



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

RHIANNON PYBURN AND ANOUKA VAN EERDEWIJK, EDITORS



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## Royal Tropical Institute (KIT)

PO Box 95001, 1090 HA Amsterdam, The Netherlands, [www.kit.nl](http://www.kit.nl)

## Writershop facilitation and content editing

Rhiannon Pyburn and Anouka van Eerdewijk,  
Royal Tropical Institute (KIT)

## Film production and editing

Geneviève Audet-Bélanger, Royal Tropical  
Institute (KIT)

## Language editing and layout

Paul Mundy, [www.mamud.com](http://www.mamud.com)

## Artwork

Nyotumba Bonaventure, [nyotsz@yahoo.com](mailto:nyotsz@yahoo.com)

## Cover design

Ad van Helmond, [helmond@hetbadhuis.nl](mailto:helmond@hetbadhuis.nl)

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## 10 “SHEEP ARE LIKE FAST-GROWING CABBAGE”: GENDER DIMENSIONS OF SMALL RUMINANT HEALTH IN ETHIOPIA

Barbara Wieland,<sup>1</sup> Wole Kinati<sup>2</sup> and Annet Abenakyo Mulema<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), <sup>2</sup> International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)

### Organizations

ILRI, ICARDA

### Species



**Methods:** Separate focus groups with adult women, adult men, young women and young men; a short joint feedback session with all four groups; participatory tools such as simple ranking, proportional piling and seasonal calendars.

**Summary:** Focus-group discussions show that women and men have different perceptions of livestock

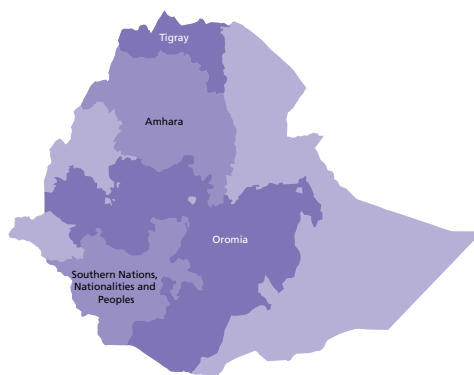
### Locations



**T**wo focus groups in the same village in Ethiopia, both talking about sheep and goat diseases... The men, in the first group, said that a disease outbreak affected the men most as it was their job to provide for the family. But the women, in the second group, said that they were affected more: they relied on the income from selling the animals to run the household and provide food for the family. A sick sheep meant less money and less food to eat. “Besides”, they said, “we do just as much work with the animals as the men do.” In a joint session with both groups afterwards, the men realized that the women were right.

Women in Ethiopia do know as much as men about diseases of sheep and goats – and often a lot more. That is because women traditionally do certain types of work: they feed and water animals that are kept in the stall or near the house; they clean the barns; they look after young animals and those that are too sick to go out to graze. The men have their own tasks to do: they help out with the feeding and take animals out to graze; they select the males to be used for breeding; and they are in charge of selling surplus stock.

Because of this division of tasks, the women and men tend to know about different types of diseases that afflict their flocks. Women spend more time in the barns with sick animals: they are more likely to smell the foul breath of a sheep suffering from a respiratory disease. Men, on the other hand, take the flock out to graze. They are more likely to notice, for example, an animal that is walking around in tight circles – a clear symptom of coenurosis, a brain parasite.



This has implications for disease control.

Men are usually responsible for calling the vet, and for paying for treatment. Women have little say in such matters. That may mean that certain types of diseases go untreated – not because they are unimportant, but because women are not taken seriously when it comes to managing animal health. Gender relations in the farming household affect the disease incidence, and so the household income.

## **The Participatory Epidemiology and Gender Project**

Insights like this are the outcome of the Participatory Epidemiology and Gender Project, a combined research and capacity-development collaboration between ILRI, ICARDA and a group of Ethiopian agricultural research institutions. It is common knowledge that small ruminants are important for women and that men and women do different things. But there is a surprising dearth in the scientific literature on how animal diseases affect different household members, or on how gender dynamics affect disease control. One reason for this is the lack of researchers trained in gender. In addition, sheep and goats tend to get a lot less attention than cattle, which are more valuable animals – and tend to be owned and managed by men. To improve the health of sheep and goats, increase their productivity and reduce the risk of zoonotic diseases, the right interventions need to be targeted at the right people.

In this project we ran an extensive series of focus-group discussions covering 23 villages in four regions: Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region. We focused on two farming systems: mixed crops and livestock, and agropastoralist production.

In each village, the research team conducted separate focus groups with adult women, adult men, young women and young men, followed by a short joint feedback session with all four groups. That gave 92 focus groups in all. Each group had 6–10 participants. All the groups followed the same sequence so the data would be comparable. This covered four themes:

- The importance of each livestock species

- Disease constraints in sheep and goat production
- The socio-economic impact of the diseases on different household members
- Who does what related to animal health management.

The team used a range of participatory tools to stimulate discussion on these themes: simple ranking, proportional piling, and seasonal calendars.

Attendance was good, and the discussions were lively – even though the research was conducted at harvest time, when farmers are busy. They were happy to have the opportunity to learn from each other and to discuss animal health – an issue that they clearly felt was important.

The women participants were pleased to have the chance to take part: somebody was finally listening to them! When they attend mixed groups of men and women, they have little opportunity to speak freely; their voices are drowned out by the men. So it was important to have separate groups for them in which they could speak up.

### **Building the gender capacity of veterinarians**

One rationale for the project was to learn more about the gendered impact of diseases in sheep and goats. A second major aim was to build the capacity of Ethiopian research organizations on gender issues. To do this, the ILRI and ICARDA team of gender specialists and veterinary epidemiologists worked closely with 24 veterinarians from the Ethiopian research institutions. The capacity-building process consisted of the following steps.

- A week-long workshop introduced the veterinarians to key gender concepts and how to apply them in participatory epidemiology. The trainees contributed to the design and testing of the protocol to be used for the field work.
- Teams of four or five veterinarians conducted the focus-group discussions with farmers. A researcher from the ILRI/ICARDA team accompanied them during the first few focus groups to build the veterinarians' skills and ensure consistency across regions.
- In a follow-up workshop, the veterinarians learned how to analyse extensive datasets. Their feedback helped to prioritize the research questions to address. This workshop also developed a household survey to gather in-depth information on the gender issues identified in the focus-group discussions. The veterinarians' input ensured their ownership of the process.
- The veterinarians then conducted the survey fieldwork with support of the ILRI/ICARDA team. In each household, the interviewers questioned both men and women about the management and impact of livestock diseases, as well as the gender issues identified in the focus groups. This



survey also included the collection of blood samples from sheep and goats owned by the households. This was done to check the occurrence of diseases uncovered in the interviews.

- The findings of the household survey will be discussed with the veterinarians in a final training workshop before they are shared with a wider stakeholder audience.

This series of workshops and practice engaged the veterinarians in the whole process, from designing the study protocols through to data analysis and interpretation. Through learning by doing, they were able to internalize the new concepts and learn from one another.

The training had a strong emphasis on facilitation skills and gender analysis competencies. But we tended to overlook other skills, especially the recording of qualitative data. The veterinarians used templates for taking notes during the focus-group discussions, which they tested before the fieldwork. But a lot of detail was lost in transcribing and translating the data. This may be because of translation difficulties or because the veterinarians were not used to dealing with qualitative information. Having a social scientist in each team might have prevented this.

Despite this, the participatory approach paid off, both in terms of the research results and the capacity building. The veterinarians' attitudes towards gender integrative research changed. As interviewers, they had to facilitate the discussions but not otherwise intervene; that forced them to listen. On various occasions they expressed surprise on how carefully the respondents, and

especially the women, observe livestock and note diseases – and particularly on how they try to understand and solve problems. During a feedback session, a veterinarian made the point that “integrating gender in research is not a choice, but a necessity”.

### Agreements, differences and perceptions

The men and women respondents ranked the importance of livestock species similarly. But women gave higher scores to small ruminants, while men prioritized cattle. For women, small ruminants are an important source of income to support their “reproductive” duties: the housework and cooking. “Sheep are like fast-growing cabbage in the homestead”, said one. “Sheep are like *injera*, ready to be eaten”, said another, referring to the local staple food.

Both men and women said that small ruminants require little investment, reproduce quickly and are a source of cash during emergencies or to cover school fees. Cultural values were also important to both men and women. Some women said they used goat meat and milk to treat sick people – a topic that did not come up in any of the men’s groups. Women also pointed out that sheep were easy for them and for children to handle. Men, on the other hand, mentioned on several occasions that sheep were important in traditional celebrations.

Turning to diseases, men and women showed a similar understanding. Contrary to what the men – and the veterinarians – thought, the women could readily describe the clinical signs, the age groups of animals affected, and the season when disease signs appeared. Both men and women said that diseases were important if they did not know how to treat them or if a lot of animals died. Common but treatable diseases that result in poor growth were ranked second in importance, but are often not addressed in research projects and large-scale control programmes.

All groups agreed that small-ruminant diseases affected women more seriously than men. Children and youth were less affected. This was because women bear most of the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. They also rely on income from small ruminants to put food on the table. If animals die, the women have no alternatives: with children to look after at home, they cannot go out to work. Young people and men are more mobile. The impact on household members also varied from one part of Ethiopia to another, perhaps because of differences in gender roles and variations in the importance of small ruminants.

Men and women saw each other’s involvement in managing animal health differently. The men recognized the women’s role, but said that they themselves did more work. The women said the opposite. Understanding who does what, and who does activities that might transmit disease, is important when targeting interventions to control diseases.



## Opening possibilities

The study helps us to identify potential entry points for interventions to improve sheep and goat health. Healthy animals have a higher productivity: they produce more lambs or kids, and they grow faster. Given that women do a lot of the management of sheep and goats, they could play a much bigger role in detecting diseases early. Disease surveillance in Ethiopia relies heavily on farmers detecting diseases and informing the veterinary services, which then take action. While the government is investing in improving the reporting infrastructure, the system is hampered because of poor disease awareness. So building the capacity of women to spot and report diseases might be a good way to improve the system. Separate trainings for men and women would make it possible to target the content to match the work that each do. Women would also be freer to take active part in the trainings if there are no men present.

There seems to be untapped potential for women in providing animal health services. For example, they might act as community animal health workers, focusing on sheep and goats. Sensitizing men on gender issues further would strengthen such initiatives. We will discuss these ideas with veterinarians, policymakers, other stakeholders in the value chain, and especially with women and men small-ruminant keepers to work out which are worth exploring further.



*“National researchers conducted the fieldwork and came to appreciate how much women know about small ruminant diseases and how much they are involved in health management of small ruminants... [the researchers’] attitude had completely changed.”*

**Barbara Wieland**

*Flagship leader – animal health,  
veterinary epidemiologist, ILRI*



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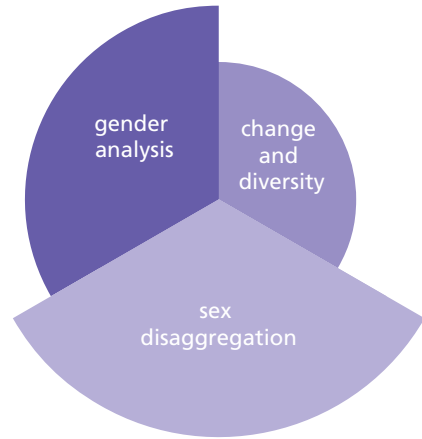
## Situating the research

*This project feeds into the gender-integrated research agenda with a focus on understanding how gender relations/dynamics affect disease control among small ruminants in Ethiopia. This is put in a broader context of wanting to know the factors that affect disease control in the communities involved. It asks questions on the importance of livestock species, the diseases that are constraints in small-ruminant husbandry, the impacts of diseases on different household members, and who does what in animal-health management. The project does not look at the impact of*



technology on gender relations, but does look at impacts of small-ruminant diseases on household members, and as such sheds light on the potential impact of gender-sensitive technologies or interventions.

- *Sex/gender-disaggregated data collection was done through single-sex focus-group discussions. These were important both in terms of the data collected and for ensuring that women had space to speak their minds.*
- *Several concepts are used to analyze gender in this study: the **gender division of labour** (including perceptions of roles and activities); **gendered benefits** (access to and control over resources); **gendered knowledge** (based on the gender division of labour); and **gendered impacts of disease** (linked to benefits). Gender dimensions of the study explore the benefits women and men (young and old) enjoy from their work with small ruminants, gendered knowledge of the diseases (symptoms and responses), and women and men's perceptions of each other's roles and interests.*
- *In terms of change and diversity, the project differentiates adult women/men from young women/men in the focus-group discussions, though this does not come out so strongly in the presentation of data.*



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