



# Working equids and women's food security in Ethiopia: an unrecognised relationship

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## Background

- Ethiopia has a population of 9 million horses, donkeys and mules (equids) <sup>1</sup>
- Equids fulfil an important economic role as a lifeline for millions of rural, peri-urban and urban inhabitants <sup>2</sup>
- Their contribution to women's lives and livelihoods is unrecognised by policy makers who focus on food producing livestock
- Evidence of this contribution is needed to enable policy makers to appreciate their importance.

## Method

- A qualitative study was undertaken in October 2013 to document the relationship between working equids and women in Ethiopia's equine owning communities
- Five semi-structured focus group discussions, each comprising 10-12 women from Halaba communities, were facilitated by a local language speaking community facilitator
- The facilitator followed a standardised questionnaire based on DFID sustainable livelihoods framework asset categories.

## Results

- Women explained the multiple functions equids perform in women's lives and the support they provide<sup>3</sup>:
  - Equids significantly ease the day-to-day burden of household and labour-related activities for women (Figures 1 and 3)
  - Equids support women in generating income that benefits them directly and indirectly, through transport of people, goods and agricultural produce for a fee, sale of firewood/water and hiring out (Figure 2)
- The income generated by equine activities enables women to buy food, cooking products and essential household items
- When an equid is sick or dies, women's coping strategies include: reducing household expenses, switching to cheaper, less nutritious foods and selling crops/assets
- Women are the primary equid carers in Ethiopia but lack access to equine management and husbandry training and extension services.



Figure 1: Donkeys transporting water for household use



Figure 2: Donkeys transporting goods to market



Figure 3: Donkey carrying fodder for livestock

## Recommendations

- The government of Ethiopia should consider equids as critical and valuable assets for food security and livelihoods
- 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
- The government of Ethiopia should enact and implement animal welfare friendly legislation and policy
- Community based organisations and non-governmental organisations working on gender and livestock related issues should coordinate on their mutual agendas

References: 1 FAOSTAT (2013) 2 Valette, D. (2015) Invisible Workers: The economic contributions of working horses, donkeys and mules to livelihoods 3 Brooke Ethiopia (2015) Invisible Helpers: Ethiopia Brief