

Livestock keeping improves gender equality in developing countries

In brief

- Increasing women's roles in livestock management decisions is associated with positive impacts on women's welfare, increased livestock assets, reduced debt, and increased incomes, as well as decreased anxiety symptoms and improved subjective health scores.
- Decisions included production strategies, choice of livestock services, and reducing herd size to mitigate risks of droughts. Broader decision roles include household expenditures, and engagement in direct action in their communities.
- These cases demonstrate that these targeted investment in capacity and skills among women in livestock-keeping households can improve gender equality.

Investment implications

Development projects can increase women's access to assets and incomes, and improve their welfare by increasing their involvement in livestock management decisions. This can be achieved through implementing targeted investment in capacity and skills.



Photo: ILRI/ Stefano Bianco

Livestock provide unique opportunities for rural women in resource-poor settings. In some cases small stock such as goats and poultry may be among the few assets they can directly control, and women may be involved in processing and marketing livestock products.

The recently developed Women's Empowerment in Livestock Index (WELI) examines roles in decisions regarding production, family nutrition, control of assets, time and income, and of opportunities (Galie et al, 2019). This brief summarizes recent key studies showing positive outcomes in these areas resulting from targeted investment in decision-making capacity and skills for women.

Methodology

The set of gender benefits of livestock interventions described here emerged from a review of the available literature documenting a range of livestock-related benefits to rural incomes, livelihoods, asset accumulation, gender equality, child nutrition, human health and climate and the environment.¹

A keyword search of several global publication databases resulted in **more than 3,500 studies of potential interest**, which were then filtered to include only those studies that:

- Were based on ex post analyses of actual (rather than forecasted) and direct impacts of livestock-related interventions among targeted beneficiaries
- Included quantitative measures of impact, measurable in an objectively reliable manner, particularly surveys
- Employed a comparison or control group
- Were undertaken in a low- to medium-income country

Findings

Of the 38 studies retained, gender-related impacts were reported in six of them. The results are summarized in the following two impact categories.

More women's decision-making in livestock systems

Women who are involved in managerial decisions represent progress towards gender equality.

- A study of an NGO-led capacity building intervention among northern Kenyan pastoralists (Grillos, 2018):
- 28% increase in pre-emptive livestock sales to better prepare for drought
- 45% increase in women reporting taking direct action
- A small increase in women's political awareness and participation in formal decision-making processes at the community level

The Smallholder Dairy Commercialization Program in Kenya (Bonilla et al, 2018):

- Households 9% more likely to have women managing cash from the sale of milk
- Women 7-11% more likely to be involved in decisions about livestock services such as artificial insemination, anthelmintic drugs, tick control, vaccination, and curative treatments

A review of the Smallholder Livestock Development Projects (SLDP) (Fakhrul and Jabbar, 2005):

- Female participation in decision-making increased
- 17% increase in deciding the use of income
- 9% increase in deciding whether children should go to school
- Women's social status within their family was also elevated

Tajikistan Livestock and Pasture Development Project, evaluated by (Cavatassi and Mallia, 2018):

- 27% increase for women's involvement in decision-making on cattle breeding
- 15% increase in goat feeding
- 17% increase in sheep feeding
- 3% increase in use of income from agricultural activities

More income and assets

More income and assets show that rural women, who are often the primary caretakers of livestock, can use their knowledge and skills for better economic decisions.

The Tajikistan Livestock and Pasture Development Project:

- Increase of 42% annual gross livestock income
- Increase of 53% annual net livestock income in female-headed households

The Women Dairy Cooperative Societies (WDCS) studies

Examples of what has worked

A study of households taking part in the Tajikistan Livestock and Pasture Development Project found:

- 27% increase for women's involvement in decision-making on cattle breeding
- 15% increase in goat feeding
- 17% increase in sheep feeding
- 3% increase in use of income from agricultural activities
- Increase of 42% annual gross livestock income
- Increase of 53% annual net livestock income in female-headed households

A study of NGO-led capacity building intervention among northern Kenyan pastoralists found:

- 28% increase in household actions to sell livestock to better prepare for drought
- 45% increase of women taking direct action at the household level

(Kumari and Malhotra, 2016):

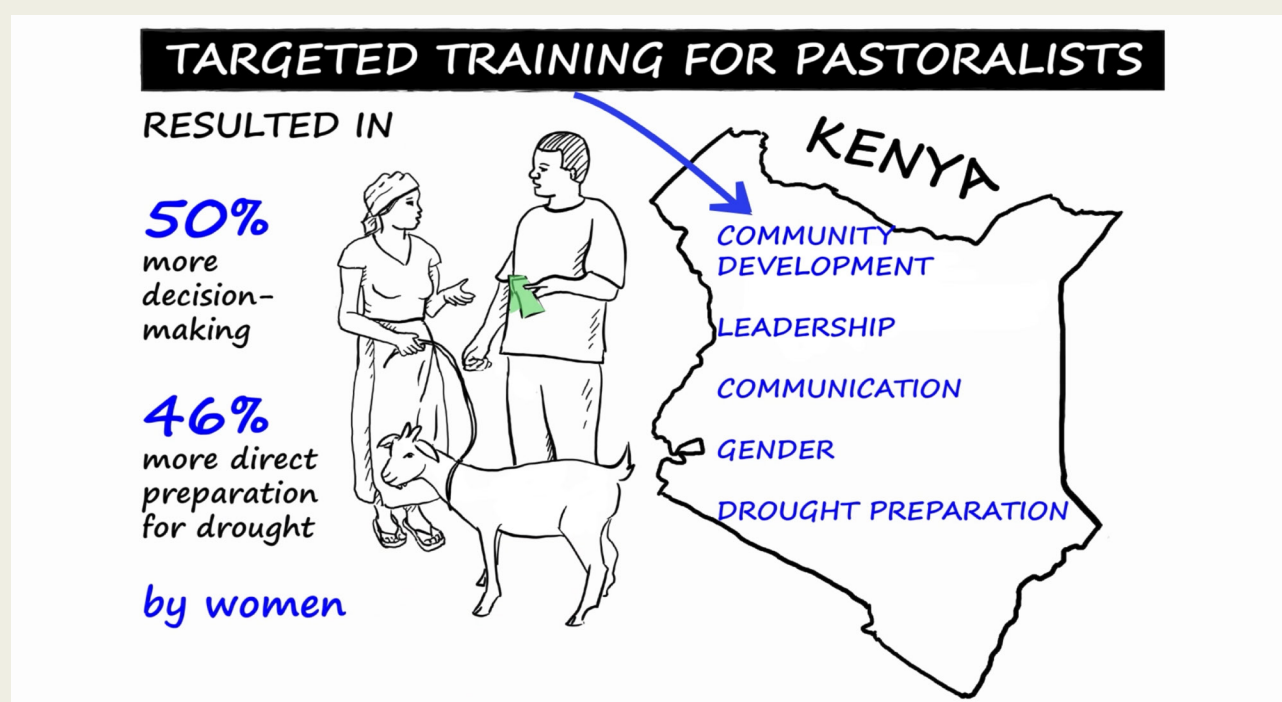
- Membership in a WDCS increased mean monthly net income and levels of employment in member households

Pigs-for-Peace pig transfer and farmer training program (Glass et al, 2017):

- Increase in household livestock/animal assets
- Less likely to have debt, or one or more loans
- Other welfare impacts - improved subjective health and decreased symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress

Table 1. The impacts of six studies addressing gender and livestock keeping

Women's decision making			
Drought -pre-emptive livestock sales by women	46% increase vs 18% in control	Participants vs control, 6 months	Kenya, Grillos, 2018
Women engagement in direct action	50% vs 5% in control	Participants vs control, 6 months	Kenya, Grillos, 2018
Women participating in livestock services decisions	7-11% point higher	Participants vs non	Kenya, Bonilla et al, 2018
Women participation in hh expenditure decisions	Increase from 21% to 38%	Participants vs non	Bangladesh, Fakhru and Jabbar, 2005
Women participation in various animal production decisions	30% to 53% vs 13% to 26%	Participant vs non	Tajikistan, Cavatassi and Mallia, 2018
Income and assets			
Livestock assets	Significant increase	Participants (84% women) vs control, 18 months	DRC, Glass et al, 2017
Debt	Significant decrease (24.7%)	Participants (84% women) vs control, 18 months	DRC, Glass et al, 2017
Dairy income to women and their households	Significantly greater	Coop member vs non-members	India, Kumari and Malhotra, 2016
Women managing dairy income	9% points higher	Participants vs non	Kenya, Bonilla et al, 2018
Increase in net livestock income in female-headed hhs	53%	Participant vs non	Tajikistan, Cavatassi and Mallia 2018
Health and wellbeing			
Anxiety symptoms (index)	57.1% decrease	Participants (84% women) vs control, 18 months	DRC, Glass et al, 2017
Subjective health (score)	8.2% improvement	Participants (84% women) vs control, 18 months	DRC, Glass et al, 2017



Whiteboard animation: ILRI\ Annabel Slater
<https://youtu.be/CHysRxe7CG0>

References

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