



Gender dynamics within small-scale farming: narratives of smallholder livestock farmers in five provinces, South Africa

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Introduction

This report presents findings based on 18 focus group discussions conducted over a period of 6 weeks in five provinces. It should be read in conjunction with the report on the Knowledge, Attitudes, Perceptions (KAPP) survey. We interviewed small-scale livestock farmers in order to get a grasp of their lived experiences as smallholder farmers and more particularly issues related to gender and farming. Although a vast and rich amount of data was collected, not all this data is presented in this section.

There is a general consensus in development economics literature as well as in research on African economies and livelihoods, that smallholder livestock farming provides pathways out of poverty, and contributes towards food security and sustainable livelihoods. The Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy of 2004 also identifies livestock farming as an agricultural activity which can be used to address food security and fight poverty in the small-scale communal farming areas in South Africa. Similarly, Vision 2030 of the National Development Plan sees agriculture as a vehicle for job creation in rural areas. Furthermore, within the agricultural development agenda, women are identified as key to the eradication of global hunger. Women have been identified as ‘the invisible agricultural producers’. This is one of the contributing factors to women becoming a focus for aid organisations that place an emphasis on women and gender in (agricultural) development projects and programmes in developing countries.

In terms of gender dynamics within small-scale farming, women experience significant challenges. Some of them include lack of ownership of assets and land, lack of access to extension services, credit, training, education, government support, control of household income and constraints on women’s mobility. Women play a critical and potentially transformative role in agricultural growth in developing countries, but they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints limiting further inclusion in agriculture. The fundamental purpose of this report is to make heard the voices from the ground of small-scale farmers especially around issues of gender as they have a significant impact in the farming industry and also how women navigate the challenges that they face.

Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was utilised in exploring and understanding gender as a construct within smallholder livestock farmers and how do women navigate the challenges they face as smallholder livestock farmers. To gain insight into these questions the following objectives were delineated:

- a) To understand the purpose of keeping livestock
- b) To understand the different diseases and primary healthcare practices among small scale farmers
- c) Understanding livelihood strategies of livestock keeping households
- d) To explore the gender dynamics in farming and how ownership and labour is influenced by gender
- e) To understand the extent of youth involvement in livestock farming within the communities

The qualitative approach implies “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning” (Shank, 2002: 5 cited in Ospina, 2004). This means that it is a methodical and ordered process, grounded in the everyday context of experience, in order to understand how individuals make sense and infer meaning to their experiences (Flick, van Kardoff & Steinke, 2004). Qualitative research is based on a specific set of assumptions and with the use of particular theoretical frameworks, it sets out to understand and represent the actions and experiences of individuals in their natural settings and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research interviews are useful in that they are related to interpretive sociological approaches and make it possible to openly inquire about meanings and motives for actions in a given situation, thus a researcher is able to better understand and interpret the data collected (Hopf, 2004).

The essence of qualitative research relates to the social meaning that people attribute to their daily circumstances, situations and experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Qualitative research “describes life worlds ‘from the inside out’, from the point of view of the people who participate” (Flick et al., 2004). This allows understanding of the social realities that

people create daily. Therefore, qualitative research enables researchers to pursue emergent ideas and the exploration of processes effectively during research (Ospina, 2004). Moreover, qualitative research is reflective and interpretive; the researcher participates and becomes immersed in the social setting (Creswell, 2007).

Sample and target population

The study focused on smallholder¹ farmers who kept cattle, or any combination of cattle with small stock (sheep and goats). These types of farmers are spread throughout the nine provinces of the country. One of the objectives of the study was to determine the farmer's knowledge of both RVF and LSD; hence, the plan was to select areas with a significant number of smallholder farmers and a reported combination of the two diseases. Based on the 2011 census, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, North-West, Mpumalanga and Free State provinces have the largest numbers of farmers owning less than 10 cattle (StatsSA, 2013).

This study used a combination of multi-stage and stratified sampling techniques. The first stage involved the purposive selection of the five provinces: the Eastern Cape, Free State, North-West, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. This was informed by the numbers of smallholder livestock farmers, as well as historical outbreaks and incidence of the two diseases. Based on the availability of resources (time and personnel) as well as the geographical spread of the diseases and the size of the municipality, one or two local municipalities in each district were selected. Expert opinion was solicited from the respective local veterinarians to confirm the selection of the districts as well as the villages/townships/farming communities affected by the diseases in each province. The plan was to select two villages per municipality. However, some of the villages that had reported the diseases had very few cattle-farming households. Hence, in some study sites more than two villages were selected to make up for the correspondingly low number of cattle farmers per village. The selection of villages was based on disease report information received from the local animal health technician. Preference was given to those villages that reported highest incidence of the disease. The process of selecting study areas is mapped out in Figure 1.

¹ Households owning 100 or less cattle



Figure 1: Study Areas

Focus Group discussion instruments and data collection

The qualitative component consisted of a series of focus group discussions in five provinces in South Africa to generate policy and practice recommendations. FGDs are recognised as a flexible way in which to explore experiences, opinions and concerns. The depth of understanding and context of focus group results may be enhanced by combining this method with other methods, which may generate information not accessed in the focus groups. Focus groups seek to understand the socio-cultural context of the study participants, their perceptions about a social phenomenon and the meaning that the community attaches to an issue, such as gendered nature of livestock farming. FGDs were conducted in the eight districts to draw out community views about how the dynamics of gender influence smallholder livestock farming. A semi-structured interview guide was used to draw out the

participants' experiences and perceptions. Semi-structured Interviews are used to gather focused, qualitative textual data. This method offers a balance between the flexibility of an open-ended interview and the focus of a structured ethnographic survey.

Selection of FGD Participants

Purposive and convenience samples of participants in eight districts in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, North-West, Mpumalanga and Free State were selected to participate based on their availability, willingness and capacity to participate in the discussions. Community leaders and DAFF officials facilitated recruitment of participants based on the above-mentioned criteria agreed upon in the inception meetings.

We first identified the research site in the prioritized districts based on advice from site coordinators of DAFF. We then approached local authorities with the assistance of state veterinarians and introduced the study to them. Through the assistance of local authorities, potential participants were recruited to be part of the study. Our sample consisted of male and female smallholder livestock farmers.

Furthermore, we stratified our sample according to age, gender, and geographic location. FGD participants were selected based on their availability during the data collection process and whether they fit the criteria of our sample frame (i. e. including age, gender, dwelling, SES and so forth).

FGDs were approximately 60 to 120 minutes long. FGD on average included seven participants at a minimum and thirty participants at a maximum (which made the discussion longer). Trained facilitators conducted all FGDs and a second team member was present to take written notes. In addition, all FGDs were audio recorded and used as reference to complement written notes. Participation in the FGDs was voluntary and confidential. Participants provided informed consent and no personal identifiers were included in written notes and audio recordings. Audio recordings were stored in a safe cabinet at the HSRC for curation until after the completion of data synthesis.

Analysis of Qualitative Data: Thematic Analysis

The FGD recordings were transcribed verbatim. The data was thematically analysed in order to draw out the key themes that emerged from the study. Thematic analysis is a flexible

method of analysing text data. It describes analytic approaches that include impressionistic, interpretive, systematic and strict textual analysis. Thematic analysis works on a subjective level by capturing the individuals' experiences and lived realities and how they infer meaning to their experiences. It also takes into account the intersection of factors such as political, cultural, socio-economic status, gender age and so forth. Braun and Clarkes (2006) thematic analysis works on the premise of reciprocity between structure and agency and how both create and shape realities either by influencing, limiting or controlling peoples realities, meanings and experiences. The goal of thematic analysis is to produce knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse primary data collected through FGDs. Thematic analysis avoids the pre-conceived categories, thus allowing for the emergence of new insights from the data. The stages in conventional data analysis are as follows:

- The process of analysing the data requires that it is read repeatedly, so that the researcher can gain an understanding of the content.
- The data is then read word by word to draw out the codes.
- Notes of the first impressions and analysis of the data are made as one reads through the text.
- Labels that are reflective of more than one key thought are coded.
- The codes are sorted into categories, depending on how the different codes are related and linked.
- The categories are then used to organize and group the codes into meaningful clusters. There can be between 10 to 15 clusters.
- The large number of sub-categories can then be combined into a smaller number of categories. This is followed by the definition of each category, sub-category and code.
- The advantage of conventional content analysis is gaining information from the study participants without imposing pre-conceived categories or theoretical perspectives.

The knowledge generated from participants is grounded in the data. A challenge with thematic analysis arises when a complete understanding of the data is lacking and this might come about as a result of distortion of information in the process of translation, thus resulting

in findings that are not consistent with the data. Yet credibility in the thematic analysis can be established through peer debriefing, prolonged interaction, persistent observation, and triangulation and member checks.

Gendered issues in livestock farming

Differences between men and women in livestock farming

Gender roles in livestock management vary according to class, age and ethnicity. The main activities are herding, feeding, milking, slaughtering, breeding and animal health care (Miller, 2011). The international development community emphasises the role of women in addressing issues within small-scale livestock farming in achieving food security and socio-economic development in resource-poor contexts. However, culturally, livestock ownership in rural areas is skewed in favour of men, especially in smallholder livestock farming systems. Women livestock ownership has historically focussed on domestic poultry and other small stock, while men traditionally keep cattle. This normative gender bias in livestock ownership stems from cultural ideologies that dictate the roles of men and women in livestock management. Depending on context specific masculinity and femininity, structural gender inequality tends to hinder women's access and participation in livestock systems and this has implications on women's income generation and food security.

Because of inequality in livestock ownership and participation, there is an animal husbandry knowledge gap (especially in larger livestock like cattle) between man and woman and this emanates from the cultural gender roles that are ascribed for man and woman. In the rural context, young boys and man look after cattle and girls and woman focus on household chores such as cooking and cleaning. Hence, boys grow up looking after cattle and become knowledgeable in animal husbandry as compared to woman. This knowledge gap is reflected by the fact that women neither own nor benefit from larger livestock like cattle, as they are a domain of man (Sanginga et al., 2013; FAO, 2011; Kristjanson et al., 2010; Mupawaenda et al., 2009).

During a focussed group discussion in Mpumalanga a female participant said;

“Men are better in taking care of cattle. I have cattle but I do not know how the cattle feel but my husband can see how they feel even though he was not trained. He

can see that the cattle are sick by just looking at them. They are different, someone can see cattle that it is sick but I can go and see but never see it is sick. I cannot differentiate it, and men is alright as they can see it”.

Although many of the farmers both males and females agree that males are better equipped in farming, however they do not all agree that women are completely helpless in farming. In fact, as one of the male farmers said, *“Livestock does not have gender, it is for people that have a purpose and they have a place to stay. For an example a woman is married or not but they can have livestock better than men. Everyone can decide to have livestock so that when times are hard you have options not only to use money that is in the bank but you can sell from your livestock as well. They (woman) have a purpose that is why in many homes the people that are ensuring sustainability of livestock even in this area its women”.*

Historically, women have always been the creators and managers of homes, and the men have always been the providers. Furthermore, men have always been the owners of properties and women subordinate to the males regardless of who buys what in the household automatically, ownership is transferred to the males, since they are considered the heads.

“You are telling the truth, a person who becomes a farmer is someone who has an interest in farming, but according to Xhosa customs a woman cannot own livestock while the husband is alive. But in other cases a man can have the ticket of the livestock under the woman’s name for whatever reason that he might know of...Let me say this with livestock I won’t hide anything, when we were growing up women had no possessions it was only when the husband had died that things will be under her name (EC_Male)”.

Challenges facing women livestock farmers

Although woman are usually not denied access to animal health care through deliberate actions, man often receives the bulk of information and training relating to primary animal health care. In South African communal livestock systems, information is shared during dipping days or livestock producer groups, which are nearly always man. The role of taking cattle to dipping tanks or attending livestock committee meetings is mostly delegated to men and boys possibly because of the gendered nature of livestock farming in rural areas.

Observations made at the dipping tanks are that even if women are present, they are usually seated far from the men and the Animal Health Technician and are not privy to the discussions that take place there. Women's other constraints are longer workdays, illiteracy, lack of mobility and lack of confidence (Miller, 2011). These constraints have a direct effect on how women view livestock farming.

In a focus group in Mpumalanga (Ornoko village) a woman participant said;

“This gift [farming] is for man. It is like a child, a mother is the one who can see what a child needs, and a man can tell when there is something wrong with the cattle. They are knowledgeable when it comes to cattle. When the cattle return to the kraal, the husband can immediately see that there is something amiss and I am not able to do that, he also knows which medication to administer or buy”.

Transmission of farming knowledge from husbands to wives is minimal and this creates a problem when the husband is deceased. In the communal setup where a man is married to a woman, larger livestock normally belongs to the man who in most cases is the household head. The woman only has absolute livestock or cattle ownership rights when the man is deceased. Interestingly, the South Africa society is characterised by high male mortality rate. In the context of small-scale farming, this poses a challenge for a woman who is left to look after the livestock and children. They are often physically challenged (by age) concerning performing tasks such as herding, administration of vaccines, and dipping, to name a few. Widows often delegate livestock tasks to their young boys, hired worker, or ask relatives and neighbours for help. This creates room for a man to take advantage of the widow. In some cases, widows end up selling all the larger stock in order to avoid tedious chores that come with keeping larger stock. The “forced” selling of larger stock further deprives a woman of assets that they can keep and use for future households needs and emergencies/essentials i.e. paying for children's school fees.

“In most cases the husbands take the role of taking care of the household affairs without teaching their wives about livestock keeping. When they are left by themselves with the livestock, they find it hard to do what the husbands were doing in livestock keeping and end up selling...”

Access to information was among the greatest challenges faced by smallholder farmers' across the five provinces. Lack of access to information reflects the trend of “information poverty” often accompanying the most marginalized members of society. Indeed, a number

of international organisations (FAO, UN, WHO, IDRC etc.) recognises that lack of access to information is a major challenge facing the woman in developing nations. The situation in South Africa is exacerbated by government cuts on primary animal health care services. For instance, our interaction with AHT's in the Free State revealed that AHT's were severely constrained in terms of traveling. The AHT's are given a certain limit of the mileage that they can travel per month and as a result, they are not able to reach all farmers under their jurisdiction. In Hartwater, in the North West province, some livestock farmers complained about the unavailability of the AHT. The AHT responded that since he had a large area to cover, farmers' cases were dealt with in order of need and in consideration of the AHT's other roles. A study (Jenjezwa et al., 2014) in Hertzog in the Eastern Cape also found that veterinarians and AHT's were severely constrained.

The cost and access to vaccines and other primary animal health care products are thorny issues among smallholder livestock farmers. The KAPP study revealed that livestock farmers are willing to purchase preventive products, although they consider them very expensive. In most cases, farmers often have to travel long distances in order to buy vaccines and this has a negative impact on their effectiveness if the cold chain is broken. Some farmers do not know where they can purchase primary animal health care products and this has a rollback effect on the health of their livestock.

In a focus group in North West province (more than 400km from Johannesburg) it was said:

“We want them to tell us the place where we can buy these medicines/vaccines because it is possible that the Department of Agriculture cannot be able to afford to supply us with these vaccines, so if there is a place where they sell, maybe we can sometimes get some money to buy like for example, my family buy medicines in Johannesburg and come with them here”

In South Africa, stock theft is among the major challenges facing both commercial and smallholder farmers. This problem is more pronounced in regions bordering other countries such as the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo (Maluleke et al., 2016). As discussed earlier, rural communities regard livestock as a “living wealth” and are often their only source of income and sustenance. Thus, when livestock is stolen many households and smallholder farmers lose their livelihoods. When it comes to women, widows in particular, the loss of livestock compounds their predicament because they are already

vulnerable since they have lost the household head. They are often aged and they cannot go the veld or mountains to look for cattle.

In a focus group in the Eastern Cape (Coffee Bay), a woman said that;

“...at first I did not see the importance of livestock because we worked in different areas, but he had the opportunity of coming back home in fact this thing they start with it away from home. I became involved after I realized the income you can make from it [farming]; I then fell in love with it [farming] when I saw that if you take good care of it [livestock] you are able to make a living. When my husband died he left me with cattle and sheep, but then I stopped because they were being stolen. I started again with sheep but then you wake up three to five sheep are stolen and I stopped again. I then said that I must stop with the livestock as a woman”

Violence, intimidation, safety and livestock farming

Gender based violence is a widespread phenomenon and comes in different forms and different contexts. Numerous studies have documented how the marginalised status of women in the context, of land rights, culture, gender power differences, socio-economic status, race and so on have an impact on how women are treated within the farming communities (c.f Oxfam, 2013; Kristjanson P. et al. 2014; Zhllima and Rama, 2017). All participants were vocal about the issues that woman face as farmers within their various communities. Issues such as rape, death, intimidation, stock theft, lowering of selling prices were associated some of the challenges faced by women in farming.

“They can chase us with guns in the veld while we are looking after our livestock, so we usually have to leave the cattle grazing in the veld. So the solution is for us to hire people to look after our livestock’s (MP_Ornoko_Female).

“..She is a woman neh, and she can have a goat that has kids; those goats are shepherded by a dog. However, if her goats don’t come back home, she will go looking for them and this is a problem because she may encounter the wrong people who will attack her” (NW_Kgomotso_male).

By virtue of being female, this renders women helpless and they have to hire external help for the protection of their livestock. This has serious implications because economically these women are mostly living on state social grants and are not employed which means an additional burden to their socio-economic status. Furthermore they are also subjected to victimisation from the people who are supposed to be protecting the communities as one male farmer suggests: *“...Our traditional leader is also dangerous, the livestock are only hers if they are at the kraal but if they are out there, that’s a different story”* (NW_Kgomotso_male).

It seems that violence is a more complex phenomenon within the farming community. There is already a perception that women do not have the know how to protect their livestock against diseases. Moreover, they must deal with being assaulted even when they are trying to prevent animal diseases like going to the dip: *“...I once came across a woman being assaulted by a boy at the dip tank and I was panicking and I won’t forget, yes I can’t forget”* (MP_Vervedene_male).

Because most female farmers are widowed and that is how they inherit their livestock; people tend to take advantage of them knowing very well that they are alone and there is no longer a household head they become vulnerable to thieves and death threats. One woman from KZN shares her experience:

“Another thing is that when you want to sell your livestock do not tell anyone that you will sell it or do not ask anyone to accompany you just do it secretly because they want to rob you. If I can tell you that when my husband died I was left with 70 something cows but you won’t believe me if I can tell you that right now I have less than 20 cows. Someone out of nowhere would come and tell you that he has been hired to kill you and you should be thankful to your God” (KZN_Mapala_Females).

A most distressing factor is when family members are the ones who are trying to do harm, one issue that has come up is that of inheritance. In the olden days women were not considered beneficiaries of the husbands assets, making it easy for the husband’s family to repossess what they thought was rightfully theirs regardless of whether a person has children or not. Especially if the children are young the widowers face adverse circumstances as they do not have anyone to protect them from such. One farmer demonstrates such a situation that she had to experience because the family members had heard she had sold a cow and they demanded the proceeds of the sale:

“...The house was locked, but I woke up and found people inside the bedroom with torches and they wanted the money that I got from selling a cow.... They strangled me; I was with my first born. I think it was the 6th of February 2006. The other one was only 6 years, he sat up straight, and all of them (children) were awake. I thought I was dreaming, (group laughter) I got outside using a window and they strangled my child so that he could not shout and he did not even go to school the next day. So whatever that is happening does not keep me away from them because they are family, even if I may go overseas but they are still family” (KZN_Mpala_Female).

The issue of authority came up a number of times as an issue. It was reported that people of authority such as police officers, the forums and the chiefs often colluded with the criminals. Thus, most of the people have lost faith in these systems as the police are easily bribed to cover up crimes committed by criminals. Thus reporting has become somewhat of an issue as the community does not have trust in the justice system which means a number of incidences go unreported and if they are, they easily disappear from the system which does not help in the faith of police and the community working together to solve criminal activities.

“In addition to that, my child, it would have been better if the chiefs of today were the same as those ones in the olden days. Chiefs back then, used to discipline those who are troubling you, but the current ones are not like that. Even when you go to them secretly to report your issues, they would just take it as it is and tell the perpetrator. When you are trying to report the matter over the phone, you have to use another sim-card so that you will throw it away after using it because even the police are liars. This causes a tension because when they arrest the perpetrator he will want to avenge himself after his release (KZN_Mpala_females).

We have seen reports of authorities conspiring with criminals and this usually ends with the perpetrator getting away with atrocious crimes. The faith in police has diminished as often they are the criminals or tend to further victimise the complainant especially in cases of woman. People have to resort to clandestine ways of reporting in order to protect themselves.

The struggle between household needs and animal health: women and men's perceptions

Gendered roles within the farming communities are made pertinent in this study. Often men are more interested in the on-goings of the livestock rather than what is happening in the household itself. We asked the participants about their thoughts on the differences between men and women in prioritising animal vis a vis household needs and the consensus was *“They [men] value livestock more”*. There is a belief that the reason is because culturally there has always been a clear distinction in the roles between men and women, and that women belong in the kitchen whilst men take care of the livestock. This has contributed to notions that *“to be a man it must show in his livestock” (EC_female)*.

For that very reason of gendered roles, men also point out that women do not fully grasp the need for livestock as they have never been taught to understand the importance of livestock in household livelihood. Often men make decision and the women are merely informed about cattle sales. In some cases, women are not involved in deciding what the money will be used for, although common uses of the money included taking the children to school, buying uniforms and food for the household.

A male participant from the Eastern Cape explains the differences between men and women in terms of perceived importance between household wellbeing and livestock: *“Well on that note, if a man sends a woman on errands to buy medicines for the livestock when there is no food at home, it is very likely that a woman would think of buying a small portion [of medication] so that she would be left with some change to buy groceries..”*

Interestingly, there is a consensus from both males and female farmers on the perceived carelessness of men towards household needs. Women explain that men have expectations that there should be food in the house but yet taking out the money to buy the needed goods is very difficult. One female farmer explains how she sometimes has to borrow money from outside so she can be able to buy food.

“Men don't care even when there is no food in the house, he would rather his children go to bed on an empty stomach until they get to school. How will they concentrate at school on an empty stomach? Even when you try to borrow money to

buy food and when he is full with the food that you bought he will start complaining that you don't know how to manage money” (KZN_Mpala_Female).

This perceived carelessness does not only affect the female counterparts but rather the children as well. In 2016, there was a notable decline in food security in some parts of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and this was more evident in places of conflict that were further compounded by the climate change such as floods and droughts. Although this was pronounced in conflict-ridden countries, peaceful settings were not exempted food security issues especially in the face of economic slowdown, which affected the export and import of goods and the increase in food prices (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2017). However, food security is but one determinant of nutritional outcomes, especially for children. Other factors include; women's educational level; resources allocated to national policies and programmes for maternal, infant and young child nutrition; access to clean water, basic sanitation and quality health services; lifestyle; food environment; and culture. In South Africa, the unemployment rate stands at 26, 7% and women and youth are amongst the most affected by this phenomenon (STATSA, 2018). Concerning the sample sites that were visited, the KAPP survey showed most of the farmers had very little or no formal education and more than half were unemployed with some having part-time jobs. Therefore, the intersection of these factors has an impact on the well-being of the families in these rural areas.

A curious notion proposed by some of the female farmers was that as much as they did sell their cattle in cases of emergencies, household needs and ceremonies such as funerals, weddings, traditional and so on; men had the tendency to hold on to livestock in order to see it growing in numbers. As a saying in Zulu goes “Ubuhle bendoda zinkomo zayo”, which means that, “the attraction of a man is his cattle”. In the ancient tribes, cattle was used as bargaining tools and currency, and looked on as something more than food but rather something that could be used for family sustenance, such as food, the skin of the cow which had many uses, the dung for plastering of the floor and houses and so forth. Thus the increasing of livestock meant an increase in bargaining power and status. However although there is a general understanding of cattle being “a black man's bank” one female puts it differently:

“...Therefore, what I mean is that to women what comes first is their children. I also have a child who stays in Manguza, the past few days I wanted to sell a cow so that I

can give the money to my child so that she will do a license. Fortunately, a manager from Manguza hospital took her in, they are siblings, and he will give her everything she needs, so I did not sell that cow. Therefore, what I mean is that with livestock I can sell it and send my child to do whatever she needs to do. However, with a man all the livestock can die without him selling” (KZN_Mpala_Female).

Aside from the arguments proposed by both males and females, livestock health is a fundamental aspect in the livelihoods of the households and for all family members. This suggests that as much as there is a perceived non-sentimental approach for both parties concerning household needs and livestock, livestock keeping is what keeps the household functioning as a sale of a cow can contribute to a number of things within the household.

Role of women in decision-making

Even in the most conservative societies, great strides to push forward equitable policies and outcomes, especially for women have been made. Women now have more influence over the decisions that affect their lives. However, the issue of decision making between men and women is still a controversial issue especially in rural communities and within households.

Gender and power exists at a societal and institutional level, which inevitably influences the personal relations, and rarely work in isolation. Autonomy, a concept that is usually defined on an operational level, is usually linked to decision-making abilities. Jeejebhoy and Sathar (2001: 688) define autonomy as the “control women have over their own lives-the extent to which they have an equal voice with their husbands in matters affecting themselves and their families, control over material and other resources, access to knowledge and information, the authority to make independent decisions, freedom from constraints on physical mobility, and the ability to forge equitable power relationships within families”. Decision making for most of the female farmers is inexorably linked to the husband and the husbands’ family, as ultimately the decision to sell livestock one must get permission from them, as one participant explains:

“A woman is married to a family and can’t do anything without consulting the husbands family, because there are male representatives of the family not just her husband, it is the same with males that you can’t just sell cattle without informing your siblings or extended family that you want to sell a cattle. The reason being you want to give them first the opportunity to know and maybe they might have an

interest in buying that cattle from you and in so doing keeping the cattle within the family. It is a norm that has existed for a long time in the AmaXhosa tradition” (EC_Female).

Notwithstanding the modernisation in South Africa, decision-making is a multifaceted interplay of individuals, family interactions and a range of socio-cultural factors. Women capabilities in decision-making operates through socio-demographic, socio-cultural and structural factors such religion, cultural systems, traditional norms, and economic dependency just to name a few. However, as much as decision-making is ultimately that of the male counterparts within the family it does however, go beyond the issue of decision-making but also that of ensuring that the correct decision is implemented. This would suggest that men are seen as having superior knowledge in terms of what and what shouldn't be done in relation to livestock as suggested earlier.

Although, some women talk about the influence of culture as a contingent in the abilities of making decisions, it may seem that there is a sense of resentment in that some of the women do the actual herding of the animals as most of these women are homemakers and they do not have any income. One woman demonstrates this: *“Another thing is that when you have livestock as a woman, your husband can decide to sell the livestock without consulting with you first; even though I am the only one who looks after the livestock” (Nhlazatshe_female).*

Interestingly, although the issue of decision making seemingly favours males, some males do not agree that the decision to sell lies solely in the hands of the males. Joint decision making between males and females came up as one man succinctly puts it: *“They are lying, they take decisions maybe they just didn't want to tell you” (EC_Male).*

“Look before I sell a cow I consult with them even when the buyer arrives they are there they count the money, so how can they say they are not part of decision making?” (EC_male).

Even though there are diverse stories about decision making within households, one thing is clear, men make the decision in the household regardless of the different cultures interviewed. However, it seems that there is space to negotiate depending on intra household power relations.

The kraal as a contested space

In many Southern African and Asian cultures, cattle are not simply classified as mere animals but rather as scared species. Their significance is beyond that of material wealth, but are symbols of memory, history and are also the principal offering in funerary rituals concerning ancestors.

It is their location in both the mundane and in such spiritual rites that they also emerge as subjects of song, idioms and myths.

The kraal is considered a sacred space where women cannot enter as they will contaminate it and the cattle will be sick and die. Many of the participants acknowledged the taboo around woman and the kraal. However, not everyone agreed with its significance in contemporary South Africa. The changing roles of men and woman has meant that woman now do own land and cattle and such taboos do not factor in the necessity of woman having to enter the kraal to ensure animal health.

“It is tradition that restrict woman from entering in the kraal, she must know that if she enters the kraal while the cattle are pregnant, the cows will have a miscarriage. If she goes in without knowing this, the cattle will bear the consequences, she must be aware of this”

“With my father’s cattle’s I know I was not allowed to enter the kraal. We could not get into the kraal or walk between them as we were told that they [livestock] abort (FS_Diyatalawa_Female)”.

There was a consensus among the woman that some the beliefs and customs made no sense in this day and age as they were the very reason that woman are seen as incompetent in taking care of livestock. However, it is also important to note that the enforcement, understanding and nature of the taboo varied from household to household. In some households since the woman is the caretaker of the livestock there cannot be any restrictions in what she can and cannot do based on certain perceptions about culture and livestock. This also applies to female-headed households where the women are farmers. Sometimes however, certain circumstances like being a widow require a bit of navigation, as demonstrated by a female farmer;

“There are certain things that we need to discontinue following, as they are no longer relevant. This thing of not entering kraals, if this is my job then what will my children eat? You become a widow and you have to be in a period of mourning for six months, which means you cannot do certain things such as that of entering the kraal. These cows are yours and yet you are not allowed near them. If there is a disease outbreak like black quarter, you need to be active and treat your cattle. The whites were very surprised when there was an outbreak and I had to stand back (FS_Diyatalawa_Female)”.

There is a constant battle between the traditional versus the contemporary. There is a need to protect and provide for one's family but also adhere to the traditions. Earlier the importance of the husbands' family was emphasised and how even if the husband has passed on, the in-laws still have to be informed of what is happening within the family and they make the decisions. Thus, it would seem that if the husband's family says that you are not allowed to enter the kraal, one must adhere. Farming for a number of women is a source of livelihood, especially if there is no source of income after the death of a husband. Thus, some restrictions can have serious implications for the household's wellbeing.

Voices from the people: improving women's involvement in farming and mitigating challenges for smallholder farmers

The need to educate women about livestock was a salient point amongst all the discussions. For women to be fully equipped men needed especially the husbands needed to teach their wives about livestock to circumvent challenges if and when the husband passed away. Most of the women farmers became farmers by virtue of widowhood and quite often they struggled with the care of livestock in the aftermath. And this was further exacerbated by the lack of interest from the youth, which posed a threat to the continuation of livestock in these areas.

Participants in the different groups noted that the farming communities try to assist each other and the female farmers but this was difficult when most people in these communities were themselves poor. Thus the individual efforts of the communities were not sustainable. Some of the programmes and intervention strategies cited as useful in assisting with equipping woman with the right skills and information include the following:

- Men can help with vaccination and provision of information

- Government can educate and take women's contexts into consideration when coming up with policies and intervention strategies
- Programs that have been developed must be implemented rather than sit on a shelf
- Women must create working groups in order to be more effective
- Priorities must be collectively determined so there is consistency amongst all farmers across the board
- There must be workshops that inform and educate younger people if the agricultural sector is to continue into the future
- Introduce more agriculture in the school curriculum especially in rural areas
- Provide calendars for vaccination with recommended vaccines
- Increase the number of AHTs through training and funding in higher education
- Expensive vaccines must be delivered by the government
- Pre-empt seasonal change and provide relevant vaccines to prevent outbreaks
- Provide workshops and training on vaccine use
- Establish satellite/mobile co-ops to minimise travelling time
- Vaccine innovation to make it reusable
- Group bulk buying
- Decrease the size of the vaccines which makes them expensive and useless once opened

While some of these endeavors were in place, participants noted that they were not without their own challenges. It was noted that aid to the farmers in whatever form tended to land in undeserving hands because it is often distributed in terms of social status rather than on need. Thus the aid intended for the destitute sometimes ends up not reaching them. While some groups claimed that the government was doing nothing to assist the poor, participants in the FreeState, in Diyatalawa spoke differently. Diyatalawa is situated about 20 km outside Harrismith. It is part of a pilot project of Agri-villages launched in 2009 as a response to poverty and food insecurity, which supports stallholder farmers with training, access to markets, infrastructure, and agricultural production. This Rural Development and Land Reform intervention was reported to be a useful poverty alleviation strategy.

This is one of the few successful programmes by the government. Participants noted that addressing poverty, food insecurity and empowering smallholder farmers, especially women, required the support of local government. There was, however, concern that municipalities are inefficient and ineffective and riddled with so much corruption that the poor do not benefit from interventions targeting them. There was emphasis that state assistance should be provided to all and not be limited to political party affiliation.

With regards to community involvement in the assistance of female farmers, there seems to be an underlying antipathy towards the females from the males. Male participants felt that their assistance at times was not appreciated by their female counterparts. In some cases when they did try and assist they have been accused of trying to sabotage the livestock or rather trying to lure their way into the females' affections in order to control the livestock. This seemed to be echoed throughout the FGDs in all provinces. Another interesting factor was that of the emphasis of equality. Male counterparts reverted to the "50/50" concept and how women were fickle in the midst of equality as it is only applied when it suited and benefited them. Male farmers felt that this was contrary especially if the female farmers wanted to be taken seriously.

Conclusions and recommendations

Livestock ownership helps small-scale farmers address immediate practical challenges and needs through providing for domestic subsistence and general household needs. Importantly, livestock farming, especially cattle farming, provides an opportunity for transformative ideological change to farmers. Changing associations with prestigious livestock and the confidence to manage them have the potential to influence gender ideologies, leading to changes in the division of labour and also an acceptance that big stock isn't necessarily strictly a "man's job".

Additionally, capacity building on primary animal health care can address practical challenges (i.e. lack of knowledge) facing women. Such training should consider the literacy levels of farmers. Culture emerges as a key component when addressing challenges to women's roles in farming. There needs to be an awareness creation about some of the

cultural barriers surrounding women and animal husbandry and how these can be addressed to improve livestock production.

In order to have more effective programmes and progress within animal husbandry and animal PAHC, there is a need for a gender sensitive and inclusive interventions. A gendered lens offers us an understanding, and the importance of inclusion, by addressing priorities and livelihood needs, and also constraints through the intersection of many socio-economic, cultural and political and structural factors. This means engaging every member of the households, and treating all of them as social capital with a potential to increase production and alleviate poverty and promote household wellbeing.

There is also a shortage of animal health technicians in the country. Some of the AHT have to provide services to vast geographical area of which they are unable to do because of lack of resources. Furthermore, because livestock farming has always been dominated by men, there is a small number of female AHT. Thus, there is a need to increase technical support and also balance out the ratio of male to female amongst animal health technicians to change the perception around livestock farming, and enhance sustainable livestock systems for food security and rural development.

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