



Gender and livestock: tools for design

The term *gender* refers to culturally based expectations of the roles and behaviour of women and men. It distinguishes the socially constructed from the biologically determined aspects of being male and female.¹ Gender issues focus not only on women, but on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, and division of labour and needs. Gender relations determine household security, well-being of the family, planning, production and many other aspects of life.

Livestock is generally considered a key asset for rural livelihoods. It offers advantages over other agricultural sectors and is an entry point for promoting gender balance in rural areas. In particular, because (a) in most societies, all household members have access to livestock and are involved in production; (b) livestock activities are a daily occupation: animal products such as eggs and milk are produced, processed and marketed throughout the year, without seasonal restrictions, in all livestock-keeping communities, with women responsible for the bulk of the work; (c) livestock production systems offer the potential for introducing a wide range of project activities relating to gender mainstreaming, including improved production methods, and redistribution of intra-household tasks and responsibilities.²

For these reasons, it is important to understand:

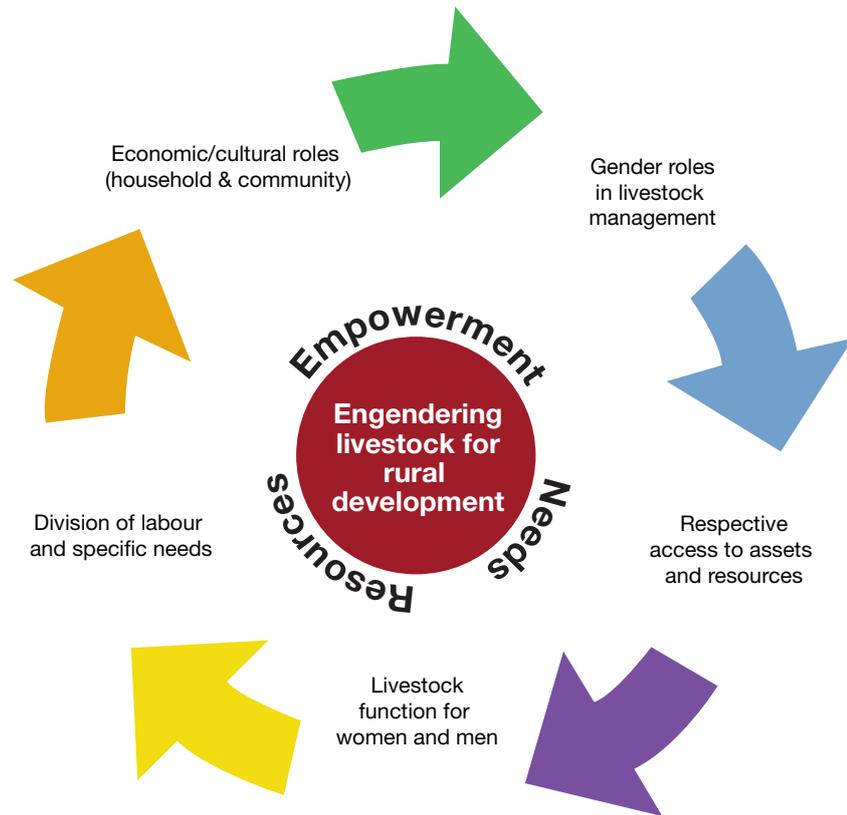
1. The function of livestock for men and women;
2. The various gender roles played in animal management;
3. The economic and cultural roles of livestock within the household and in the community.

¹ IFAD, 2003.

² Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2000.

Figure 1

Key issues associated with gender and livestock



Women's typical role within a livestock production system is different from region to region, and the distribution of ownership of livestock between men and women is strongly related to social, cultural and economic factors. Generally, it depends on the type of animals they raise. In many societies, for example, cattle and larger animals are owned by men, while smaller animals – such as goats, sheep, pigs and backyard poultry kept near the house – are more a woman's domain. When the rearing of small animals becomes a more important source of family income, ownership, management and control are often turned over to the man.

Women play an important role in livestock management, processing and marketing, acting as care providers, feed gatherers, and birth attendants. They are also involved in milk production, although not

all women control the sale of milk and its products. Identifying and supporting women's roles as livestock owners, processors and users of livestock products while strengthening their decision-making power and capabilities, are key aspects in promoting women's economic and social empowerment and consequently provides a way to enable rural women to break the cycle of poverty.

Women³ are typically responsible for milking ewes, processing and selling milk products, providing feed/fodder and water, caring for newborn lambs/kids and sick animals. Young girls are also involved in the grazing of goats and sheep, whereas married and young women are responsible for household activities.

Typical male tasks include herding, cutting branches for home feeding and administering modern medicines. Wool-

3 Lo Bianco, 2007.

4 Work on gender and ruminant livestock production is limited, especially gender disaggregated data on access to resources and benefits.

shearing, giving traditional vaccines against sheep pox, and castration are exclusively the domain of men for socio-religious reasons.

Most of the work and decision-making by women takes place at the household level, while men take the sheep for grazing and participate in public meetings that relate to sheep husbandry. Almost all important decisions are taken jointly by both the man and the woman heading the household. These decisions include which animals to sell and at what price, disease diagnosis and treatment of sick animals, and ram lamb selection. Women negotiate dung prices with farmers, while men negotiate wool prices.⁴

Despite their considerable involvement and contribution, women's role in livestock production has often been underestimated, if not ignored. Gender-blindness is the result partly of a paternalistic bias, and partly due to the attitudes of the women themselves, who may be conditioned by their culture and society to underestimate the value of their work. As a result, it is difficult to obtain information on the role of women in livestock production from existing research and project reports. In addition, women's work is rarely reflected in national statistics.⁵

Access, control and management of such resources as small ruminants, grazing areas and feed resources empower women and lead to an overall positive impact on the welfare of the household.

Main benefits for women

- *Decision-making and empowerment.* Livestock ownership is increasing women's decision-making and economic power within both the household and the community. It is also a source of cash and can open up access to credit (the sale of small ruminants can provide an emergency source of cash for medical treatment or school fees, while daily milk provides a regular flow of cash income often used to purchase food and household items).
- *Household welfare.* The management, processing and marketing of livestock

products generate more income than most of the activities women tend to be involved in, and bring benefits for the whole family (for instance by increasing food security at the household level: small ruminants provide food products such as milk, butter, cheese and meat, all of which are a source of protein, minerals and vitamins);

- *Income generation.* Animals provide raw material such as wool, skins, and bones used by women to make clothes, or as fuel for home consumption and for sale. Processing of these materials can be an important source of additional employment and income for poor rural women;
- *Self-esteem.* Owning, controlling and benefiting from livestock production increases women's self-esteem and strengthens their role as producers and income generators within the household and in the community.
- *Access to credit.* Livestock ownership increases the likelihood of gaining access to credit.

Obstacles and constraints

- *Insecurity of land tenure for women.* Apart from private ownership, security of land tenure can take a variety of forms such as leased public land or user rights to communal property. Limitations on access to or use of land inhibit agricultural productivity and consequently affect rural women's income.
- *Lack of access by women to capital and knowledge and lack of control over assets.* The obstacles faced by women in gaining access to basic assets constrain their socio-economic empowerment and overall economic growth and poverty reduction.
- *Ownership of different livestock species.* Milking, processing and marketing of milk products, does not necessarily mean that women can control decisions regarding livestock or own it.

⁵ Niamir-Fuller, 1994.

⁶ IFAD, World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). *Gender in Agricultural Livelihoods Sourcebook. Gender and livestock module – Overview*, 2007.

- *Women's control over income-generating activities.* Women are often not in charge of selling milk and other livestock products and/or do not have access to the income gained from the sale.
- *Gender aspects in livestock projects.* In the past, livestock projects were mainly oriented towards production issues such as breeding, feeding and animal health. More attention is needed to incorporate women farmers into project design to guarantee women's active participation and involvement in the different project phases and activities.

Other substantial gender asymmetries remain between women and men⁶ in particular with regard to

- *Access to markets* and distribution of risks and gains along different steps of livestock value chains varies according to the gender of (i) producers (e.g. rights to income generated from livestock); (ii) processors (access to processing technologies and information); (iii) market agents (access to transportation, safe market spaces and overnight accommodation, risk of sexual harassment and abuse); and (iv) economies of scale (bringing women together to improve their market position).
- *Risk and vulnerability.* Women and men have different experiences and capacities to face: (i) livestock sector trends (e.g. policy biases and changes, "supermarketization", the lengthening of livestock value chains, vertical integration); (ii) regional shocks affecting livestock (climate/ecosystem change, drought, flooding, animal disease, demographic changes, political upheaval, conflict); (iii) household shocks (illness or death of family member; "distress sales" of livestock to pay for medical treatment, property or asset grabbing).
- *Access to information and organization,* specifically to (i) livestock extension and veterinary information and services; artificial insemination services;

participation in developing livestock programmes and policies (e.g. vaccination, culling and restocking programmes); (ii) emerging livestock-related technologies (e.g. fodder, breeding, disease prevention, livelihood decision-making tools); and (iii) training and involvement as community animal health workers and paraveterinarians.

Key issues and questions for project design⁷

Given that gender has a bearing on the goals, activities and impact of a project, gender considerations should be systematically included in logical frameworks and translated into concrete activities monitored by appropriate indicators.

The task for project designers is to consider these factors, assessing to what extent and how they will affect or be affected by the project.

For livestock interventions to be successful, the following issues have to be considered:

- *Ownership of land.* Security of tenure is an important precondition for women's empowerment. *Given the complexity of different tenure systems, project strategies should be tailored to the context of the region and society, with the aim of guaranteeing and expanding women's access to, and control over, land.*
- *Access to capital and knowledge.* Women generally lack collateral, decision-making power in the household and control over loans. Ensuring women's access to extension services, knowledge, credit and technologies is therefore critical. *Project experiences show that special credit lines for women are successful if these are made transparent and adapted to the cultural and social reality of the concerned families.*
- *Ownership of livestock.* For women, purchase or receipt of a cow does not necessarily imply ownership. *Analysis of the specific conditions of the project area and target households and monitoring of change are important to formulate and achieve realistic project goals.*

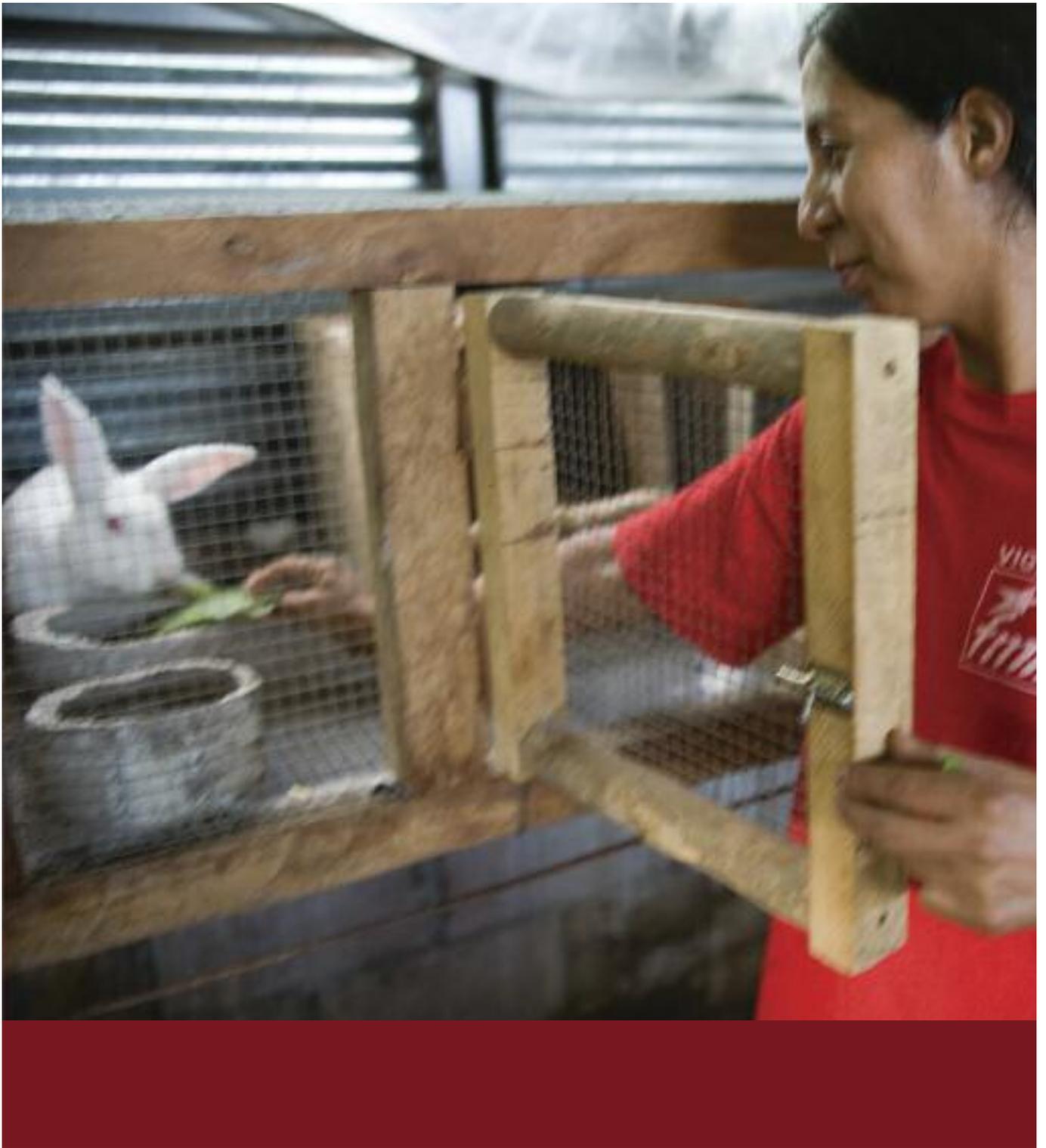
⁷ IFAD, 2003.

Figure 2

Pillars for women's empowerment in the livestock sector



- *Responsibilities and division of labour.* Including women in project activities does not automatically benefit them. Periodic analysis of labour, with corresponding adjustments to the time spent by women on the different tasks, or introduction of labour-reducing measures could diminish the risk of overwork.
 - *Role of livestock in household nutrition.* Due to differences in the ways in which men and women use income, *increases in men's earnings from livestock-related activities may not be necessarily translated into improved household nutrition*, whereas women tend to prioritize household well-being. Moreover, project designers should be aware that if the project objective is to increase the income of small farmers, the nutritional and social needs of vulnerable groups will need to be met through special programmes.
 - *Influence of processing and marketing of livestock products on household economy.* The division of work between men and women in processing and marketing needs to be analysed and project activities adapted accordingly.
 - *Role of farmers' organizations.* An important function of well-organized farmers' groups is to represent the interests of their members. Therefore, specific measures should be included at design to guarantee women's participation in such organizations (or create organizations specifically for women if needed).
 - *Information and relevant indicators* (livestock production systems and types of animals; crop/livestock linkages; availability and quality of land, availability of inputs; management of natural resources; use of technology; relationship between livestock and other activities; gender disaggregated seasonal occupations and sources of income) should be examined from a gender perspective.
- Other issues to be considered at the design are as follows:
- The function of livestock for the various household members needs to be understood and fully taken into account.
 - Measures to improve productivity and production will only succeed if additional



income can be generated by selling products outside the home. Women's access to markets, mobility and control over the proceeds of the sale are important considerations in this respect.

- To increase livestock production, women should receive special training that is tailored to their specific needs and constraints (such as content of training, timing and social restrictions).
- Efforts to introduce new technology that does not take into account traditional practices by men and women will not be successful.
- Patterns in livestock activities (such as feeding, watering and milking) shift in response to seasonal changes, and affect the labour input of women and men.

Key questions for design

- Which types of livestock do men and women own? And what does ownership mean in reality?
- How does women's access to livestock affect their decision-making power?
- Does owning land affect women's ability to own livestock?
- Which activities do men and women carry out, with which animals, and which products are they responsible for?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the livestock system?
- Do women control the income generated by production and marketing of livestock products?
- Does access to livestock affect women's access to other resources (such as credit, pasture, water)?
- Do women have access to veterinary services?

Recommendations and lessons learned

IFAD together with its partners (the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas [ICARDA], the International Livestock Research Institute [ILRI], FAO and others) has accumulated solid experience in gender mainstreaming in development projects.

Lessons and Recommendations

- *Identification of women's role* as livestock owner, animal health care provider, feed gatherer, birth attendant, and user of livestock products and support to their decision-making capacity are central to the effective implementation of gender-responsive interventions.
- *Women's safety.* Gender roles in the provision of water and feed for livestock should be considered. For instance, poor women and girls may not have equitable access to water, or they could suffer exploitation or risk violent assault if they have to travel distances to fetch water.
- *Women as animal health care providers.* Women (and girls) are often responsible for small and/or young stock, including the diagnosis and treatment of livestock diseases. They should therefore be involved in animal health interventions and training.
- *Social and cultural norms.* The design of veterinary services should take account of local social and cultural norms, as these may affect women's role as a service provider. (i.e. in some communities it is difficult for women to move around freely or to travel alone to remote areas where livestock sometimes graze).
- *Women's workload.* Although the position of women livestock keepers can be improved through income-generating activities (i.e. processing and selling livestock products, trees and forage products, and wildlife products), women's daily workload is already extremely heavy, leaving little time to diversify or enhance their livelihoods. As a consequence, labour- and time-saving opportunities merit special attention.

Project design should ensure that the planned activities do not compromise the interests of women in target communities.

- *Women's access to assets.* Women's economic and social empowerment is linked to their access to productive resources and basic assets (water, land, fuelwood, markets and knowledge), their participation in small-scale dairying and their role in decision-making.
- *Women and markets.* Women need to become more market-oriented and identify new economic opportunities. Their role in community decision-making needs to be strengthened.
- *Role of social networks.* Women's status and decision-making role within the family depends on their access to and control of land, livestock and income and on the presence of social support networks.
- *Role of farmers' organizations.* It is important to increase women's negotiating power and decision-making role in farmers' organizations. Women's organizations and the role of women in farmers' organizations should receive special support.

Other issues

- As income-earning opportunities in areas of livestock production traditionally handled by women increase, control of these areas may be taken over by men. An agreement among men and women beneficiaries that protects women's position must be found.
- The role of women and their empowerment in the local and regional livestock production system should receive special attention. The local practices at the basis of livestock production must inform all development initiatives, and proposed technologies should be economically feasible, socially accepted and low risk.
- Although income is not the only factor that determines women's socio-economic position, it greatly influences their status and living conditions. Increasing women's income by boosting livestock production therefore strengthens their position. As men may feel threatened by this process, projects must involve men and women in all negotiations to bring about equitable and sustainable changes.
- Efforts are needed to increase the capacity of women to negotiate with confidence and meet their strategic needs.

Box 1:

Gender-oriented strategies and priorities for pro-poor research into small ruminants

The increasing demand for meat and milk in many countries highlights the potential benefits that can be derived from livestock production, such as employment and income generation, and improved food and nutrition security across production systems and along different value chains.

However, global change and economic globalization, rising demand for livestock products, increasing prices of agricultural products, growing urbanization and migration are all threatening these opportunities.

Addressing these challenges and ensuring that the development of small ruminant production is socially, economically, and environmentally sound will require innovative and creative approaches to research.

First, approaches and interventions should be gender-sensitive and should recognize and build on women's and men's custodianship of local knowledge about animal husbandry and livestock disease. The various needs and constraints encountered along the value chain and across production systems must also be identified and addressed.

Research should focus on the interaction between livestock and gender; the implications for natural resource management, markets and rural livelihoods; the links between gender and small ruminant production with a view to improving food supply, incomes and welfare of the rural poor.

Therefore, research should be undertaken on

- Gender roles in livestock production (management, processing, marketing)
- Gender inequality in access, allocation, management and control of resources
- Gender imbalance in the benefits from livestock-related income.

Key issues for research

- Data disaggregated by sex. Work on gender and small ruminant livestock production is limited. In particular, there is a lack of gender-specific information such as data disaggregated by sex on roles, tasks, and access to resources, benefits and income. There has been little analysis of the various roles in terms of gender and most studies that have been conducted at the field level are more theoretical than empirical.
- Gender-oriented research and analysis. Despite the complex nature of women's participation in small ruminant production, the problems of access to assets and other gender-related obstacles – lack of capital, credit and technical skills, inequitable allocation of livestock-generated income – are not well documented. More research is needed to achieve a better insight into their implications for household welfare and poverty reduction.
- The correlation between women, nutritional status of children, and consumption of dairy products should be the object of further analysis, in particular: (a) the contribution of animal source foods to the nutrition of children and pregnant/nursing women, and (b) the lack of proper veterinary care and good standards of hygiene, which exposes children to the risk of serious diseases.
- Research approach and methodology. Research on gender and livestock production needs to be undertaken using (a) a framework that has the flexibility to adapt to a changing socio-cultural environment; and (b) an inclusive approach to the overall functioning of livestock systems (crop-livestock, pastoralism), with special attention to the interaction between the stakeholders and the surrounding elements.

Box 2:

Role of women in poultry farming⁸

Poultry raising and production are the most important livestock activities for many poor rural families worldwide, providing a source of income and a tool for poverty alleviation.

Poultry farming generates cash income and employment opportunities, while increasing production of valuable protein foods (i.e. meat and eggs) that improve nutritional standards.

Rural women traditionally play an important role in this sector and are often in control of the whole process from feeding to marketing, which is not the case in production systems for other livestock species.

For women who stay at home, poultry enables them to (a) help the family in times of need, and have cash for emergencies; (b) save money for future investments; (c) obtain an income to provide for the needs of their children and the household; and (d) supplement the family's protein intake.

Advantages

- Poultry is easy to manage, requires few external inputs, and enjoys good market demand and prices.
- Feeding of backyard poultry is a good example of the recycling of household and farm waste. Women in particular devise innovative ways of using waste products.
- Rural poultry keeping can be used to reduce poverty among women and children in rural areas. By increasing women's income, poultry farming also enhances women's social status and decision-making power in the household.

Constraints

- Distance from markets, limited access to market information, and inadequate transport facilities.
- Lack of vaccines and difficult access by women to veterinary services
- Limited access to knowledge, technology and extension services.
- Limited access to credit (and consequently lack of quality feed and medicines)
- Traditionally the domain of women, poultry keeping is undergoing a shift in roles and attitudes as men become aware of its economic value. This influences women's control over the income generated.

Recommendations and lessons

- A well-organized marketing system, accessible to women, is the key to guaranteeing a better price for their livestock products
- Where women receive training in husbandry practices and gain access to poultry health services, poultry activities are more successful
- Availability of credit is often essential for poultry development in rural areas
- Gender is a necessary component of a poultry project in order to identify factors of production and access to benefits
- The role that women play in poultry production and in rural development needs to be supported by adequate policies and be addressed by policy makers and planners.

⁸ IFADc, 2007 and Rushton and Ngongi, 1998.





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