

Involvement of women in animal traction in Kaoma District, Zambia

by

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Kaoma Animal Draught Power Programme, Zambia

Introduction

Kaoma Animal Draught Power Programme (ADPP), is part of the Zambian Western Province ADPP, for small and medium scale farmers of Kaoma District. The programme is implemented bilaterally by the Zambian Department of Agriculture through the Agricultural Engineering Section and by the Dutch Government through a Dutch consultancy company, RDP livestock services. The latter provides the major financial component as well as technical assistance.

Kaoma district is one of the six districts in the Western Province. However, it can not utilize the resources of the Bulozzi flood plain for provision of water and pasture for cattle. Unlike the other districts, it has better communications and soils are more favourable to grow cash crops. Unfortunately, it borders a tsetse infested area, therefore the indigenous people have little or no tradition in cattle keeping. As a result it lags behind in cattle population. With 0.13 of trained oxen/ha. against the provincial average of 0.51 trained oxen/ha. There is a shortage of these animals for ploughing.

Kaoma district has a proven agricultural potential, which is not fully utilized due to a shortage of work oxen. It is estimated there are 20,000 households, of which 20% are female headed, with a total 9 480 cows and 5 069 oxen (DVTCS, 1992). The number of trained oxen may be in the order of 3 500-4 000, most of the others being too young for work.

Subsistence and semi-commercial farming is practised in Kaoma. The major crops are cassava and maize, the latter being (also) a cash crop. Other cash crops in the region are cotton, groundnuts, rice and tobacco, but areas under cultivation are very small compared to maize.

An overview of the project activities in the promotion of ADP

The project has been actively promoting and supporting the sales of ADP implements/spares and oxen to farmers through the local district union fund and other available channels.

A number of ADP mobile training and extension activities were carried out, such as ox-training courses (including separate courses for women), an ox-ploughing competition, and demonstrations on the use of trained cows for ploughing and weeding.

Eight secondary tillage field day demonstrations were conducted within the district while two ox-hiring units operated in tsetse infested areas so as to encourage cattle keeping in these areas. To sensitize farmers on the possible use of cows for traction an ox plough demonstration unit was operating for four weeks during the ploughing season in the area.

An ADP seminar was organized, for farmers and institutions involved in animal traction related activities. As a pilot activity, barter oxenization loans were issued to 10 farmers, four being women (each loan consisting of two oxen, one plough and one trek-chain). Seven farmer groups were issued with weeding implements for trial purposes (one cultivator and one ridger per group). A yoke making group was formed in Kashamu to accommodate the corresponding demand in yokes with a different length to be used for secondary tillage. Direct ridging trials in Kaoma North and East, involving 13 farmers, were implemented in collaboration with Magoye ADPR & D project. The same farmers have established plots of groundnuts, which is a women's crop, on ridges (to be harvested using a groundnut lifter during the harvesting season).

A socio-economic study related to ADP has been carried out to get a farmers-first view of their problems and constraints.

In all the activities mentioned above and others, the project has targeted both female and male farmers. During the project period it was found that the major constraint in Kaoma is the labour shortage during the cultivation season, more especially for weeding operations, which is mainly a women's job.

Involvement of women in ADP in the area

- During mobile courses, it was expected that 25% of the participants should be women. However, this was not always attained



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Sowing in every third row, Zambia

- In various on-farm implement demonstrations, especially in ADP weeding, female farmers have been encouraged to participate. It was found out they prefer ridgers to cultivators due to their easy use
- For barter loan packages, 40% has been allocated to women. In order to get the loan they first had to attend an ox-ploughing course
- Promotion of women's crops (for cultivation of groundnuts) using ADP for primary and secondary tillage as well as transport
- Involvement of female extension staff in the programme
- Involving female farmers in meetings and seminars in which they could express their needs and opinions
- During cow and ox demonstrations for ploughing, women have expressed that they preferred cows to oxen. Courses for women have been organized

Constraints for women to benefit from ADP

- Shortage of work oxen and implements

As there is a general shortage of oxen even for male farmers due to a number of factors already mentioned, it follows therefore that female farmers (who generally do not own oxen) have a narrow access to benefit from ADP. For those who manage to hire or borrow oxen for ploughing, these services come late as ox owners will plough their own fields first.

- No access to loan facilities

Credit facilities are rather scarce and where these do exist women are scarcely involved. Married women can not get loans independently from their husbands. In the same way the absence of a responsible male makes credit organisations rather reluctant to provide female headed households with credit. At present the only existing credit facilities for women are group loans. Seasonal loans for hiring labour, ploughing and weeding would bring relief for many female headed households.

- Indigenous people have insufficient knowledge and skills in ox-handling

Diffusion and adoption of ADP technology has been intra tribe, with an elite farming community having more access to cattle and implements. It was observed that some non-oxen owners shun ADP courses as they perceived it was of no use acquiring knowledge which could not be utilized after all.

- Oxen ownership limited to males

Though women may own cattle, oxen ownership is predominantly a male feature.

- ADP considered to be a male job especially for ploughing

Since ploughing with oxen is considered a male's job due to the heaviness of the operation, women have limited access to oxen. They would prefer to use oxen for weeding and transport purposes.

- Inadequate funds to hire oxen

Many female headed households have insufficient funds to hire oxen for ploughing. When promotion of ox use is taking place, there should also be emphasis on money generating activities for these women.

- Many women have un-stumped fields for subsistence crops

Due to shortage of labour already mentioned, female headed household farmers have un-stumped fields. Therefore ox-owners hesitate to hire their animals to those women as they fear the beasts could be injured by standing stumps and the implement damaged by buried roots.

- Women who have cattle in other villages might have no access to them

When women are encouraged to learn ox (or cow) handling, access to their own cattle might improve as they can own more actively participate in decision making on the subject.

Opportunities for women to benefit from ADP

Due to the increased awareness that has taken place on the use of ADP, most tribes, women as well as men, have access to oxen. To encourage women to use the available but unutilized cows, specific courses on the use of these animals can make these animals available to the women as it conforms with the prevalent gender issue. Women have access to hire oxen if they have the money. Borrowing from relatives is sometimes possible.



Woman plowing with two oxen, Zambia



Woman plowing with two oxen, Zambia

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Access to ADP can be increased through training and extension activities for women as this can raise their confidence. Males will also get used to the idea of women being capable of handling the animals, when specific courses for women are organized. Money generating activities for women should be initiated and encouraged in the first place. Loans targeted at women is a second possibility.

Conclusions

The critical path for women's involvement in animal traction is never straight. Substantial combined initiatives and approaches are required if the issue of gender neutral development is to be raised at all. A lot of ideas and methodologies have been suggested and applied but still many questions remain unanswered. It will be particularly interesting to see independent women participating in animal traction without persuasion by any external force. The ideal situation is to see women right from the start handle both cows and oxen, using them in primary, and more so, in secondary tillage without any external assistance.

When women are participating in an ox handling course, they are very active and show their capacity to handle the animals. However, when they are back at their home, one can rarely see them using their skills.

The question is how women themselves can come to realize the importance concerning their use of animal traction. Through extension, women can be made aware of this. ADP training has to provide confidence to women, and consequently make them benefit from the technology.

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