

## *Gender, small-scale livestock farming and food security: Policy implications in the South African context*

### **Executive summary**

Women are powerful but often neglected agents of change, and their leadership is critical: they play a significant role in decision-making within households, including decision-making about animal care, the use of livestock-farming by-products and household food security. As key actors in the agricultural sector, women play a vital role in addressing and leading efforts to improve local economic growth by farming with livestock and improving livestock health, thereby contributing to household food security. Gender perspectives on livestock farming and disease prevention (i.e. mitigation, adaptation, policy development, decision-making) are urgently needed to improve the broad human and social dimensions of farming systems. Drawing on insights from a recent baseline study and multiple studies in Africa and elsewhere, this policy brief addresses the importance of gender considerations for small-scale livestock-farming communities in relation to food security in the South African context. The brief examines some of the key elements of gender in relation to small-scale livestock farming, asks how some of these important elements align with current policies and practices, and makes a number of focused policy recommendations.

### **Women, small-scale agriculture and food security in a global context**

Hardest hit by poverty globally, two-thirds of the world's 600 million poor livestock keepers are rural women (Thornton et al. 2003). Within the international agricultural development agenda, women are increasingly identified as key to the eradication of global hunger (FAO 2011; Nesamvuni et al. 2010; Njuki & Sanginga 2013). Indeed, women are identified as 'the invisible agricultural producers' (Mofya & Chisenga 2000: 128).

The role of women in agriculture is particularly strong in sub-Saharan Africa, where women form 50% of the population economically active in agriculture (higher than any other region in the world), and where the employment of both men and women is also higher in the agricultural sector than in either industry or services (FAO 2011). Women remain central to any rural development strategy, constituting 'the backbone of global smallholder agriculture, and [representing] one of the best hopes for ensuring future global food security' (Njuki & Sanginga 2013: xv).

### **The problem**

Among development practitioners and researchers studying gender issues, livestock farming is increasingly being recognised as an important subject because of its role in poverty reduction and food security:

Livestock is considered a key asset for rural households worldwide and a primary livelihood resource for rural communities: about 752 million of the world's poor keep livestock to produce food, generate cash income, manage risks and build up assets ... [Livestock] widens and sustains three major pathways out of poverty: (1) securing the assets of the poor, (2) improving smallholder and pastoral productivity and (3) increasing market participation by the poor ... Especially in rural areas, the development of small-scale livestock enterprises must be seen as a key element of any efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. (FAO 2013: 5)

Given that the majority of the world's poor livestock keepers are rural women, and that in rural areas 'livestock are important in women's livelihoods and asset portfolios' (Kristjanson et al. 2010: 2), there is a need to consider the ways in which livestock-related opportunities relate to women.

## A note on 'gender'

The following definition, presented by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), forms the basis of our understanding of gender issues within small-scale livestock farming/keeping: 'Gender issues focus not only on women, but on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, and division of labour and needs. Gender relations determine household security, well-being of the family, planning, production and many other aspects of life' (IFAD 2010: 1). Programmes and initiatives in small-scale livestock farming take into account the impact, role and effects of gender on intra-household and inter-household dynamics to differing degrees. The extent to which gender forms part of an approach renders that approach as variously:

- gender-accommodating, implying a neutral approach to gender;
- gender-exploitative, suggesting an approach that ultimately results in a worsened gender disparity; or
- gender-transformative, indicating an approach that positively transforms the gendered dynamics (Njuki & Miller 2013: 115–116).

There is a need for a gender-sensitive approach to livestock farming that does not set men and women in opposition to one another or assumes that they have exact symmetry in roles, assets and responsibilities. It is important to recognise that men are not 'independent agents unconstrained by concerns about the welfare of others, and women [are not] altruistic individuals almost exclusively concerned with producing food for consumption and achieving food security for others' (FAO 2011: 23).

According to IFAD (2010), the main benefits for women in livestock production are empowerment through their decision-making role, income generation, boosted self-esteem and access to credit. Women's ownership of assets, including livestock, means betterment for them as well as for the households in which they reside.

Women's ownership and control over assets translates into their ability to exercise decision-making and other powers in wider domains: 'Increasing women's control over land, physical assets and financial assets can improve child health and nutrition, and increase expenditures on education, contributing to overall poverty reduction' (Njuki et al. 2013: 73). Yet the invisibility of women in decision-making processes and their lack of control over livestock assets and income have had a detrimental effect on both family welfare and economic growth (Njuki & Sanginga 2013). Women

face significant obstacles and challenges in using small-scale livestock farming as a springboard for self-empowerment. These include:

- lack of ownership of livestock;
- lack of ownership of land;
- lack of access to extension services and support, credit, training, and education;
- low literacy rates and lack of access to information;
- lack of control over household income; and
- constraints on mobility, which prevent women from accessing basic services.

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) was developed to 'capture women's empowerment and inclusion levels in the agricultural sector, to raise the status of women in agriculture, [and to] improve nutrition and decrease poverty' (Njuki & Miller 2013: 121–122). The index considers five

factors to be indicative of women's overall empowerment in the agricultural sector:

1. decisions over agricultural production;
2. power over productive resources such as land and livestock;
3. decisions over income;
4. leadership in the community; and
5. time use.

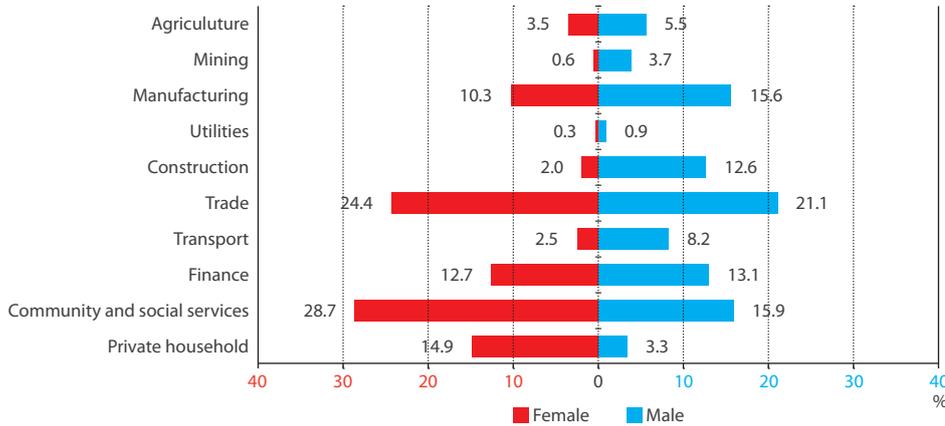
As a principal component of agriculture, livestock has been recognised as important for promoting sustainable livelihoods and for strengthening the role of women in bringing about social change. Livestock can thus be said to be crucial in enabling women to achieve their full potential and participation in society.

## The South African policy context

In South Africa, government policy and strategy for rural development is focused on addressing issues of poverty, and the growing significance of livestock farming is recognised in this effort. As the dominant industry in the agricultural sector, livestock keeping 'contributes up to 49% of agricultural output ... [and] enables South Africa to produce 85% of its own meat requirements' (Munyai 2012: 33). Of all agricultural activity, livestock agriculture accounts for 42.4%, mixed farming for 21.8% and crop farming for 31.2% (Stats SA 2013a). According to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the amount of agricultural land used by livestock farmers is estimated at 70% (cited in Meissner et al. 2013).

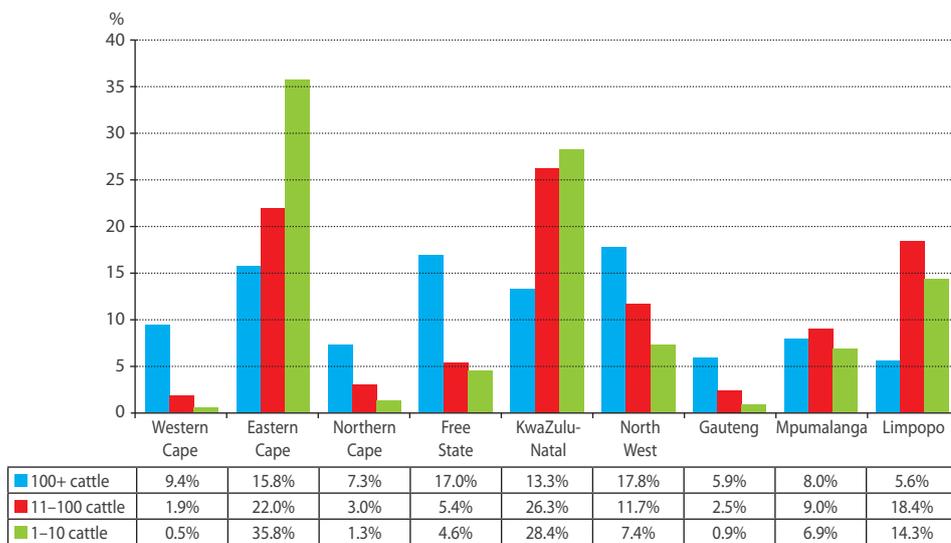
However, while livestock is an important sub-sector within agriculture, there is a worrying decline in the agricultural sector's overall contribution to the country's economic growth as well as in the sector's provision of employment opportunities. Agriculture, which is the 6th biggest sector (out of 10) in terms of employment for women and the 7th in terms of employment for men, accounts for just 3.5% of women employed and

**Figure 1:** Gendered employment by sector



Source: Stats SA 2013b: 33

**Figure 2:** Percentage of small-scale livestock-keeping households by province



Source: Stats SA 2013a: 6

5.5% of men (Stats SA 2013b). The declining significance of the sector's employment creation is shown in Figure 1.

Nonetheless, the statistics also indicate that livestock keeping is central to sustaining millions of households. Specifically *small-scale* livestock production is a significant agricultural activity in the country (see Figure 2). Nationally, 78.6% of all livestock-keeping households keep 1–10 cattle; 19.2% own 11–100 cattle; and only 2.2% keep more than 100 cattle (Stats SA 2013a).

Livestock keeping is a significant activity that may be described as household-sustaining, allowing many households in rural and peri-urban areas to remain food-secure and out of extreme poverty. It is acknowledged that 'smallholder' livestock farmers are not a singular homogeneous group. They engage in livestock farming/keeping for differing purposes and in conjunction with other economic activities to differing degrees.

We need to understand how women fit into this overall livestock-keeping scenario in order to offer targeted policy interventions to (1) empower women and

(2) enable livestock farming to provide communities with a pathway out of poverty and towards long-term food security.

## Women, livestock farming and the achievement of food security in South Africa

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) states that there is a significant slowdown in the progress towards lower hunger rates, bringing hunger reduction essentially to a halt in developing countries as a whole (FAO 2014). Data from the 2005 National Food Consumption Survey commissioned by the Department of Health indicate that 'the level of child undernourishment in South Africa is exceptionally high for a developed, middle income nation' (Hendriks 2013: 2). The 2011 General Household Survey by Statistics South Africa shows that 11.5% of the population – close to 10 million people – experienced hunger in the 30 days prior to the survey (Hendriks 2013). In addition to experiencing hunger, '22.7 percent of the population, or 13.8 million people, has insufficient access to food and many households (21 percent) continue to experience difficulty in accessing food' (The Presidency 2014: 65).

Further, the geographical concentration of food insecurity is in rural areas and is the result of a number of contributing factors, including 'a declining trend in subsistence food production, [and the rising] cost of food relative to the incomes of the poor', the latter contributing to malnutrition and poor dietary diversity as well (The Presidency 2014: 65–66).

There is a growing recognition on the part of government of the link between smallholder livestock farmers on the one hand and rural development and land reform on the other. However, there needs to be a more integrated gender strategy to cement the triangular relationship

between smallholder livestock farming, women's empowerment, and rural development/poverty alleviation/food security initiatives. Typical of the poor is that they spend more than 50% of their earnings on food. Women are known to be responsible for food selection and food preparation for their households, as well as for the care and feeding of children. In rural areas the availability of women's time is a key factor in obtaining water for hygiene, collecting firewood and frequent feeding of young children (De Klerk et al. 2004; Stats SA 2013a).

A major part of the government's rural development and poverty alleviation strategy is land reform, and for some scholars, such as social historian William Beinart, the success of land reform is often directly linked to the success of livestock keeping/farming.<sup>1</sup> Women's empowerment as livestock keepers is thus dependent on access to land. According to government, women have increasingly become beneficiaries of the land reform and redistribution process:

An enabling environment has been created for women to access, own, control, use and manage land, as well as to access credit. This led to an increase in female-headed households benefiting from land reform, from 1.2 percent of beneficiaries in 1994 to 13.3 percent of beneficiaries by 2007. (The Presidency 2014: 65)

It is noteworthy, however, that in some reports government places the issue of women's land rights out of its own sphere of responsibility, claiming that 'women continue to be denied their constitutional right to access land due to male dominance in traditional and cultural practices' (The Presidency 2014: 65).

In the Communal Land Rights Act (No. 11 of 2004), gender equality within the

communal tenure context is identified as an important imperative (Du Plessis & Pienaar 2010). Furthermore, South Africa has an obligation to address gender inequality within the context of land because of its international commitments. As one of the United Nations member states, South Africa is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which states that 'State Parties should ensure that women have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes'. However, the likelihood of the elimination of gender-based discrimination in land reform policy remains an ongoing challenge.

## Recommendations

Based on the foregoing evidence and arguments, this policy brief makes the following recommendations.

1. Given that some 70% of agricultural land is used for livestock farming, and that livestock farming accounts for up to 49% of all agricultural output, government policy around this agricultural sub-sector needs to be more robust, more integrated, comprehensive and increasingly long-term.
2. The empowerment of women as smallholder livestock keepers/farmers needs to be continued through increased access to education, information, training in animal healthcare, and ownership over assets and land.
3. Women also need to be empowered to take on leadership positions within rural livestock-farming communities, to play a role in intra-household and communal decision-making, and to exercise greater control over their time use.
4. More robust statistics around smallholder livestock keeping are required in order to further

understand how these farmers make choices and decisions. Sex-disaggregated data are crucial in the generation of these statistics. Further research to better understand local contexts and the social and gendered dimensions of small-scale livestock communities is needed.

5. The significance of women in smallholder livestock farming needs to be concretely established as a targeted policy imperative and as a part of a broader food-security strategy for the country.

## References

- De Klerk M, Drimie S, Aliber M, Mini S, Mokoena R et al. (2004) *Food security in South Africa: Key policy issues for the medium term*. Pretoria: HSRC
- Du Plessis W & Pienaar J (2010) The more things change, the more they stay the same: The story of communal land tenure in South Africa. *Fundamina* 16(1): 73–114
- FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization) (2011) *Notes on livestock, food security and gender equity*. FAO Animal Production and Health Working Paper No. 3, Rome
- FAO (2013) *Understanding and integrating gender issues into livestock projects and programmes: A checklist for practitioners*. Accessed November 2013, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3216e/i3216e.pdf>
- FAO (2014) *The state of food insecurity in the world: Strengthening the enabling environment for food security and nutrition*. Accessed March 2015, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4030e.pdf>
- Hendriks S (2013) South Africa's National Development Plan and New Growth Path: Reflections on policy contradictions and implications for food security. *Agrekon* 52(3): 1–17
- IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) (2010) *Gender and livestock: Tools for design*. Livestock Thematic Papers: Tools for project design. Accessed January 2014, <http://www.ifad.org/lrkm/factsheet/genderlivestock.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication from W Beinart to authors, 18 March 2015.

- Kristjanson P, Waters-Bayer A, Johnson N, Tipilda A, Njuki J et al. (2010) *Livestock and women's livelihoods: A review of the recent evidence*. Discussion Paper No. 20, 1–30, International Livestock Research Institute, Nairobi
- Meissner H, Scholtz M & Palmer A (2013) Sustainability of the South African livestock sector towards 2050: Part 1: Worth and impact of the sector. *South African Journal of Animal Science* 43(3): 282–297
- Mofya R & Chisenga N (2000) Gender and animal draught power: Experiences of Palabana with small-scale farmers in Zambia. In PG Kaumbutho, RA Pearson & TE Simalenga (Eds) *Empowering farmers with animal traction*. Proceedings of the workshop of the Animal Traction Network for Eastern and Southern Africa (ATNESA), 20–24 September 1999, Mpumalanga. Accessed June 2014, [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/237255669\\_g\\_Gender\\_and\\_animal\\_draught\\_power\\_experiences\\_of\\_Palabana\\_with\\_small-scale\\_farmers\\_in\\_Zambia](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/237255669_g_Gender_and_animal_draught_power_experiences_of_Palabana_with_small-scale_farmers_in_Zambia)
- Munyai FR (2012) An evaluation of socio-economic and biophysical aspects of small-scale livestock systems based on a case study from Limpopo province: Muduluni village. PhD thesis, University of the Free State
- Nesamvuni EA, Swanepoel FJC & Stroebel A (2010) Interactions between gender, environment, livelihoods, food, nutrition and health. In F Swanepoel, A Stroebel & S Moyo (Eds) *The role of livestock in developing communities: Enhancing multifunctionality*. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State and The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA). Accessed July 2014, <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/3003/roleLivestockFarming.pdf?sequence=1>
- Njuki J, Mburu S & Pimentel P (2013) Livestock markets and intra-household income management. In J Njuki & P Sanginga (Eds) *Women, livestock ownership and markets: Bridging the gender gap in eastern and southern Africa*. New York: Routledge
- Njuki J & Miller B (2013) Making livestock research and development programs and policies more gender responsive. In J Njuki & P Sanginga (Eds) *Women, livestock ownership and markets: Bridging the gender gap in eastern and southern Africa*. New York: Routledge
- Njuki J & Sanginga P (2013) Gender and livestock: Key issues, challenges and opportunities. In J Njuki & P Sanginga (Eds) *Women, livestock ownership and markets: Bridging the gender gap in eastern and southern Africa*. New York: Routledge
- Stats SA (Statistics South Africa) (2013a) *Census 2011: Agricultural households*. Pretoria: Stats SA
- Stats SA (2013b) *Gender statistics in South Africa, 2011*. Pretoria: Stats SA
- The Presidency (2014) *Twenty year review: South Africa, 1994–2014*. Accessed June 2014, <http://www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za/news/Pages/20-Year-Review.aspx>
- Thornton PK, Kruska RL, Henninger N, Kristjanson PM, Reid RS et al. (2003) Locating poor livestock keepers at the global level for research and development targeting. *Land Use Policy* 20(4): 311–322
- of Canada, provided through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), Canada, [www.international.gc.ca](http://www.international.gc.ca). *The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the IDRC or its Board of Governors. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the ARC and its Council.*

## POLICY BRIEF AUTHORS

**Prof Vasu Reddy**, Executive Director, Human and Social Development Programme, HSRC, and Honorary Professor and Research Fellow, University of KwaZulu-Natal

**Safiyya Goga** and **Stanley Molefi** are Senior Researchers and **Furzana Timol** is a Junior Researcher in the Human and Social Development Programme, HSRC

**Dr Arshad Mather**, **Dr Thireshni Chetty** and **Dr David Wallace** are attached to the ARC's Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute (OVI)

Enquiries to: Prof Vasu Reddy:  
vasureddy@hsrc.ac.za

## Acknowledgements

This policy brief is based in part on research that was designed and implemented with the Agriculture Research Council (ARC) of South Africa and in conjunction with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada. This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the IDRC, [www.idrc.ca](http://www.idrc.ca), and with financial support from the government