

A note on the use of animal traction by women in North Western Province, Zambia

by

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Abstract

The use of animal traction can lessen the burden of women involved in subsistence and semi-commercial farming. Draft animals can assist with land cultivation, planting, weeding, harvesting, carrying water from wells and transporting grain to hammer mills.

In North Western Province of Zambia, as in other parts of the country, women do not normally own animals and have no say over their use, because such decisions are traditionally considered to be in the male domain. Women are therefore deprived of the advantages and profits that arise from animal traction use.

Recently there have been limited changes in the use of animal traction by women in North Western Province. More needs to be done to integrate women farmers in the use of animal power. Women need to be targeted for extension advice and information about loans. Training should be made appropriate to women. The use of women trainers and the holding of plowing competitions for women would help overcome fears and prejudices

Introduction

North Western Province is the third largest province in Zambia. Two agricultural development projects are working in this area: in the northern region the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) covers Kasempa, Mwinilunga and Solwezi Districts, while the southern region is catered for by GTZ (the German Agency for Technical Cooperation) which covers Kabompo, Mufumbwe and Zambezi Districts.

Cattle owning is traditional in the southern region, but not in the north. The approach to the introduction and promotion of animal traction among female farmers has therefore been different in the two regions, much greater progress having been made in the south. For instance, in the GTZ supported southern area, 4177 out of 14 366 women farmers (30%) were involved in cash crop farming during the 1989/90 season, and of these, 20% had access to plowing services. Participation of women farmers in the work oxen programme has slightly improved with time. For example, the number of ox loans to women increased from six in 1988/89 to 29 in 1989/90, this increase being partly due to the

experience that people have gained in animal handling, but largely as a result of an intervention programme by GTZ, through the Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDP), directed toward women farmers. The IRDP has since established a women's section to promote women's activities.

In the northern region only 10% of oxen users are women. Farmers are generally unfamiliar with oxen because cattle are not generally available in this area.

Advantages of animal traction use among women

Animal traction technology can help to reduce the drudgery of women. For instance, it can make the transport of harvested produce for commercial purposes much easier (and thus help women to earn much needed income), and can also ease the burden of transporting wood and water.

Labour is a major constraint to crop production in the province. Women farmers contribute 59% of the total labour input, so the use of oxen considerably reduces the labour burden among those women farmers. For instance, in sorghum and maize production it is estimated that the average time spent on hand hoeing, ridging, planting and weeding amounts to 1071 hours/ha; use of oxen reduces this time by 56%, to 467 hours/ha.

As a result of the animal husbandry skills shown by the few individual women or groups who have oxen, deliberate efforts have been made to encourage women, either as individuals or in groups, to obtain loans from lending institutions in the province to purchase their own animals.

Constraints on animal traction use

Although the use of animal traction may seem to have been a success for some women, many factors have prevented it from being widely and effectively adopted. It is still difficult for a woman to have access to a pair of oxen in non-cattle-keeping areas such as Solwezi and Kasempa Districts. Here women are generally afraid to handle a pair of oxen.

It will take some time for women to build up their knowledge and confidence.

Among female-headed households, the extra labour involved in managing animals (for herding, for example) has discouraged some from owning oxen.

Incomplete mechanisation of farm operations using animal traction can present problems for women. The use of oxen for plowing can considerably increase the area cultivated, but this also causes an increase in the workload on non-mechanised operations such as planting, weeding and harvesting, which are mainly done by the same women. At peak periods for these operations, women therefore have much less time to devote to looking after their families.

Where oxen are owned jointly by a group of women, plowing is still often late because a large area must be plowed in a short time. This leads to late planting, reduced yields and, ultimately, less income from cash crops and a decrease in the quantity and quality of food crops available to the women's families.

Extension services as a whole are still biased towards men. So are the processes of selecting farmers to qualify for loans and credit. For instance, in 1989/90 only 29 out of 500 ox loans (6%) were given to women. In addition, women do not seem to

be given proper information about the possibility of owning oxen.

Training in the use of animals does not take into account the social, cultural and economic conditions of women handling oxen for the first time.

Sometimes women cannot join a training course because they are too busy taking care of children and performing other household duties, especially where they have no relatives nearby to help them.

Recommendations

Several steps should be taken to promote ox ownership among women. For example:

- special efforts should be made to inform women about loans, and suitable women should be given priority in selection procedures for loans and credit
- training courses for future ox owners should consider the specific fears of women; if married male ox owners participated in training with their wives, these women would become familiar with animals
- recruitment of female ox trainers would help reduce women's fears and prejudices
- plowing competitions among women should be encouraged.

Photograph opposite
Women learning to plow during a demonstration organised by the Tanga Draft Animal Project, Tanzania