

Working equids and women: a new paradigm in animal welfare



The Brooke India

Zaman S F, Upjohn M and Valette D
zaman@thebrookeindia.org
Brooke Hospital for Animals (India), Regional Office,3/266,Vishal Khand, Gomtinagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, Pin- 226010, India

Introduction

- In India, women’s lives would be more difficult without working equids
- Equids assist them in
 - fetching fodder for animals
 - bringing home goods such as groceries
 - transporting pottery to the market
 - carrying construction materials
 - attending social events, funerals
 - transporting patients to hospital
- The link between equids and women is inadequately researched or reported
- This study aimed to:
 - explore working equids’ role in the lives of women in rural communities in India
 - document their perspectives on equid use and care



Figure 1: Photographs of the FGDs taking place at (A) Raebareilly and (B) Lucknow, UP

Methods

One equid-owning community was selected from each of seven districts of Uttar Pradesh, India. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews were undertaken with women (Figure 1) in their communities. FGD proceedings were analysed qualitatively using an analytical framework under five thematic areas:

- (i) working equids as assets
- (ii) uses of working equids
- (iii) social benefits of working equids
- (iv) welfare of equids
- (v) women’s education, knowledge and skill in equid management and welfare

Summary

- A study was conducted in 7 districts of Uttar Pradesh to investigate the synergistic relationship that exists between working equids and women, which is little understood in India
- Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were KEY qualitative tools used to understand women’s perceptions
- Women used equids mostly for non-income generating household activities
- Women had a good understanding about animal welfare, spending 4–5 hours daily looking after them
- Women were the predominant decision-makers with respect to their equids, holding a key position in the wider picture of working equid welfare
- Upgrading their knowledge and skills is paramount to achieve long-term equine welfare improvements

Table 1: Details of FGD participants. D = donkey; H = horse; M = mule				
Community (district)	Total number of women	Median age (years)	Average family size	Type of equids
Mahavan	10	30	7	D
Noida	10	29	8	H, M
Mahatawa	12	30	8	H
Bala	12	39	6	H
Multannagar	11	35	7	H, M, D
Bhaila	12	37	7	M
Shadipur	11	35	7	H, D

Results

- 78 women participated with an average age of 36 years (Table 1)
- Equids ranked first in order of importance of livestock species for their cash-earning capacity
- Women used equids for carrying green fodder, dung cake, animal feed and clay for pottery as well as acting as an ambulance
- Equids, especially mules and horses are status symbols
- Women had good understanding about animal welfare
- Women would like to improve their knowledge of proper feeding, body weight measurement, identifying sick animals and ways to enhance body condition
- Women were the predominant decision-makers and carers with respect to equids
- Women spend on average 4–5 hours each day performing husbandry tasks such as feeding and watering, cleaning stables, stable and harness maintenance, first aid treatment (eye cleaning, wound cleaning and application of medicine) and grooming

Conclusions

- Women of equid-owning families are closely involved in equine welfare
- Upgrading their knowledge and skills is paramount to achieve positive long-term equine welfare
- Sharing the findings of the study with policymakers and other NGO/INGOs will be done for advocacy purposes



Presented by
Syed Zaman