are the farmers. Second, men continue to hold overall authority. Third, since male migration is higher in the low or poor potential agricultural zones, female-headed households tend to be poor.

Female-headed households seem to require special programme emphasis because this phenomenon is an outcome of emerging economic circumstances which tend to work to the disadvantage of women.

### **Gender analysis and planning**

To overcome the constraints and difficulties with involving both men and women in animal traction projects a gender-sensitive planning approach has to be adopted. The first step in sensitive project planning is a gender analysis. Various tools have been developed by ATNESA to assist planners to do this (see Sylwander and Mpande, 1995).

A gender analysis includes the following key issues:

- identification of the division of labour
- identification of the resources available to men and women and the benefits they derive from these activities
- analysis of the needs, the conditions and positions of women and men
- analysis of the relationship between the division of labour and the access to social, economic and environmental resources.

The first tool in gender analysis is to develop an activity profile for identification of gender roles. Some key questions for animal traction projects are:

- who is currently using animal draft power for which activities?
- which tasks could be done using animal power?
- which activities are most time-consuming and labour demanding? Who does this work?
- how can the project address the need for labour reduction in reproductive activities as well as productive activities?

The second tool to be used is an access and control profile. The analysis of the flow of the resources and benefits is essential in understanding how a project will affect women and men. The necessary differentiation between access and control of resources can be directly related to the control and access of benefits derived from project activities. Some key questions for animal traction projects are:

- do women and men have equal access to the animals and equipment used for traction?
- who controls draft animal power resources?
- can current patterns of access and control over draft animals be changed?
- who has access to credit for draft animal power?
- how has information and extension on animal draft power been disseminated in the community so far?

The third tool takes into consideration other factors that can influence the potential impact of a project, and presents opportunities and constraints to project goals and activities. The following factors have been suggested:

- socio-cultural factors*: societal norms, societal organisation, traditions, religion etc.
- economic factors*: poverty level, inflation rate, infrastructure, credit facilities etc
- environmental factors*: quality and availability of land, climate, rainfall, availability of firewood etc
- political factors*: power relations and control, government bureaucracy, legal system, land ownership etc

*demographic factors*: migration, life expectancy, infant mortality, nutritional status, female-headed households etc

*institutional factors*: health care, extension, education, veterinary services, hospitals etc

*legal parameters*: right to ownership, right to vote, family rights, inheritance, the right to credit etc.

By using these tools, project planners may be able to develop a picture of gender roles and relations in a society.

The fourth and final relation in a society is to identify the specific gender needs that men and women have. *Practical gender needs* are the immediate and daily needs such as food, water, housing healthcare etc. Practical needs can often be met in a project context with specific inputs. *Strategic gender needs* refer to long term issues which are common to women and men. They relate to the disadvantaged position of women, lack of power, education, resources, decision making etc.

For animal traction projects it is crucial to identify both practical and strategic needs that can be met by the project and by the use of draft animal power. For further discussion refer to Sylwander and Mpande (1995).

## Conclusion

Animal traction projects and programmes have to be reorientated to address issues of equity, human development, women's roles in society and sustainability of development. An holistic and integrated approach is needed to address gender issues in animal traction. This may not always be possible within a project context. Thus women need to be integrated thoroughly in all phases of development from the planning stage, as well as in their social and political surroundings. Animal traction technologies that can effectively reduce labour and time requirement for weeding, food processing, water and fuel fetching could alleviate women's drudgery substantially.

Gender awareness needs to be emphasised in all levels and activities of a project or programme. Women and men have to be part of all aspects of project design, implementation and evaluation. A strong recommendation is to ensure that the entire staff has been gender trained and gender sensitised.

To solve the inherent problems of the diverse and complex gender issues encountered in the introduction and promotion of animal traction programmes in eastern and southern Africa, animal traction research systems must be given a new direction. The emphasis should be on establishing a system which approaches research as a problem-solving process directly related to gender issues and evolving with changes in people's conditions of life, their resources, education, skills, family composition and the prevailing environment.

Most importantly, animal traction technology must be based on the active participation of the community for whom it is intended, from the definition of problems to the selection, application and evaluation of possible solutions. Too often, animal traction technology introduced to women is inappropriate because women have not been consulted during design and planning. Equally important is the fact that the development and diffusion of animal traction appropriate for women's major tasks require increased research funds to be allocated to food crops, food processing and transport projects.

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