

Brief on Gender and Livestock

Livestock are important components in agricultural systems and are closely linked to the themes of biodiversity, water, land use, access to resources and environmental degradation. Livestock contribute to subsistence livelihoods as well as provide individuals and families with a source of income through their food products. Tending to and managing livestock, in both rural and urban agricultural systems, involves gender-differentiated practices and knowledge and is influenced by social and cultural norms.

Men and women are involved differently in livestock-related activities, such as fetching water, collecting fodder, caring for the health of livestock and the buying and selling of livestock. While it is difficult to generalize about women in livestock production and management, women are often responsible for small stock such as goats, sheep and poultry, for the care of young and sick animals kept at the homestead and milk production, although not all women control the sale of milk and its products. Involvement in this latter task is not necessarily the women's choice, but provides an opportunity to obtain some additional income. While women share in a great majority of livestock-related work, men are often considered the sole 'farmers' with the prime responsibility of livestock and women are consequently deemed contributors.

Gender-balanced programs and projects have become an important goal for many development agencies. Participatory methods, involving both women and men, are an important tool for success. Project content and approach, however, must be well defined in order that efforts in gender-related issues will have a sustainable impact and that the role of women in the sector is not trivialized. Policy and institutional structures can act as barriers to existing sources of support to women, particularly in obtaining credit to acquire large ruminants.

WOCAN offers organizational change and advocacy to the issue of gender and livestock, seeing policy change and the disintegration of organizational barriers as key to gender mainstreaming in livestock and livestock-related fields.

For more information:

- Heifer International - www.heifer.org
- International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI): <http://www.ilri.cgiar.org/>
- FAO – Gender and Livestock: <http://www.fao.org/WAIRDOCS/LEAD/X6106E/x6106e00.htm>