

Invisible Helpers: Ethiopia

voices
from
women

Women's views on the contributions of working donkeys, horses and mules to their lives.

Key findings from research in five equine owning communities in Ethiopia



Working equids are one of the most important livestock for women.



Working equids lighten women's burden by reducing their labour and helping with domestic chores.



Working equids support women in generating income that benefits them directly and indirectly.



Working equids help women in carrying out social functions and increase their opportunities for community engagement.



The loss or sickness of a working equid has negative impacts on women and their families.



Women are the primary carers and users of working equids, however women have limited or no access to training and extension services on equine management and husbandry.

Introduction

Ethiopia has the largest equine population in the world after China, with around 9 million animals.ⁱ Donkeys make up the majority of working equine animals (6.75 million), followed by horses (1.91 million) and mules (0.35 million). These animals play an important role in the economy of the country and are a lifeline for millions of people in rural and peri-urban areas of Ethiopia. Cart donkeys transport a huge diversity of loads ranging from people, agricultural produce and water to building materials, such as timber, stone, bricks and even iron sheets and girders.ⁱⁱ Gharry horses are also commonly used as a form of taxi. The rapid growth in Ethiopia's population has resulted in increased demands for working equids.ⁱⁱⁱ

Working equine animals provide a vital support system for women from equine owning communities, reducing their domestic burden and generating income. They are often the bread winners for women and their families, not only enabling them to buy food, clothing and household items, but also to pay for their children's school fees and healthcare. They also play an important role in supporting women to carry out social functions and raise their status in the community.

However, the role of working equids in Ethiopia is often unrecognised or under-rated by policy makers who primarily focus on food producing livestock and fail to recognise the contributions that working equids make to millions of people and to the country's economy.^{iv} In an effort to bring attention to the links between women and working equids, Brooke Ethiopia conducted a piece of research with women to hear their views and experiences on owning and working with equids and the difference they make to their daily lives.

This policy briefing highlights the findings of the research carried out in five communities in Ethiopia. It shows the extent to which women rely on equids for fulfilling their many roles within the household and the wider community, including help with domestic chores, providing both income and savings, and enabling women to play an important role in their communities. The briefing also highlights the major impact of loss or sickness of those animals on women and their families. It concludes by making a set of recommendations to inform policy and decision makers and practitioners involved in design and implementation of livestock and development policy and programmes in Ethiopia.

voices from women




The Voices from Women research project was initiated at The Brooke in 2013 to explore the role of working donkeys, horses and mules in supporting the lives of women from the perspectives of the women themselves, and to consider the role of women in the management of those animals.

It aims to give women who live and work with these animals a voice and a platform to tell and share their experiences and opinions, as well as to express their needs and wants.



Key objectives and methodology of the research

The main objectives of the research in Ethiopia were to understand, from the women's perspective:

-  The key roles that working equids play in supporting women's lives.
-  The role of women in the use and management of working equids.
-  How the welfare status of working equids affects the support they provide to women.



Ethiopia












Location and profiles of communities

The study was carried out in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) in Halaba Special Woreda (District) in October 2013. SNNPR is overwhelmingly rural, with only 8% of the population living in urban areas.^v People rely primarily on mixed farming (crop and livestock production), with the sale of crops being the main income source, followed by sale of livestock and livestock products, gharry horse and donkey cart rent, petty trade, casual labour and land rent.^{vi} Access to markets for many farmers in the area is inadequate due to poor infrastructure, lack of affordable transportation and the lack of a good local market information network.

Five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) comprising of 10-12 women were conducted in five Kebeles (villages) in both peri-urban and rural settings on the outskirts of Halaba. All groups relied on the same means of livelihoods consisting of crop production (including maize, sorghum, pepper, teff and millet), use of equids, and wage labour.



Use of working equids by women participating in focus groups in Ethiopia and type of income generated

	Transport of people for a fee	Direct
	Transport of grains for a fee	
	Transport of agricultural produce for a fee	
	Transport/sale of firewood/water	
	Hire (donkey/horse)	
	Transport of agricultural produce (to market)	Indirect
	Transport of grains to/from milling houses	
	Fetching water and firewood for own use	Saving
	Transport of goods/household items from market	
	Transport of grain and agricultural produce for own use	
	Transport of sick animals to health clinics	

Key findings:

1.

Working equids are important to women.

When we asked women in Halaba to rank their livestock, including working equids, oxen, cows, goats and sheep, donkeys were ranked very highly by all groups including one group who ranked them first, three groups who ranked donkeys joint first with oxen and one group which ranked them second only to oxen. There was a general consensus across all the groups that while oxen are critical to farming activities (especially ploughing), donkeys were crucial for household chores. The groups also noted that donkeys bring in additional income, transport the harvest and work throughout the year and not only during the farming season.

“I put the donkey first because it works all year round, more than an ox.”

Hatiya Mohammed, 35, Hamata, Sidae village

2.

Working equids lighten women’s burden by reducing their labour and the drudgery of household chores.

Working equids provide physical and psychological relief to women by supporting them in carrying out household chores. These chores include collecting and transporting firewood and water (for the household and other farm animals) – especially important in Halaba due to water scarcity and the long distances women have to travel to collect water; transporting grain and agricultural produce for their own use and farm residue for feeding animals; and transporting household goods from the market to home.

“Donkeys are lifelines for us women. Life without a donkey is like a mountain that you don’t dare to climb.”

Worke Ayano, 37, Wanja, Ababora village

“Having a donkey feels like having a tap in my home. I am confident that I won’t run out of water.”

Sefiya Hebiso, 37, Second Choroko village

“They help us fetch water for animals that cannot go to the river for drinking; they carry residue from the farm and firewood from a distant location.”

Laila Hassen, 37, First Ashoka village

“I am happy because my donkey allows me to have time for a break.”

Tiya Suraje, 26, Gedeba village

“I don’t mind spending to feed my donkey, as she is helping me a lot.”

Keyria Abdella, 25, Gedeba village

3.

Working equids support women’s capacity to care for their children.

The study also found that the help provided by working equids saves women time which can then be spent with their children, enabling them to provide their children with better care. Donkeys or horses also provide transport, which enables women to send their children to school.

“If there is a donkey in the house, the mother carries her child on her back and lets the donkey carry other stuff be it water or crops. However if they don’t have a donkey, she has to leave the child behind at home even when there is no one to look after the baby as she has to carry the load herself. So, donkeys make a huge contribution in caring for babies.”

Medina Hussien, 35, Gedeba village

“I send my children to school because I have a donkey. After the children have gone to school, I can quickly collect water and other household items, and I have time to prepare food and take care of my children.”

Shegu Someno, 29, Gedeba village

“We get time to rest and children go to school. When there is social event that I need to participate in, I simply send my donkey cart for them to use and stay home to take care of my children.”

Amina Adem, 32, Second Choroko village

4.

Working equids support women in generating income.

By using their horses as taxis or their donkeys to transport water, firewood, agricultural produce or grain for a fee or for sale, or by hiring out their equine animals to others, women bring in income which enables them to provide for their families.

“Donkeys help women with household chores and are also sources of income.”

Sunete Tulicha, 29, First Ashoka village

Income earned from working equids goes directly towards paying for the family needs including food, other household expenses, school fees, children’s clothes and healthcare, as well as the purchase of other livestock.

“We use the money [from our donkeys] to pay school fees. When schools open in September, we buy new clothes, soap, exercise books, pens and also some household items.”

Bontu Musa, First Ashoka village

Due to the significant and multiple contributions working equids make to the household and women in particular, the loss or sickness of a working equid has a major impact on income and the other benefits they bring to women and their families.

“If my horse gets sick I will give him a rest until he gets better. But the healthy one will work half a day. To compensate the loss of income, my son will work for other people for half the day. I will also do some labour for people like preparing kocho la local staple made from false bananal to get some money to cover my expenses.”

Tagessech Dotamo, 39, Wanja Ababora village

When an equid is sick or dies, women have to use various kinds of coping strategies, including renting out their other animals, using money saved for emergencies, borrowing money, taking on daily labour, switching to less nutritious foods, taking children out of school and selling crops and assets including other livestock.

“It is a pain to live a single day without a donkey. That is because donkeys are the base for our life. So if we lose our donkey, we will buy another one by selling one of our calves, goats or sheep, or even a heifer.”

Urgo Yassin, 37, Gedeba village

“If my donkey is ill and my income dries up, I will have to sell my other animal products like milk and butter to cover my expenses. If that is not enough I will start selling my goats and sheep.”

Zeniya Ergeto, 28, Gedeba village

CASE STUDY

“Three years ago, I lost a horse suddenly to a sickness. I didn’t have any other equid during that time. So I had to sell pepper and grains to buy another horse.

The previous horse was purchased for 1,200 Birr and I bought the new one for 2,600 Birr. He died during harvest time and that made me lose the income that I was expecting.

Then we faced a shortage of food during rainy season for a period of one month. I lost my daily income, lost my grain. Some people started to look down on me. It was such an uncomfortable and depressing time.”



Eyaya Bobeio, 50
Second Choroko village

5.

Working equids support women in carrying out social functions and increase their opportunities for community engagement.

The research found that the support working equids provide to women also extends to the social sphere of their lives, strengthening their relationships with their neighbours, relatives and the larger community. Women often lend their equids for social functions and events such as weddings and funerals, for village development projects, to those who do not have their own animals, or during times of emergency or disaster. The income earned from use of working equids also enables women to pay monthly contributions to social and savings groups, which women rely upon in times of need for loans or the payment and organisation of important events in their lives. Working equids therefore enable women to contribute to the community's life and as a result give them a sense of pride.

“When there is development work in the village or functions like a wedding or funeral, we give out our equids to serve for free.”

Merde Awol, 35, Gedeba village

“When they are building a school for our children, we send our gharry horses to transport water and wood for the construction for free. We also participate when there is a road construction and other development work in our village.”

Tuba Shebamud, 25, Wanja Ababora village

“If you have something people respect you, so those people who own equids get respect.”

Beyida Kedir, 35, Gedeba village

“We have a savings group in our village and we deposit some of the income we get from our donkeys. When a group member has a wedding or other social functions, they use our donkeys.”

Haisha Shelemo, 39, Hamata Sidae village

“We also pay our monthly contributions to our social groups using the money we get from our cart horse.”

Zeniya Erketo, 28, Gedeba village

6.

Women are the main keepers, carers and users of working equids but they have limited access to equine training and extension services.

In the areas where the research was conducted, women are the primary and traditional keepers of livestock, mainly within the household compound, but also tending to production livestock such as cattle and goats outside their homes. All of the women we spoke to highlighted their role as care givers to equids, providing feed, water and hoof care and cleaning shelters.

When asked who makes decisions when purchasing animals, most of the women we spoke to said that they were consulted by their husbands and two groups said purchases were mutually agreed. Where husbands made the decision, some women told us that they were still able to encourage their husbands to buy a donkey. Some households were female-headed and therefore women made their own decisions, sometimes involving their children.

“It is a woman who looks after the donkeys, she guides them to shade, gives them water, feed and also prepares their bedding.”

Bontu Habib, 35, Hamata Sidae village

The research showed that women have a strong voice when it comes to advocating for their animals. Some groups we interviewed said that they do not allow animals to be worked when they are sick until they have recovered, hiring or borrowing other animals or carrying loads themselves in the meantime. While taking sick animals to the health post or clinic is normally the responsibility of men, women are the main providers of healthcare and treatment at home.

“If my donkey is sick, I will start doing all the work myself, carrying water or paying money for other cart donkeys.”

Amarech Lamiso, 35, Second Choroko village

“Since we are using the animals most, we tell our husbands when we notice some problems and it is their responsibility to take them to health posts.”

Chuchu Ahmed, 32, Wanja Ababora village

Despite women having the primary role for caring for and using working equids in Halaba and the critical importance of these animals to their lives, our study found that they have little or no access to training on equine health and welfare, including husbandry practices and diseases, outside of specialised agencies like Brooke Ethiopia. Women told us that the only source of knowledge was the training received from women “Agents of Change” trained by Brooke Ethiopia either through community based organisations or the Farmer Training Centres (FTCs).

“We learnt about feeding, watering and how to conduct simple eye treatment.”

Kedija Tekiye, 40, First Ashoka village

“Before The Brooke’s intervention, we didn’t have the opportunity to join an equine welfare group. After the Brooke, we got knowledge and skills on how to improve husbandry practices.”

Muslima Edris, 37, Second Choroko village

Across all the focus groups, women expressed strong interest and motivation in receiving training that would enable them to better look after their animals and tend to their healthcare needs, noting the need for trainings to be held in accessible locations and timed to enable them to also meet their work and childcare duties.

Women as Agents of Change

In Halaba, Brooke Ethiopia forms equine women’s groups which receive training and support on good equine welfare and husbandry using Farmer Training Centres (FTCs) set up by the government as part of its rural development programme. The training uses a cascade approach (Training of Trainers): Development Agents (DAs) are trained and then train a number of farmers as Change Agents, who then train other farmers who also become Change Agents.

The FTCs are selected by Brooke Ethiopia on the basis of the equine population in the area as well as the severity of health

and welfare problems, the role of the animals in providing income to families and the commitment demonstrated by DAs in providing extension packages to the farmers in the area.

In addition to training men, Brooke Ethiopia has also specifically focused on training women, through community-based organisations’ existing credit and saving groups. Whilst it is difficult to involve women in interventions mainly targeted at men due to cultural factors, working through existing women’s groups has enabled Brooke Ethiopia to successfully engage and train women.

Conclusion

The research findings highlighted the multiple and unique functions of working equids in women’s lives and the extent to which they rely on them for support in fulfilling their many roles within the household and the broader community.

For women from equine owning communities, these animals are indispensable, or as some women put it, they are like an additional member of the family; therefore the health and welfare of these animals are critically important.

A sick or dead horse or donkey will have negative consequences for women and their families. Poor working equine health and welfare resulting from overworking, overloading, wounds, bad harnessing, inadequate shelter, or poor feeding and watering, impact on the capacity of these animals to support women and their families optimally. Hence good equine welfare is not a luxury but a necessity for women and their families.

Without the help of working equids, women’s burden increases, they have less time to care for their children, income decreases and women are less able to support their families’ livelihoods and perform social functions, which in turn affects their status in the community.

Recommendations

1.

The Government of Ethiopia should consider equids as critical and valuable assets for people's food security and livelihoods.

Working equids are the cornerstone of millions of families' livelihoods in Ethiopia and provide a support system for women. Therefore working equids' health and welfare needs should be adequately addressed by government policies and programmes alongside other livestock at national, regional and local levels. This includes allocating sufficient budget for equine drugs and vaccination campaigns and providing appropriate education or training on equine health and welfare for vets and livestock technicians.

2.

The Ministry of Agriculture, the Livestock Sector, agencies at national, regional and woreda level, and donors should give greater priority to ensuring women's access to livestock training and extension services.

Appropriate emphasis should be put on increasing the number of women being trained and employed as "agents of change" at community level. Training related to livestock care must take women into account and incorporate equine health and welfare, including management and husbandry practices.

3.

The Government of Ethiopia should enact and implement animal welfare friendly legislation and policy.

New international standards on the welfare of working equids are being developed by the OIE (the world organisation for animal health). Ethiopia can show its support by finalising and enacting comprehensive national animal welfare legislation in line with these international standards, which adequately addresses issues related to working equids. This should be replicated at regional and local level through local laws and guidelines, and implemented through targeted awareness campaigns to the relevant decision and policy makers, regulatory bodies, owners, users and carers. These awareness campaigns should include women as the primary carers of working equids and influential advocates for their welfare. Public campaigns aiming to raise the status of donkeys, horses and mules as valuable animals more generally should also be implemented.

4.

Community based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on gender and livestock related issues should coordinate on their mutual agendas.

CBOs and NGOs working on women's economic empowerment, livelihoods, livestock and animal welfare, should initiate joint discussions to better understand and explore the opportunities and benefits of collaborating on their common agendas, including working equine welfare.



healthy working animals
for the world's poorest communities



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