

Info Note

Gender [im]balance in productive and reproductive labor among livestock producers in Colombia: Implications for climate change responses

Findings from a qualitative field study in the municipality of Patía in Cauca region of Colombia

Diksha Arora, Jacobo Arango, Stefan Burkart, Ngonidzashe Chirinda, Jennifer Twyman

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Key messages

- Roles and responsibilities in livestock production and household maintenance are segregated along gender lines. Men's and women's participation in the livestock sector varies by tasks. Women combine livestock production, particularly, milk processing activities with the responsibility of household and care work.
- Men's and women's indirect contribution with regard to maintenance of the household and care provision to family members is also crucial for healthy and smooth functioning of livestock productive activities and therefore, must be accounted for in policy decisions, including those related to changing climate.
- As a response to climate change induced drought, men, and particularly women, are investing their labor in alternative sources of income to pay for water provision services to meet the water demands of their animals. For women who already face the double burden of productive and reproductive work, this coping mechanism may deepen their time poverty.

Introduction

Traditionally, men and women have performed different roles in agriculture. Often these distinctions are attributed to differences in physical strength and aptness required to perform a task. For example, land clearing is seen as a male task while weeding is attributed as a female task. Both activities are crucial in the process of production. However, to generalize the division of roles as male and female is misleading as shown in the seminal work by Boserup (1970); women in Africa perform all the tasks performed by men in agriculture. In addition, the introduction of technology, markets and urbanization

(particularly, migration) has blurred the division of roles between men and women in regions where traditionally the distinction occurred (Cornhiel, 2006; Radel, 2012). As a consequence, women have taken up traditionally male tasks in order to support their families (Doss, 1999). The evidence on *feminization of agriculture* substantiates this claim (Deere, 2005). From the evidence, it is clear that women are capable of performing most of the tasks labelled as "male tasks." Often, women perform tasks that allow them to manage work outside and inside the household (Benard et al., 2016). Therefore, the observed division of labor between men and women in agriculture can be attributed to the gendered institutions that oblige women to care for the household members; and therefore, it is a *social* construct.

This info note examines gender roles in livestock production and unpaid work in the household among the small-scale livestock producers in the municipality of Patía in Cauca region of Colombia. Our main objectives are - visibilize women's direct roles and indirect contributions in livestock production and examine whether women's reproductive roles interfere with their participation in livestock production.

Overall, there is dearth of studies and gender-disaggregated data in the livestock sector in Colombia and rest of Latin America. In this study, we make use of three focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observation and one in-depth household interview conducted in Patía during November 2016. The study informs the differences in the work burdens and decision-making capability of men and women active in livestock production in Patía. Moreover, due to existing gender roles it is likely that climate change and its adverse effect on livestock

production in this region, has differential impact on men and women.

Gender roles in livestock production

In livestock production the division of roles along gender lines is clearly marked depending on the type of production system. There are three main types of livestock production systems – milk, beef and dual purpose and mixed systems. In general, women have greater participation in milk and dual purpose production systems.

The small scale livestock producers in Patía are primarily involved in dual purpose and milk production systems. Although most of the tasks in the production process are performed jointly by men and women, the amount of labor supplied by each varies by activity. According to our observations, women are generally more active in processing and selling milk products and also play an important role in different livestock and pasture management activities. The women of Patía consider livestock production as one of the most crucial means to support their livelihoods. They expressed that – “livestock (*ganadería*) is the fundamental base for sustaining the household and growing more and more each day in order to give a better future to our children” (Women’s focus group discussion, Patía, Cauca, November, 2016).

The livestock producers in Patía gave a detailed list of 35 activities performed in the management of cattle and production and sale of livestock and livestock by-products. We group these activities in 12 broad categories and present the participation of men and women in these activities in table 1.

Activity	Participation		Who devotes more labor?
	Man	Woman	
Pasture sowing and management	Yes	Yes	Men
Caring for animals	Yes	Yes	Men
Rotation of animals across pastures	Yes	Yes	Men
Managing and cleaning the equipment and utensils	Yes	Yes	Women
Feeding the animals	Yes	Yes	Both
Caring the animals and helping with birthing	Yes	Yes	Men
Weighing the animals and keeping records	Yes	No	Men
Milking	Yes	Yes	Both
Processing milk (cheese, yogurt production)	Yes	Yes	Women
Selling animals	Yes	No	Men
Selling meat	Yes	Yes	Men
Selling processed milk products	Yes	Yes	Women

Table 1: Men’s and women’s participation and labor input variations in livestock production in Patía, Cauca, Colombia.

Source: FGDs men and women, Patía, Cauca, November 2016.

As shown in table 1, women perform most of the tasks involved in livestock production. As indicated in table 1, men devote more time to traditional male tasks like

pasture management, rotating for grazing and caring for animals while women contribute more in activities like cleaning and processing milk products.

Managing productive and reproductive tasks – Women livestock producers of Cauca

The variation in men’s and women’s labor input to different tasks in livestock production is directly linked to women’s traditional roles in unpaid work in the household. Research from different developing regions of the globe point to the fact that women are often at the crossroads of having to choose between paid and unpaid work. Their own leisure needs are often subverted too, under the pressure of the need to look after the family (Arora and Rada, 2016). In livestock production, women often do the tasks that are close to the home in order to manage the double burden of productive and reproductive work (Benard et al., 2016). Rosa Maria in Patía voiced her concern “I cannot spend more time in the field looking after the cows since I have to take care of the household chores and look after the kids” (Focus group discussion, Patía, Cauca, November, 2016)¹.

Women in Patía, as in many other parts of the world, manage the responsibility of household chores and unpaid care work singlehandedly, sometimes with the help of other women or girls in the household. Men offer very little assistance in these tasks. In Latin America, typically the participation of men is greater in agricultural and other income generating activities. Nonetheless, women bear the double burden of work inside and outside the household. While lack of time-use data restricts commenting on time poverty status of men and women in this region, overall from the interviews and FGDs it can be argued that women’s total work load is greater than that of men. The comment from Marta Luisa in Patía echoes this inference, “I leave with my husband, to milk the cows and look after the calves at 5am. In the afternoon I come back earlier to cook lunch for him. Usually, when he is tired, he has no patience so I have to rush back and quickly prepare a meal. This is patriarchy (*machismo*), where the man eats first because he is tired while no one sees that we fight harder every day. They do not value our work” (Participant interview, Patía, Cauca).

Women and decision-making in livestock production and household management

Women are active in most of the decision-making related to pasture management, adoption of technology and management practices, buying and selling of animals etc. Both men and women in FGDs responded that women have a say in livestock production and investment decisions. In addition, women in Patía are active in several organizations facilitating improvement of livestock production capacity, adoption of improved pastures etc. In

¹ Participants’ names are changed to protect their identity.

some cases, women represent their husbands at community meetings or workshops. Overall, women in Patía are empowered to make decisions in household management and finance and also contribute in productive and investment decisions related to livestock.

However, there is a gender imbalance in the control of income from livestock production. Men tend to control the proceeds from sale of animals and meat production while women keep the income from sale of milk products. Most of them agreed that the sale of milk is exclusively for household expenses.

Climate change and livestock production

The men and women of Patía consider livestock as a source of livelihood as well as an integral part of their culture. Nevertheless, most households reported increased activities in horticultural production and wage work in agriculture. This shift is a response to climate change that has increased drought conditions in this region.

In the last few years, Patía has experienced drought and severe heat conditions, especially during the summer months (Meneses, 2012). The lack of rainfall makes it difficult to manage the pastures and feed food and water to the cattle. Alberto in Patía shared the account of his loss “I lost 7 cows (that is, almost one-fifth of the herd) during the period 2014-15. It did not rain at all in 2014. All the creeks have dried up. We had no means to provide water to the animals.” Some households have acquired water pumps (*motobomba*) to address the problem of water scarcity. Although water pumps temporarily resolve the water problem, it comes at a notable financial and time cost for livestock producers in Patía. The pumping of water is a laborious task, which requires transportation of the heavy equipment between the house and the farm, setting up the machine and monitoring the flow of water. Most often, this work is performed by men, while women help their husbands in transporting the pump and at times, large reserves of water to feed the livestock. Teresa compared the work of providing water to livestock during summer months as equivalent to slavery, “we fill tanks of water at home and take it to the farm to pour on the plants and feed the animals. We feel like slaves transporting water under the hot sun in the summer months” (Focus group discussion, Patía, Cauca, November, 2016).

To tackle the financial cost of providing water, many women have stepped up their activities. For example, they cultivate horticultural crops (like lemons, mangoes, oranges, cacao) and collect forest resources (like *mate*, cane) for sale, and at times work as wage labor on others' farms to earn additional income to pay for the cost of water pumps, gasoline and water transportation.

Conclusions and policy implications

This study provided an account on gender division of labor in livestock production and household activities in Patía. This research is the first step to visibilize women's direct and indirect roles in supporting livestock management and production. Further research, particularly household and time-use surveys are needed to fully and accurately illustrate gender division of labor and interactions between intra-household relations and livestock production in this region.

The production in the livestock sector in Patía is undertaken jointly by men and women in the household. There are gender differences in roles and responsibilities between livestock and household (unpaid work) production as well as within the tasks in livestock production. In general, men's labor participation is higher in pasture management, livestock care and management, production of meat and buying and selling of animals. On the other hand, women are more active in activities related to milk production and processing like cleaning of the equipment and the utensils, milking and production of cheese and yogurt. Although, women are capable of performing most of the tasks in livestock production, their greater participation in processing activities is partly due to the ease of combining these activities with the household responsibilities. The maintenance of the household and care provision is undertaken mainly by women with very little assistance from men. Furthermore as a result of the prolonged drought in Patía, men and particularly, women are trying to generate income through alternative means to support the productive and investment activities in livestock.

These preliminary findings have important policy implications. The policy consideration of both men's and women's direct and indirect contributions to livestock production is crucial to avoid any unintended policy consequences and ensure successful response to technology adoption. For instance, a technology that requires more labor input in livestock care and management would increase the labor demands from both men and women producers in the livestock sector. Given women's additional responsibilities in the household, such a policy would worsen the competing claims on women's time and may hurt their well-being. Potentially, the response to technology adoption may be weaker than expected.

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Diksha Arora (d.arora@cgiar.org) is a gender postdoc fellow at CIAT. Her work gravitates around economic modeling of intra-household dynamics and food security among rural household in southern Africa and Latin America.

Jacobo Arango (j.arango@cgiar.org) is a Molecular Environmental Biologist working at the CIAT. He leads the LivestockPLUS project for Livestock NAMAs in Colombia and Costa Rica.

Stefan Burkart (s.burkart@cgiar.org) Socio-Economist working at CIAT. His major focus lies in value chain research and forage technology in Latin America.

Ngonidzashe Chirinda (n.chirinda@cgiar.org) is an Agroecologist and scientist at CIAT. His work is mainly aimed at finding innovative solutions to climate change mitigation. His vision is related to the need to co-design, co-develop and co-promote sustainable solutions with farmers and communities that are expected to thrive after adopting proposed solutions.

Jennifer Twyman (j.twyman@cgiar.org) is a Gender Research Leader at CIAT. Her research focuses on the issues of intra-household dynamics in the rural, agricultural sector.

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