

Women and animal traction in Mbeya region of Tanzania: a gender and development approach

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Introduction

Agricultural technologies are not value neutral. They carry with them certain assumptions and choices which can greatly alter the existing social structures into which they are being introduced. This means the promotion of a technology requires an understanding of the technology, as well as the culture involved.

The experience of the Mbeya Oxenization Project (MOP), which is discussed in this paper, outlines the attempts of a development project to promote the use of animal traction in a "gender sensitive" way. Challenged with the reality that animal traction is considered a "male" activity; and that gender issues are often perceived as a threat; MOP designed strategies to ensure female farmers are effective participants in, and beneficiaries from, project activities. By fitting MOP's experience into the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, a useful framework evolves which could be used by other animal traction projects in their efforts to integrate gender concerns.

Background

The introduction of a technology into a culture involves an understanding of both the culture and the technology; how they fit - or don't fit - together. All too often a technology is considered value neutral, meaning only its physical attributes are considered. However, experience has shown that all technologies carry with them certain social and cultural assumptions and values. Technologies also reflect a certain relationship between people and machines. As well, culture is not something static, which remains unalterable despite external forces or influences. Cultures, or patterns of interaction between people, develop due to certain environmental, economic, social, and political influences, and are in a continual state of flux. Without careful investigation, the introduction of a technology into a culture can have unexpected and often unintended results.

These thoughts are not new. Many have recognised this fact for sometime, but have not understood its impact on the change process. Furthermore, this awareness is often ignored, or overlooked in

development projects. This paper will discuss the experience of the Mbeya Oxenization Project (MOP), an animal traction project based in Mbeya, Tanzania; and its attempt to involve both male and female farmers as effective participants. By placing the project's experience within a developmental framework - the Gender and Development Approach - some potential lessons will be identified to assist others when trying to integrate "gender issues" into an animal traction project.



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Women's group weeding at Iyula village, Mbozi District

The MOP Context

Situated in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania, MOP was initiated in 1987 as a joint venture between the Government of Tanzania and the Canadian International Development Agency. Its primary objective was to promote agricultural development by encouraging smallholder farmers to use animal traction technologies to increase production and alleviate drudgery, in a way that "contributes to growth with equity among smallholder farmers" (MEDA 1986).

Though it was the intent of project planners to develop a project where both men and women would be effective participants and beneficiaries, no strategies were identified in the planning documents to implement these intentions. Early in the life of the project MOP staff found themselves using a passive approach, which resulted in them working

only with men and frustrated by the little direction given on how to involve the main farmers of the area - the women.

Rather than accept this situation however, a solution was sought. A year after the project began, a Gender Issues Section was created within MOP. The mandate of this section was to develop a programme which does not just assume women will benefit from the use of Animal Draught Technologies (ADTs); but one which listens to and works with women - as farmers and agents of change. With little support and no blueprint to follow, this section was given the task to develop and operationalize guidelines to ensure that women's needs, opportunities or constraints would be considered at all levels, and in all activities of the project.

The Role of the Gender Issues Section

It did not take long for the gender issues staff to realize that in order to develop a methodology to integrate so called "women's concerns", two major issues had to be recognised and dealt with. The most visible of these was the fact that in most people's minds, and supported throughout the literature, the use of animal traction is a male-oriented/dominated activity. Consider, as an example, most posters or brochures which are promoting the use of ADTs. The message rarely includes women as ADT farmers!

Also part of this perception are the ideas that:

women are too weak and afraid to handle oxen; women will destroy the equipment as they are not capable of understanding it; women have no interest to learn to use ADTs; there is no need for women to use oxen, etc. Decision-makers at Regional Government levels, to village levels had little awareness, or were not willing to acknowledge, that women have any meaningful role of play in animal traction project.

The second major issue, which all too often is left untouched, is the misunderstanding which many of those working in development have about what gender issues really means. To many, gender issues translates into the threat of radical change - where culture and traditions are disregarded as women take control over the men. Barriers to communication immediately go up - barriers caused by the fear of this anticipated change. Whether one is talking about an animal traction project, or any other activity which is promoting change, these misconceptions are very likely present and must be discussed by men and women together. It needs to be understood that being culturally sensitive does not necessarily mean one is gender sensitive.

Therefore, both these issues had to be considered in MOP's methodology. As the relationships developed with rural women through frequent interaction, it became quite obvious that the perceptions of women and animal traction mentioned above were those of men. Women were indeed interested in using oxen, but they felt



Weeding demonstration at Njelenge village, Mbeya District

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powerless to try. In Mbeya Region, men are the exclusive owners of oxen and exercise complete control over them giving women little access to their use, or benefit from this productive asset.

As a result, it seemed crucial that MOP facilitate a process where women could have access to, if not control over this resource. Our approach was twofold. At household level, an awareness campaign was started with our contact farmers. Discussions were initiated with the men and women of the household, to raise awareness of who benefits and who could benefit from the use of ADTs. Questions concerning which members of the household were responsible for which crops and what carts could be used to carry water for domestic use (women's responsibility) not just water for brick-making (men's work); or that an ox-drawn ridger could be used for ridging a bean field (women's crop), not just a man's maize field.

Training seminars and exchanges were organized, where husband and wife had to attend together. Gradually we began to see a new perspective developing within the households. Men became more aware of potential benefits of ADTs for the whole family, for agricultural activities as well as domestic use. Women gained in skills and confidence, not to mention relief from some of their responsibilities. Through a slow process like this, by promoting awareness, positive change can occur.

A second strategy was to assist women to actually have access and control over this technology. By providing loans to women's groups to purchase oxen and equipment and to manage income-generating project based on animal traction, the perceived barriers to women using oxen were again shattered. In the "group" context women felt that they were strong enough to counter family, community and constraints. As individuals they may never have had the courage to plough a field with oxen.

Now, with the support of several other women of like mind, they were enthusiastic students about ADT use. Many are seeking creative ways in which animal traction could enable the group to meet its objectives (i.e. hiring out their oxen and equipment). In some of the groups, several individual members saw this as an opportunity to reduce their personal workload. Working with groups allowed MOP the opportunity to train many women at one time, stressing animal traction and project management skills, as well as encouraging women to be more self-confident and aware of their role in development.

Gender and Development Approach: MOP's Experience

These "village based" activities are not enough

however. Though there is much talk these days of "Women in Development" (WID), "Gender Issues", etc. it is not always clear what these terms mean - particularly in the context of an ADT project. Although there is a considerable and expanding theoretical base concerning "gender", there is little to guide a project which is of practical or implementable worth.

An example to illustrate how we handled this situation. A concern of the Gender Issues section was if MOP staff themselves do not understand (or even agree!) why we are trying to involve the women, will be the message they are trying to convey be consistent? To address this issue, a "gender sensitizing" process was initiated within the project. Using some basic organizational tools, all project staff went through a process of recognizing our fears or ideas surrounding "women's issues"; discussed what gender issues are for development workers; and the implications for an animal traction project. It became clear through our discussions that it was necessary to deal with comments such as "I am afraid about what will happen if women are equal"; as well as raise awareness on issues of gender, before we can design a gender sensitive animal traction programme. This does not happen spontaneously!

Gender Issues must be understood as a development issue, rather than as an equality issue, in order to objectively and constructively be used to plan and analyse activities. It should be mentioned that the participation of MOP staff has been active and honest; and recommendations emphasised the need to continue this awareness process.

In brief, these points outline some of MOP's attempts to ensure gender "equity" within our project. However, it must be stressed that we have developed our programme through trial and error. As there is no right way to address gender concerns appropriate for all situations, MOP's methodology should be considered as one of many possible alternatives.

If we fit MOP's experiences into a theoretical framework, a pattern, or guideline for activities emerges which may be helpful when analyzing other ADT projects. An appropriate perspective to ensure women are equal participants in the development process seems to be the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, as defined by Young (1989), Rathbeger (1989), among others. This approach is not concerned with women per se, but with the socially defined and defended relations between men and women - called gender relations (Young 1989). In other words, what women do, or do not do, is related to what men do, or do not do. One way that gender relations are evidenced in a society is through the sexual division of labour (SDOL), which is based on a set of ideas about what men's

and women's capacities are and what is appropriate for them to do. The SDOL in any society includes both a set of ideas as well as a set of material practices; all of which are specific to a particular culture and time. Though the SDOL can be seen as a structure of division between men and women, it should also be seen as forming the basis of social connection; as men and women become interdependent in their combined efforts to meet household survival needs.

Applied to an animal traction project, this approach would emphasise the need to examine the division of labour between men and women for productive, as well as reproductive activities - and try to predict how a change in one activity will effect other activities. MOP experience has indicated that the introduction of animal traction into a household can effect the labour allocations of the whole household, and for many cropping activities (Vander Ende, 1990 & 1991).

Data collection from some 20 farming households who own oxen and 20 who do not own oxen, over the entire cropping season, has documented some possible implications of ADT use. For example, it seems that overall labour requirements increase for those who own oxen compared to non-owners. This is not surprising as ox-owners cultivate nearly twice the total acreage of the three main crops as non-oxen owners. However, whereas males are investing 26% more time in cropping activities, females of the household spend 54% more time and children

spend 33% more time in the three main crops in households which own oxen compared to those who do not own oxen. Though it is true that the household size of those with oxen is larger than where no oxen are owned, it raises the question that perhaps household size is larger (i.e. more wives and more children) because of the higher labour requirement. The 'cause' and/or 'effect' response to ADT adoption/ownership and labour patterns and labour allocation continues to be part of a MOP long term study.

ADT- an agent of development

As well as determining the responsibilities of men and women, the sexual division of labour also attributes a set of values to all tasks and the doer of the task (Young 1989). For example, as supported by Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi (1983), hauling water for domestic consumption is hardly considered work - therefore it has basically no status. However, hauling water for making bricks can assist to generate an income - therefore there is prestige involved. As animal drawn ox-carts have high status and as it is the men who are the decision-makers, carts will usually be used to haul bricks rather than water which is considered "women's work". This also applies to the use of ADTs on cash crops (high returns, high status) compared to food crops (low cash returns, low status). From MOP data, we have become aware that for those who own oxen, the total time of all household members which is spent



Weeding demonstration at Njelenge village, Mbeya District

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on coffee production is 46% less per acre than time spent in households which have no oxen. This supports the assumption that by using ADT, farmers can reduce the labour required for agricultural activities. However, for bean production, households that own oxen actually increased their time per acre by 16% (Vander Ende, 1990 & 1991).

Though there may be many explanations to these changes in labour allocation, the data referred to above is presented as an indication that the impact of ADT may be far reaching. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what kind of changes we are promoting and to monitor the consequences. The Gender and Development approach provides a framework for reminding us of the many aspects which must be considered. The implications for an

fact that men have capital to purchase and therefore control the oxen and equipment. They are in the position of power. It may also be that men determine access to training or education opportunities.

It was observed by MOP marketing staff that very few women attended meetings and demonstrations. Through investigations it was discovered that although the village leaders (men) and contact farmers (men) were informed that MOP expected both men and women to attend, the message was never received by the women. The men decided that there was no need for the women to participate, so they were not informed. Only by understanding who has access to and who controls the various resources involved in an ADT project, can we determine strategies to reach our target groups.



Farmer's group at Njelenge village, Mbeya District

ADT project are clear. If we want to give women a chance to really have access to and benefit from ADT, we will have to challenge the typical path that most development of technologies follow.

Equally important, perhaps most importantly, is the fact that gender relations reflect power relations. The relationship between males and females differential level of access and control which men and women have over resources such as land, capital, equipment, education, training etc. (Overholt et al. 1985). Applying this concept to an animal traction project means recognizing that men's use of ADT, to the exclusion of women, can be simply based on the

Crucial to this kind of investigation is the awareness that a household decision may not be a democratic one. Folbre (1986) makes the point that intra-household conflict involving family decision-making over distribution of income or work responsibilities is possible. Therefore, we must be aware as to whose priorities we are hearing.

It is important to acknowledge when doing such an analysis that culture plays a major role in determining who does what and with what technology. However, it is often heard in development projects that certain activities could not be done because of cultural restrictions or constraints.

Though it is true that the local culture provides a pattern for interaction, it is not set in stone. It may be a convenient excuse to blame culture when in fact it is actually our technical inability to understand the social/cultural environment (Prindiville, 1991). Only by recognizing the positive and dynamic nature of culture and identifying opportunities and openings, can we develop our strategies for change within the parameters of the culture.

For example, MOP was often told that for male extension workers to talk to women, with no men around, was inappropriate within the local cultural context. However, MOP identified an "opening", that by organizing women into groups, it was quite acceptable for male staff to discuss with women even when no men were around. The culture was respected and in a small way change in being promoted.

Conclusion

The experience of MOP has clearly shown that assumptions of equal benefits for all household members from the use of ADTs, without special attention given to the position of women are not valid. We have also seen that by using a GAD framework, we can be systematic in our analysis and better able to design activities to meet our objectives. By analyzing the local situation and bringing this to the attention of the household, i.e. who is responsible for what work (reproductive/domestic as well as productive activities), with what technologies, what skills are needed for this work

and what are related activities, we are better prepared to understand how all these aspects could be influenced by the introduction of a new technology into the household. Also it is important to scrutinize existing power relations, i.e. who has control over which resources? Are we content to work within these structures, or do we want to try to change them?

By promoting ADT use for women's crops and activities, we may indeed be challenging traditional attitudes and values on many fronts. Firstly, reproductive activities (e.g. carrying water and firewood; milling maize) have to be considered actual work, not just "the things that women do".

Secondly, we need to convince the decision-makers, farmers, researchers, producers, leaders and politicians, all usually men, that there is reason to direct "high status technologies" to "low status work and workers". We need to go beyond merely teaching women to plough with oxen, to actually addressing the structures which keep women in their secondary position. Animal traction is an ideal vehicle to promote such change.

A review of most ADT projects shows a consistent association between men and ADT. In this paper we have challenged some traditionally held perceptions as to why this is so. It is suggested that it may be a reflection of the shortcomings of development projects and the way they are planned rather than direction dictated by culture. The "other issues" - to listen to alternative priorities. By adapting a GAD framework, planners and implementers can begin the journey towards truly "gender sensitive" development.

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