

India

voices
from
women

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

Key findings from research in seven equine owning communities in Uttar Pradesh, India.



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



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



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



A sick working equid or the loss of one has detrimental consequences on women and their families.



Women are the main carers of working equine animals but have limited access to training and extension services.

Introduction

There are over 1.1 million equids in India. Horses make up just over 50 percent of the equine population, followed by donkeys (37%) and mules (12%).ⁱ The majority of equids are found in the northern part of the country, with the largest concentration of animals found in Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.

Whilst India's economic growth in recent years has been significant, poverty remains high and the rich-poor gap has broadened in both rural and urban areas. According to the World Bank, India accounts for one-third (400 million) of the world's poorest, 75% of whom live in the country's rural areasⁱⁱ which is also where eighty-seven percent of working equids are found.ⁱⁱⁱ Those animals populate the roads of the country and support people's livelihoods through the transport of people and goods (primarily agricultural produce) and their work in the construction industry (India's brick kiln industry is the 2nd largest in the world after China).

Working equids also provide invaluable help to women who are often the animals' primary care taker and rely on them to lessen the burden of household chores. Those animals often also support women by feeding and contributing to their children's access to education and healthcare.

In an effort to bring attention to the links between women and working equids, Brooke India met with women in order to hear their views and experiences on having those animals and the difference they make to their daily lives.

This policy briefing highlights the findings from research carried out in 7 communities in India. It shows the extent to which women rely on working equids for support in fulfilling their many roles within the household and the wider community. This includes reducing domestic drudgery, providing income, enabling them to play an important role in their communities, thereby enhancing their status, and providing savings by transporting goods, agricultural produce, water, firewood, animal feed and manure.

The briefing also highlights the devastating impact of the loss or sickness of a working equid on women and their families and the value of good equine welfare. The briefing concludes by making a set of recommendations aimed at India's national policy makers and implementers.



The Voices from Women research project was initiated at The Brooke in 2013 to explore the role of working horses, mules and donkeys in supporting the lives of women from the perspectives of 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 objectives of the research were to understand from the women's perspective:



The specific roles that working donkeys, mules and horses 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.

The study was carried out in the State of Uttar Pradesh during one week in March 2013. It was conducted through seven women only Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews. Groups included participants from both female and male headed households.



Uttar Pradesh, India

Location and profiles of communities

The research took place in seven communities in the Uttar Pradesh districts of Mathura, Noida/ Delhi, Meerut, Saharanpur, Bijnore, Raebareilly and Lucknow. The locations comprised rural and peri-urban areas and communities who use donkeys, mules and/or horses as the main or one of the main sources of income. Income in the communities is generated primarily through transport of goods including pottery, bricks and other construction materials, people, and vegetables through mobile shops.

Two of the communities are involved in brick kiln work for 6 months of the year when families work in the kilns and men use mules and horses to transport bricks. They use the animals for transporting goods and people for a fee the rest of the year but earn most of their income during the brick kiln season.

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

	Transport of construction materials	Direct
	Foal rearing and selling	
	Transport of bricks in brick kilns	
	Transport of pottery to market	Indirect
	Transport of goods/household items from market	Saving
	Transport of dung cakes and clay for own use	
	Transport of animal feed for household livestock	
	Transport of grain & agricultural produce for own use	
	Personal transport for social events/ambulance	

Key findings:

1.

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

All groups told us about the positive difference that working equids make to performing their daily household chores by transporting goods to and from the market, animal feed for other livestock, construction materials for their own use and grain to the mill houses.

By using equids, women spend less time on household chores and they have more time to take care of their children and elderly relatives.

"With them (donkeys), our work became easier and quicker."

Guddi, 30, Mahavan

2.

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

"Horses earn money and help us survive."

Mamta, 28, Multannagar

"Even though donkeys are smaller they make more money for us."

Guddi, 30, widow Mahavan

Women highlighted the critical importance of working equids in their lives due to their role in generating income for their families. When asked to rank their livestock, all seven groups ranked their equids first because they generate cash and regular income. Buffaloes and cows were ranked second because of the milk they produce and which is used for home consumption or sold.

"A donkey brings money for us, not the buffalo."

Rekha, 20, Mahavan

Based on the income figures given to us by women we interviewed, in some communities up to 80% of income is directly generated by equids whilst the rest is earned from daily wage labour.

Women from male headed households are generally not involved in income generating work, but in female headed households working equids are used by women to earn money including in construction.

"A few years back a woman in our village transported bricks in the cart for 3 years when her husband died."

Babita, 32, Bhaila

In addition, whilst women may not be generating direct income from equids they do support family earning through indirect income work and through the use of the animals for homestead purposes, which result in savings particularly with regards to transport costs.

The money earned by working equids goes towards paying for all types of family expenses. Women told us that after paying for maintenance of their equids (feed and fodder, treatment, farriery, hair clipping etc.), most of the money earned by equids is being spent on household expenses such food, clothes, schooling and healthcare.

"We are living because of these donkeys. We work with them and earn money and live."

Kela, 42, Mahavan

3.

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

Women in all communities highlighted that working equids play an important role in supporting them to carry out social functions which in turn, raises their social status in the community. This is because these animals are assets that bring income and are also paramount in facilitating transportation for both equine and non-equine owners, including in case of emergencies.

"Having a good horse means having better social status in society."

Sudesh, 33, Bhaila

CASE STUDY

RESHMA, MAHATWA VILLAGE, LUCKNOW, INDIA

Reshma is a young woman who took the lead in forming an Equine Welfare Group in her community. She and other interested women asked the Block Development Officer for a loan that is available to families living below the poverty line.

They were granted a loan of Rs 250,000, half of it subsidised, as the Office was impressed by their proposal and the leadership and commitment of Reshma.

Reshma has been leading the group and has been taught by a Brooke Veterinary Assistant Community Mobiliser how to inject a horse and is responsible for giving First Aid to sick equids in her community.



Tools Reshma made to educate other women and people in the community

"People keep a good relationship with us because they might need us (our horses) one day."

Ramshri, 45, Bala Village

"For ceremonies we go by cart otherwise we don't go."

Participant from Saharanpur.

Women told us that working equids "open doors" for them by enabling them to come together and raise their profile in the community. Equine ownership provides women with an opportunity to form groups which contribute to building respect in their communities based on the knowledge and skills they acquire. These groups also provide women members loans with minimum interest in times of need, for example to purchase a new animal or cart, feed or harness.

Women also use those groups to provide support to their members and other equine owners in times of need for example by lending their equids. However in some communities, equids are seen as too valuable to be lent to other people because they earn the family's income.

4.

Women are the main carers of working equids.

The research showed that women are the primary and traditional care givers for livestock, mainly within the household compound but also tending to production livestock such as cattle and goats outside their homes. Working equids are also primarily looked after by women although children also help.

Women are in charge of cleaning and maintaining stables; managing harness equipment; providing feed and water; giving first aid treatment (eye cleaning, wound cleaning and application of medicine); and occasionally grooming. Women also make the decisions about whether a sick animal should work or rest, and decide on treatment options with the husbands.

"When my horse was sick I went 25 km to purchase medicine."

Ramshri, Raebareili

A majority of women told us that taking care of animals, including working equids takes time but they emphasised that the benefits gained from having

equids largely outweigh the time constraints associated with their care. This is mainly due to the income generation function of those animals and the physical relief it gives them.

“Our livelihoods rely on equids so we have to take care of them.”

Participant from Bijnor

“Having a donkey increases my work but I have to take care of him as he earns food for my family.”

Participant from Mahavan

“Our horses are our lives. Without them there is nothing there.”

Ajmatul, 45, Mahatwa Village

As the main livestock carers, women also have a say in the sale and purchase of the animals with a large majority of women telling us those decisions are made in consultation between husbands and wives.

“A family can’t prosper where male members only take decisions.”

Suman, Meerut

5.

Women have limited access to training and extension services.

Despite women’s role in managing and caring for equids, our study found that there is little or no access for women to education and training on equine health and welfare, including husbandry practices and diseases.

Women said that their main sources of information and knowledge were initially traditional practices, but the formation of women’s equine groups at Brooke India’s initiative gave them an opportunity to strengthen their skills and adapt some of the traditional methods they used. Women stated that belonging to such groups allowed them to gain critical knowledge on how to look after their equids.

“We have learnt everything from Brooke India - before we were unaware”

Guddi, 30, Mahavan

Women as Agents of Change

Women’s Equine Welfare Groups

The Brooke India has facilitated the formation of 259 Women’s Equine Welfare Groups whose primary functions are to improve equine care and increase communities’ awareness and, knowledge of equine needs and improve attitudes towards equids.

Women receive training on group management as well specific training and support on equine welfare and health including first aid, treatment and prevention of major diseases, feeding management and good husbandry practices (stable hygiene, importance of shade and shelter, watering).

The groups get the support of Brooke India’s veterinary community mobilisers. They also have a saving function with loans available to their members.

Loans can be used towards equine care and purchase of an equid as well as for other purposes such as ceremonies or in times of need. Money collected is also used for the bulk purchase of animal feed. The groups provide women with a platform to share their views and learn from each other about equine treatments, equine needs and husbandry.

They also give women a voice in the community and raise their status by enabling them to act as a group. Finally, the groups deal with women’s issues and give women support to address problems they are struggling to conquer alone.



Mahatwa,
Lucknow

Conclusion

The research gave a snapshot of the critical importance of working equids in women’s lives in equine owning communities and the extent to which they rely on them for support in fulfilling their many roles within the household and the wider community. Women told us themselves of the help donkeys, mules and horses provide with household chores including carrying feed for other livestock, income generation with the animals sometimes being the sole bread winners, and their increased ability to perform and take part in social functions in their communities. The multiple roles that working equids perform mean that they work daily throughout the year, with little rest and very little consideration of their needs. As a woman participant told us, “a donkey’s work never stops.”

For those women, the health and welfare of these animals are therefore essential. A sick or a dead donkey, horse or mule will have dramatic consequences for women and their families. Some women compared losing an animal to losing a limb. Working equids in poor welfare are impaired in their ability to benefit women and their families optimally. Without their help, women’s burden increases, income decreases and women are less able to perform social functions, which in turn affects their status in the community.

Listening to women’s voices expressed through this research is an important step towards raising awareness of the importance and roles of working equids among policy makers and implementers in India concerned about and working on women and livestock.

Recommendations

1.

India's Ministry of Agriculture, in particular the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries should explicitly acknowledge working equids as critical and valuable livestock for people's food security and livelihoods.

Working donkeys, horses and mules are the cornerstone of ten thousands of families' livelihoods in India and provide an essential support system for women. Therefore the health and welfare needs of working donkeys, mules and horses must be adequately addressed by government policies and programmes alongside those of other livestock. This includes allocating sufficient budget for equine drugs, including working equids in livestock health interventions and animal husbandry schemes, and providing training on equine health and welfare for government vets and livestock technicians.

2.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, together with the Ministry of Agriculture and with the support from Brooke India and the participation of women, should explore programmatic



healthy working animals
for the world's poorest communities

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initiatives such as Women's Equine Welfare Groups to strengthen women's involvement in their communities and foster social and economic opportunities for them.

Those groups provide women with social and business opportunities and a platform to come together and raise their voices in their communities. They play a key role in improving working equine welfare and should be given greater support and attention from policy makers developing community interventions aimed at women.

3.

Community based organisations and non-governmental organisations working on gender and livestock related issues should initiate a dialogue with organisations concerned with working equine welfare to better understand and explore the opportunities and benefits of collaborating on their mutual agendas.

The research shows the linkages between equine welfare and human welfare. Brooke India is committed to promoting those linkages and exploring opportunities for collaboration and joint learning with concerned development actors.

References:

- i Livestock Census, Government of India, 2007.
- ii World Bank Global Poverty Estimates.
- iii Rao, E. Krishna (2006). "Role of Women in Agriculture: A Micro Level Study."

