

Info Note

Gender roles among small-scale livestock producers in Costa Rica

Findings from a case study in the district of Los Chiles in Alajuela province of Costa Rica

Diksha Arora and Jennifer Twyman

JANUARY 2018

Key messages

Both men and women make important contributions to livestock production.

Women's contribution, monetary and non-monetary, even though in an indirect form, supports investment in the livestock sector and ensures smooth functioning of the household.

The spouses take the productive decisions jointly in the livestock sector.

Introduction

As the evidence grows about the critical role of women in agriculture, more and more agricultural development programs and projects aim to address the gender-based constraints to achieve their goals. The process starts with identification of the roles played by men and women in different agricultural activities. The main questions in identifying the roles include - *what are the main activities of men and women on- and off-farm and how these activities contribute to production?*; *do men and women make productive decisions jointly?*; *do women have access to resources?*. In case of livestock activities, the evidence on the roles and responsibilities of men and women is limited, particularly in Latin America. As more attention is targeted to increasing productivity in the livestock sector in Latin America, there is a greater need to increase the evidence on gender roles and intra-household decision-making process among livestock producers in this region.

Gender roles and division of labor in livestock management and production vary across the type of livestock and across countries in Latin America. For example, in the An-

des in South America, women primarily own and manage the livestock, mainly llamas, alpacas and sheep. While in other parts of Latin America, particularly in Colombia and Costa Rica, men manage larger livestock, primarily cattle, and women are responsible for smaller livestock like poultry and also support production in the cattle sector (Arora et al. 2017, Gumucio et al. 2016, MAG 2016). Gender roles in a particular livestock production system differ across various regions in Latin America. In Colombia and Nicaragua, women play an important part in cattle management, processing and marketing, acting as care providers, feed gatherers, and also involved in milk and cheese production (Bernard et al. 2016, Arora et al. 2017). While in Costa Rica, although women play an active role in the production and sale of milk and milk products, their role is minimal in other cattle management activities (MAG 2016, dos Santos et al. 2015). Besides regional variation, roles and activities of men and women in livestock production differ across the scale of production and the type of household. For example, among large-scale producers, women's involvement in on-farm activities in the livestock sector is very minimal while among the small-scale producers women play different roles ranging from animal care to milk production and sales. Similarly, among single- and female-headed households, women undertake all the important roles in livestock production while women with husbands perform supportive roles in livestock activities.

In this study, we make use of two focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observations and two in-depth household interviews conducted in Los Chiles during December 2016 to explore this theme. This info note examines gender roles in livestock production and unpaid work in the household among the small-scale livestock producers in the municipality of Los Chiles in Huetar Norte region of Costa Rica. Women's contribution in the cattle sector is limited to the production of milk and milk products with little involvement in animal care and pasture management activities. Women manage small livestock like chickens, pigs

while many others work in the paid sector, which ultimately supports the household and encourages investment in the livestock sector.

Livestock sector in Costa Rica

The livestock sector is one of the most important economic activities in Costa Rica. Cattle constitute the dominant and most important livestock in Costa Rica. More than 59 per cent of the cattle population of Costa Rica is based in two regions – Huetar Norte and Chorotega (Gumucio et al. 2016, MAG 2016). In this study, we focus on the study site, Los Chiles, in the region of Huetar Norte in the Alajuela province. In this region, the three main production systems are – meat production, milk production and mixed production. Small-scale producers dominate the production in Los Chiles. The main sources of income among the small-scale livestock producers are – sale of animals, milk and milk products. Moreover, households in this en Los Chiles have one or more member participating in off-farm work to generate additional income.

Gender roles in livestock production

Men and women are important actors in livestock production in this zone. They play different roles in on-farm and off-farm activities and support livestock production in various ways. The report on socio-economic conditions and gender in the livestock sector in Costa Rica shows that men, more often undertake the direct tasks in the cattle sector including milking, animal care, commercialization (MAG 2016). Women are active in processing milk products, partly due to the ease of combining household work with livestock activities. This, however, does not imply that women’s contribution to livestock production is not significant. Some women take lead in livestock activities while others support their husbands by contributing their off-farm income for running the household and caring for the household members through their continuous effort in unpaid work.

The livestock producers, both men and women, in FGDs in Los Chiles gave a detailed list of 39 activities performed in the management of cattle and production and sale of livestock and livestock by-products. We group these activities in 14 broad categories and present the participation of men and women in these activities in table 1.

As indicated in table 1, in the study site, women perform most of the tasks related to the production and sale of milk and milk products and also help in activities related to animal care and feeding. Men devote more time to traditional male tasks like pasture management, rotating animals for grazing and caring for animals and women contribute more labor in milk processing activities.

Activity	Participation		Who devotes more labor?
	Man	Woman	
Pasture management	Yes	No	Men
Fertilizer and herbicide application	Yes	No	Men
Caring for animals	Yes	Yes	Men
Cut pasture	Yes	No	Men
Rotation of animals	Yes	No	Men
Managing and cleaning the equipment and utensils	Yes	Yes	Men
Feeding the animals	Yes	Yes	Men
Curing the animals and helping with birthing	Yes	No	Men
Weighing the animals and keeping records	Yes	No	Men
Milking	Yes	Yes	Both
Processing milk (cheese, cream, yogurt production)	Yes	Yes	Women
Selling animals	Yes	No	Men
Selling meat	Yes	Yes	Men
Selling processed milk products	Yes	Yes	Women

Table 1: Men’s and women’s participation and labor input variations in livestock production in Los Chiles, Costa Rica.

Source: FGDs men and women, Los Chiles, Alajuela Province, December 2016.

Gender roles in off-farm paid and unpaid activities

Rural men in the district of Los Chiles consider themselves as *ganaderos* (ranchers). Not being able to perform well in the livestock sector undermines their position in the community; therefore, they dedicate most of their labor to livestock activities to maintain a farm with healthy and productive cows. As a result, in most of the off-farm income generating activities, women are the prominent actors. The main off-farm paid activities in Los Chiles include school teacher, cleaner, cook, restaurant business, grocery store etc. Women participate in these activities and make significant contributions to household expenses. Consequently, many households with additional off-farm income are able to save and invest the income from livestock production in their farms. Adriana in Los Chiles shared her household experience – “I spend my salary on food, electricity and other household expenses, while the money from sale of cheese and animals, we try to invest in buying better pasture seeds, making repairs in the ranch (*potreros*).”

Although it is easier for women in this region to work outside the household and support their families, the women who chose to work in traditionally male-dominated fields, have to struggle more to set an example. The life story of Belen in Los Chiles is an example to demonstrate the struggles women may endure to succeed in a non-traditional role. Belen runs a butcher shop in Los Chiles.

To start her business, she faced problems in obtaining the permits, which she was able to resolve with the help from her brother. The most difficult part as she shared, “was to get informal community approval, or in other words, acceptance. In the beginning, men who came to the shop never greeted me or responded nicely to my greetings. Many of them always asked who the owner of the place and insisted that they get served by the owner.” To these men, it is not normal to see a woman as a butcher since it is a man’s job. Belen worked really hard not only to run her business but also to make good relationships with people in her community. She shared, “I would spend time with older people, play with little kids, help people on the streets with their groceries and little by little, I started to gain their trust.” Her income is very crucial to support the investment on her family farm with 34 cows.

In addition to the financial contribution, women also support livestock production through their significant labor in unpaid work that is essential for running the household and ensuring healthy and productive labor supply. Women in this zone, as in many other parts of the world, manage the responsibility of household chores and unpaid care work with very little assistance from their husbands. In Latin America, typically men are more active in agriculture and livestock production.

Due to higher standard of living and greater infrastructure investment, in Costa Rica many rural households have access to electricity, potable water and modern household appliances. This facility reduces the drudgery of household work for women. Nonetheless, women bear the double burden of work inside and outside the household. In this context, women do most of the household work, which they combine with off-farm paid work and in some cases, helping their husbands in livestock production and processing of milk products.

Lack of time-use and household survey data restricts examination of time poverty status of men and women in this region, however, from the participant observations, in-depth interviews and FGDs, it can be argued that women’s total work load is equal to and in some cases greater than that of men.

Decision-making in livestock production and household management

Even though women are not very active in direct management of livestock, they participate in decisions related to livestock activities. In many cases, husbands consult their wives in decisions related to adoption of new varieties of pasture, buying and selling of livestock, repairs and alterations on the ranch etc. Moreover, women also participate in various technical and capacity building workshops targeted to increase production in the livestock sector. A woman in Los Chiles shared her household

experience, “my husband always consults me in all the decisions related to the farm, if I do not know about the technology, I ask him to explain me and we try to weigh the benefits and costs of adopting something different.” Another woman shared that, “when I do not feel confident to take the decision related to the livestock, I relegate it to my husband.”

The control and management of household finances is usually shared between the man and the women in the household in this region. Women have a greater say in the management of basic household expenses and they tend to be “more efficient,” as shared by men in the FGD in Los Chiles. Overall, women in this region are empowered to make decisions in household management and finance and also contribute in productive and investment decisions related to livestock.

Conclusions

This study provides an account on gender division of labor in livestock production and household activities in Los Chiles in Costa Rica. The system of production in the livestock sector in Los Chiles region in Costa Rica is a joint system, where both the man and the woman are involved. There are gender differences in roles and responsibilities between livestock and household (unpaid work) production as well as within the tasks in livestock production. In general, men’s labor participation is higher in pasture management, livestock care and management, production of meat and buying and selling of animals. On the other hand, women are more active in activities related to processing and production of milk by-products. The women in Los Chiles are more active in off-farm paid sector and contribute their income to take care of household needs, which allows on-farm investment of the income from livestock production. The unpaid activities like maintenance of the household and care provision is the woman’s role in this society that tends to increase the overall work burden of women.

This research is the first step to visibilize women’s direct and indirect roles in supporting livestock management and production in Costa Rica. Further research, particularly intra-household and time-use surveys at the national level are needed to fully and accurately illustrate gender division of labor and interactions between intra-household relations and livestock production in Costa Rica .

References

- Arora, D., Arango, J., Burkart, S., Chirinda, N. and Twyman, J. 2017. *Gender [im]balance in productive and reproductive labor among livestock producers in Colombia: Implications for climate change responses*. CCAFS Info Note. CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS). Copenhagen (Denmark).

- Benard, M.A., Urbina, M.A., Corrales, R., Der Hoek, R. and Ojango, J.M. (2016). "The silent cattle breeders in central Nicaragua." in *A different kettle of fish? Gender integration in livestock and fish research*, edited by Pyburn, R. and van Eerdewijk, A. Volendam: LM Publishers.
- Dos Santos, N.; Tapias, A., González, E., Larios N., Méreida N., and Turren T. 2015. *Participación de las mujeres y los jóvenes en la actividad ganadera en Santa Cruz, Turrialba*. Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza, Turrialba, Costa Rica.
- Gumucio T, Mora Benard M. A., Twyman J, Hernández Ceballos M. C. 2016 Género en la ganadería. Consideraciones iniciales para la incorporación de una perspectiva de género en la investigación de la ganadería en Colombia y Costa Rica. Documento de trabajo CCAFS No. 159. Programa de investigación de CGIAR en Cambio Climático, Agricultura y Seguridad Alimentaria (CCAFS). Copenhagen, Dinamarca. Disponible en: www.ccafs.cgiar.org
- MAG (2016). "Estudio de condiciones socioeconómicas y de género en la ganadería de Costa Rica," Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería, Dirección de extensión Agropecuaria Programas Nacionales, Programa de Ganadería, San Jose.

This study was undertaken as part of the LivestockPlus project funded by CGIAR research program (CRP) on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), which is a strategic partnership of CGIAR and Future Earth. In addition, this work was done as a part of the Livestock CRP. We thank all donors that globally support the work of these programs through their contribution to the CGIAR system. For details, please visit <https://ccaafs.cgiar.org/donors>. The views expressed in the document cannot be taken to reflect the official opinions of these organizations.

Diksha Arora (d.arora@cgiar.org) is a Gender PostDoc Fellow at CIAT. Her work gravitates around economic modeling of intra-household dynamics and food security among rural household in southern Africa and Latin America.

Jennifer Twyman (j.twyman@cgiar.org) is a Gender Research Leader at CIAT. Her research focuses on the issues of intra-household dynamics in the rural, agricultural sector.

Correct citation: Arora D, Twyman J. 2018. Gender roles among small-scale livestock producers in Costa Rica. CCAFS Info Note. Wageningen, the Netherlands. CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS).

Research by:



RESEARCH PROGRAM ON
Climate Change,
Agriculture and
Food Security



CCAFS and Info Notes

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) is a strategic partnership of CGIAR and Future Earth, led by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). CCAFS brings together the world's best researchers in agricultural science, development research, climate science and Earth System science, to identify and address the most important interactions, synergies and tradeoffs between climate change, agriculture and food security.

CCAFS Info Notes are brief reports on interim research results. They are not necessarily peer reviewed. Please contact the author for additional information on their research.

www.ccafs.cgiar.org

CCAFS is supported by:

