

INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) IN ANIMAL HEALTH DELIVERY IN NEPAL (ENGLISH)

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IDRC GRANT / SUBVENTION DU CRDI : - ADVANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LIVESTOCK VACCINE VALUE CHAINS IN NEPAL, SENEGAL AND UGANDA



Image 1. A woman goat farmer attending to her goats in Dhading, Nepal

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In Nepal, women are often the primary caretakers of goats. However, they experience differentiated access to animal health services due to caste. Women from upper castes have better access to veterinary services, inputs, and information, enabled by their membership in goat cooperatives. Women from lower castes, on the other hand, have restricted membership in goat cooperatives and thus, less access to local animal health service providers and services. Consequently, they are less able to benefit from animal health campaigns or small livestock-related business opportunities compared to upper caste women. A study by the University of Florida demonstrated the importance of integrating a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) approach in animal health delivery to reach, benefit and empower women of lower castes and other marginalized goat-rearing communities to improve livestock productivity and health.

Key Messages

1. Women from *Dalit* and *Janajati* castes, and other marginalized groups have limited access to veterinary services, including vaccination. Animal health and vaccination campaigns are often held without considering the needs of these women.
2. Local animal health service providers have inadequate knowledge and skills regarding GESI approaches. As a result, they are less able to address unequal access to resources and services among goat-keepers arising from gender and other intersecting variables such as caste, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.
3. With the growing demand for veterinary services from goat-keepers, there is an urgent need to increase the number of village-level animal health service providers, and particularly those who can deliver services to remotely located, marginalized goat-keepers.

Introduction

In Nepal, goats are important assets for rural women. They provide not only income, food, prestige and a safety net, but are also a component of religious rituals, which form an important part of the social fabric of Nepal's rural communities. To address rural goat-keepers' access to veterinary services, women were trained as village animal health workers, and goat cooperatives were created with support from the Government of Nepal. A policy was initiated to mainstream a GESI framework within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Services. This, however, has not yet been integrated within its departments, nor the animal health delivery systems at provincial, district, and ward levels.

A study by the University of Florida in Nepal documented that animal health service providers and goat cooperatives primarily serve women from upper castes, who tend to own more goats, live close to roads or community centers, and belong to the same caste as the service providers. Women from the marginalized goat-rearing communities, on the other hand, reside in more remote locations, are poor, own fewer goats, and tend to belong to the lower castes. They also have limited agency to influence public and private entities' decision-making related to the location and timing of animal health and vaccination camps, and the recruitment of vaccinators. These factors severely limit their access to much-needed veterinary drugs, extensions, and vaccines. Their marginalization is compounded by the insufficient understanding among veterinary service providers of the differences among women goat-keepers and the intersecting social, economic, and institutional factors that prevent some of them from accessing and benefiting from veterinary services.

Perception and Reality

During the University of Florida's Training of Trainers workshop with district veterinary hospital and livestock expert service center staff, participants pointed out that the care of small livestock usually falls on women and children because they often stay at home. When asked whether all women work from home, the participants said that Dalit women and men often work as daily wage laborers and leave their homes during the day. They then realized that their assumption about when to target communities with animal health or vaccination camps may not always reach Dalit communities. They thought that changing the timing of the camp to suit the availability of lower caste groups could be a good first step in enabling them to participate.

The Livestock Vaccine Innovation Fund (LVIF) supports the development of affordable livestock vaccines, targeting diseases that impact women and men livestock keepers and facilitating their access and use at scale. A set of participatory action research projects within LVIF are addressing barriers faced by women in livestock vaccine systems and generating new evidence on how women can better benefit from and participate in these systems.

Under the LVIF program, the University of Florida conducted research to examine how gendered and caste-based roles and relations influence the participation of goat keepers in the livestock

vaccine value chain (LVVC). The study aimed at strengthening the capacity of animal health service providers at district and local levels using gender transformative approaches. The research focused on selected communities in Chitwan, Dhading, Kaski, Nuwakot, Palpa, and Tanahu districts, and specifically addressed women goat keepers' access to the *peste des petits ruminants* (PPR) vaccine.

Insights from the research

To facilitate the integration of GESI in veterinary services, we need to find creative and sustainable ways to encourage district and local animal health service providers, and community leaders to use the approach as a pathway to reach marginalized livestock keepers in need of their service. This will ensure that men and women of different communities are reached equally, regardless of their socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. The Government of Nepal is already committed to using a GESI approach in its policymaking. Lower caste and marginalized communities receive quotas to access health, education, employment, and other social programs. However, more efforts are needed to translate GESI integration from policy to practice, and to make the value of using the approach clear to both government as well as community actors involved in the LVVC.



Image 2. GESI training of Livestock Division staff in Nuwakot.

Making livestock services GESI-sensitive at the community level

During University of Florida's one-day training of the Livestock Service Division (LSD) and Goat Cooperative staff on integrating GESI approaches in animal health delivery, the participants recognized the need to integrate GESI in their work. They indicated that the last vaccination campaign in their communities which followed the GESI approach helped them bring animal health programs to the homes of Dalits. This was also confirmed by focus group discussions of the Dalit community: "Our confidence in animal health and vaccination have improved. The LSD staff and vaccinators came to our homes, used new syringes on our animals, and provided one-on-one consultation regardless of who was in front – a woman, and a Dalit."

What is GESI training?

GESI training is based on a concept that the context in which animal vaccination takes place is as important, if not more important, than animal health factors. Often it is not simply gender that prevents owners from getting their animals vaccinated, but its intersection with other social factors such as class, ethnicity, disability, or age that create barriers for owners from getting their animals vaccinated. Understanding GESI can enrich and transform livestock programs to be gender responsive and inclusive.

We need more women animal health service providers and GESI training!

The animal health service providers who participated in the University of Florida trainings indicated that there is a need to recruit more staff, especially trained women, to reach the growing demand for veterinary services in their communities. They also asked for refresher trainings with GESI lens to ensure that the old and new staff continue to deliver gender-responsive and inclusive services regardless of caste or other social identities. A women village animal health worker said: "The upcoming community sensitization activity in my community will allow me to reach Dalits as a step forward to improve mutual trust and reciprocity."



Image 3. Woman Village Animal Health Worker is training goat keepers in Dhading as part of community sensitization activities.

Policy Recommendations

- ◆ **1. Integrate a GESI approach in veterinary service delivery so women from lower caste and other socio-economically marginalized groups can access the critical veterinary care, drugs, information, and vaccines they need.**

This can help animal health providers to intentionally promote gender-responsive and inclusive animal health programs targeting all community members. As communicators of veterinary knowledge, they are well-placed to facilitate equal access to improved or new technologies that achieve higher productivity and return among all goat keepers.

- ◆ **2. Invest in GESI training of animal health service providers to boost entrepreneurship and economic empowerment of women goat keepers.**

Creating opportunities for animal health service providers to learn and apply GESI responsive and inclusive veterinary approaches can lead to increased engagement of women as livestock owners, managers, and entrepreneurs.

- ◆ **3. Create opportunities for women, especially those from lower castes and marginalized communities to become animal health service providers.**

Encourage and recruit women of different caste, ethnicity, and socio-economic background into veterinary programs. This effort could be integrated in school curricula to encourage girl students to pursue careers in veterinary or animal science fields. Additional interventions, such as sensitization of existing animal health service providers, and parents, may be required to reduce barriers and create support for entry of these women into the animal health services.

About this brief

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Photo Credit

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