A different kettle of fish?
Gender integration in livestock and fish research

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11 THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF A PIG DISEASE: AFRICAN SWINE FEVER IN UGANDA

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Organizations
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Species

Methods: Literature review, key informant interviews, household surveys and focus group discussions with men and women separately

Summary: This research project explores gender relations in pig husbandry, and how they impact on the effectiveness of African Swine Fever control and related biosecurity protocols.

O nen Okello was puzzled: the family’s five pigs were huddled together, ignoring the food waste and kitchen scraps he had brought them that evening. The teenager told his mother, who checked up on the animals the next morning. She found three of them lying dead, their ears and belly covered with red sores.

She checked with her neighbours: one had already lost all five of their pigs with similar symptoms. In the following week; several others found their animals had died. The villagers started to panic; they quickly sold off their pigs cheaply to visiting traders.

Normally, it is her husband who deals with the vet. But he was away at the time, and Mrs Okello decided she couldn’t wait for him. She called the area vet, who confirmed an outbreak of African swine fever – a serious viral disease. But it was too late for the Okello family’s pigs: they had all died.
Dead pigs, bad news

The Okellos are one of more than 1.1 million families in Uganda that keep pigs. Most are smallholders in peri-urban and urban areas who raise pigs in their backyards to sell (FAOSTAT 2010). They use the income to pay for school fees and health care (Ouma et al. 2015). An outbreak of African swine fever is bad news: when the virus infects a farm, large numbers of animals can die within a few days. The entire herd can be wiped out.

Pigs can become infected in various ways: through direct contact with sick pigs, through infected feed, manure, meat and other products, by tick bites, or mechanically (for example by a person or vehicle going from one farm to another) (FAO 2010). There is as yet no vaccine, and no cure. The only way to control the disease is through quarantine and on-farm “biosecurity”: preventing transmission and eliminating the virus on the farm. Biosecurity measures include keeping the pigsty clean, disinfecting equipment, and preventing animals from coming into contact with other herds, heating the swill to kill the virus, controlling visits to the farm, and disposing promptly of dead animals. Controlling the disease requires knowledge, skills, money to buy disinfectant, and the ability to make the right decisions.

Applying such measures is difficult enough for large pig farms with well-trained staff and money to invest. It is much harder for smallholders, and especially for the women who do most of the pig husbandry in Uganda. Men are usually the ones who make most decisions, control the family’s cash, attend trainings, and get in touch with the veterinary services. Because the women work more closely with the animals, they are likely to detect the disease or symptoms more quickly, but they lack the skills and resources to control it. This makes for a weak link in the pig health system.

Asking about African swine fever

Interventions to encourage farmers to use better husbandry practices and disease-control measures are urgently needed. For these interventions to be effective, we need to understand how women and men perceive the disease and the factors that affect what they do about it.

We conducted a study focusing on gender dynamics in pig husbandry and the control of African swine fever in Uganda. This study covered 32 villages in two pig-farming districts where the disease is a big problem: Masaka in central Uganda, and Lira in the north of the country. The study consisted of three parts:
A review of the literature and interviews with key informants to ascertain the attitudes, norms and behavioural aspects that affect how men and women manage pigs and control diseases.

Focus-group discussions in 19 of the villages, where we interviewed groups of women and men separately.

Intra-household surveys in all 32 villages, where we questioned 339 men and the same number of women individually in each household on pig husbandry and disease control.

An animal health scientist worked closely with gender specialists to design the study.

**Focus groups**

The focus groups covered four topics:

- **Division of tasks.** Who does what type of work in pig husbandry and disease control, and why?

- **Attitudes.** What attitudes influence the tasks of women and men in pig-raising and disease control? Box 11.1 shows the guide statements we used for this topic.

- **Gender changes in division of labour and its impacts on pig production.** What did women and men do to control the disease 10 years ago? How has this changed today? Why? How has this affected pig production?

- **Stakeholder relations.** Which organizations are involved in controlling disease, and what do they do? How do men and women perceive these organizations? Are they successful?

**Intra-household survey**

The intra-household survey focused on the following:

- **Ownership and decision making.** Who owns the animals and farm equipment, and who decides to buy farm inputs and to sell animals? Which male or female household member has the final say on pig-husbandry activities?

- **Knowledge.** What do male and female household members know about the disease (cause, transmission and control)?

- **Attitudes and perceptions.** What attitudes influence the tasks of women and men in pig-raising and disease control? How do men and women think or feel about the disease?

- **Practices.** What actions do men and women household members take if there is a disease outbreak?

- ** Capacities.** Do men and women household members have ability to implement proper biosecurity measures?
Incentives. What incentives do men and women farmers need to start using techniques that will control the disease? (We did not ask this directly, but posed a series of questions to tease the incentives out.)

In each household, we interviewed both the head of the household and his (or her) partner separately.

We pre-tested the survey tools in two villages and adjusted them in the light of the findings. We trained local enumerators and note-takers who spoke Luganda and Luo, the local languages in the two districts. The note-takers captured the group discussions; their notes were then translated into English. The intra-household questionnaires were written and answered in English.

Below we present some preliminary results from a qualitative analysis of the focus-group discussions only.

Disease breaks down the divide

We found a clear division of roles and responsibilities in times when there is no outbreak of African swine fever. Women largely carry out traditional household tasks such as cleaning the pigsties and water troughs, preparing swill, collecting the animals’ urine and waste for use as manure in gardens, and feeding and watering the pigs. Men do tasks such as building pig pens and burying animals that have died, as well as off-farm activities such as marketing, buying feeds, and arranging veterinary services and inputs. Women may also take on non-traditional roles that require a certain level of knowledge, such as spraying to control parasites, treating pigs against disease, and heat detection. The women do more of such tasks if they own the pigs.

During an outbreak of African swine fever, however, this gender division of labour is diluted or disappears completely. Women and men both said that during such an emergency, it was okay to share roles: men could do work normally done by women, and vice-versa. For example, men said they prepared swill and cleaned the pigsties and troughs, while women would bury dead animals, build pigsties or report disease to the vet. Making rules to restrict the movement of pigs during an outbreak, however, was still a male task according
to both men and women. There was little controversy over the shift in tasks and roles in order to control the disease: sharing roles seems acceptable during an outbreak. The disease appears to be a driver of change in the gender division of labour and related gender norms. It demonstrates the fluidity of what appear in normal times to be quite rigid gender divisions of labour.

“He can allow you to go”

Generally, men know more than women about pig husbandry. They have more ties to outside organizations, interact more often with veterinary services (whose staff are mostly men), are offered more training, and have greater access to the media and so to messages about the disease. Men are free to attend trainings, and they do not need their wives’ permission to take part. In the words of one man we interviewed, “Authority lies in the hands of the man; a woman should always seek for permission from her husband before going for training”.

Women may not only need their husbands’ permission; they also have many other demands on their time, and tend to be less mobile than men. That means they miss opportunities to learn about how to control African swine fever, even though they do most of the work in pig management and are in a better position to apply biosecurity measures. The chances of women to attending training are higher if they own pigs. As one woman put it, “Maybe if the animal belongs to the woman and the man is not concerned at all, there he can allow you to go”.

Different concerns

Men and women had different viewpoints on the pig business. Women said their housework left them with no time to attend training, go to meetings or take care of marketing. They knew of the need for hygiene measures but said
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did not have the money or other resources needed, such as cleaning materials, gloves and gumboots; they also did not know how to use disinfectants correctly. Men were more concerned with the lack of money to invest in pig-raising, access to buyers for their pigs, and getting quality feeds. For those in and around towns, big problems were the lack of land and the difficulty in finding wood to make pigsties.

Because they did most of the tasks in the household and in pig management, women were at greater risk than men of problems associated with these tasks. They (along with children) were at risk of zoonotic diseases and pests (such as jigger, a parasitic insect) and respiratory infections (from exposure to dust when cleaning the compound and smoke from cooking food or pig swill). They were at risk of injury during routine farm work such as collecting feed and water and cleaning of the sty. They were also more exposed to chemicals used for cleaning and disinfecting the sty and house.

More effective disease control

Before this study, we offered training for the owners of pig farms without paying attention as to whether they were men or women. In fact, the owners – and thus our trainees – were almost exclusively the male heads of households. This created a weak link in African swine fever control. This study made us realize that we need to make our target group explicitly both men and women in the same household (and for single parents, the older son or daughter too) in order to effectively combat the disease. As we have observed, during an outbreak of the disease, both men and women are involved in the search for solutions. This broader outreach will help spread knowledge about pig husbandry among household members and ensure prompt action during an outbreak, even when the owner of the pig farm is absent.

Training messages and how we deliver them should take women’s needs, specific work related to pig husbandry and time constraints into account. They should cover occupational hazards such as jiggers, chemicals and dust that women face in caring for their pigs. We may have to further develop certain aspects of the training specifically for women who are more at risk for exposure to zoonotic diseases.

We also need to find ways to reinforce the value of the knowledge women and men gain from the training, and to encourage them and other people in their household to share and use it. For example, we could give attendees a certificate or information materials to take home with them. For women, this would also strengthen their status vis-à-vis their husbands. Many husbands are suspicious if their wives go out of the house for an extended time; providing them with a certificate would help allay their suspicions and reduce the risk of a jealous man beating his wife.
Finally, from a broader perspective, we should promote interventions that enable women to participate in the market and access financial resources. We hope that such inclusive training methods can be taken up by other projects and by national extension services in Uganda and elsewhere.

**Situating the research**

This project focused on the questions on how gender relations affect African Swine Fever protocols and biosecurity measures. It looks at the male-focused current approach, which overlooks women’s critical roles in pig husbandry. The project did not look at the second (overall) research question in the gender research agenda – how African Swine Fever biosecurity measures and protocols affect gender relations.

- Women and men were separately interviewed in focus-group discussions, and intra-household surveys were done where men and women in each household were questioned individually.
- Gender analysis focused on data pertaining to: the gender division of labour in normal times as well as in disease outbreaks; gendered knowledge, capacities and practices related to pig husbandry; gender norms (attitudes, perceptions) on who should do what in the relation to animal-health management; ownership – who owns the pigs and farm equipment; and decision-making – who decides when to buy inputs, sell animals and so on, and who has final

> “It is very important to have a take-home message at the end of the training, in the form of a poster or leaflet, that can inform people at home who did not attend the training. For the women this could be a proof of attendance at a training, so they can avoid domestic violence.”

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[https://youtu.be/rqWyYy-6I8g](https://youtu.be/rqWyYy-6I8g)
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say on pig-related activities. The study also looks at how organizations involved in disease control perceive women farmers as well as access to participation in these organizations.

• The project revealed that gender roles are dynamic and changing, for example, from everyday routines in the gender division of labor to unfixed roles when an outbreak of African Swine Fever occurs. The project also studied changes in men and women’s disease-control tasks and knowledge over time comparing current practices to those of 10 years ago.

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References


