

# Gender, Livestock and Asset Ownership

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Ownership of assets is critical for increasing agricultural productivity and is often closely linked with economic growth, poverty reduction and reduced vulnerability. For women in the developing world, livestock are thought to be one of the most important assets. However, while women may own livestock, the animals are not always assets over which those women have ultimate control.

## Gender and assets

There is little evidence available on:

- the extent to which women own livestock,
- which species are most important to them,
- how they acquire livestock, or
- how important livestock are relative to other assets.

Whilst many studies have looked at household ownership of assets as a measure of wealth, the gender dimensions and their implications have not had the same attention.

The gender asset gap, however, is a critical indicator of women's empowerment, providing a better



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In Ethiopia, Chiffra Woreda milks her cow

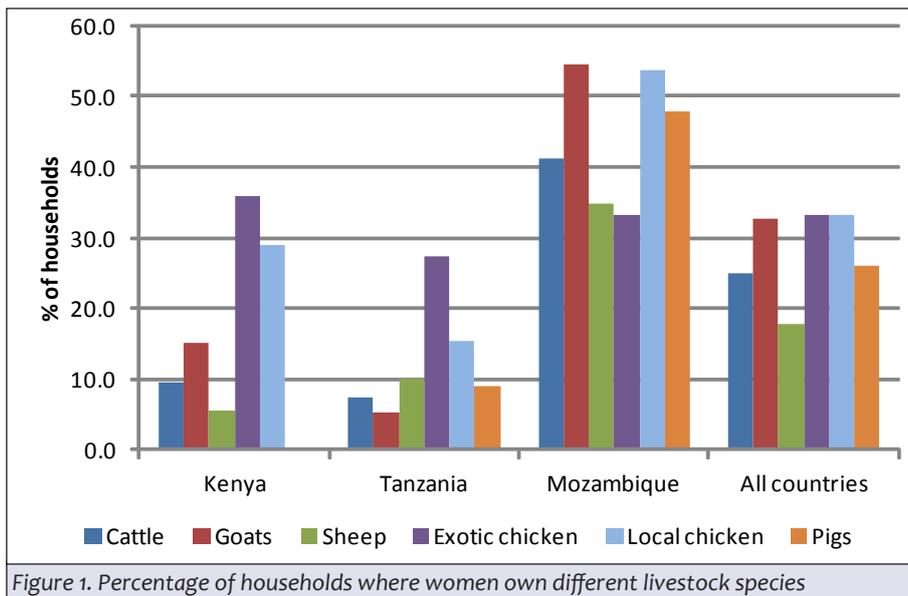
## Facts

- Livestock are productive assets that women can easily own and are not bound by complex property rights.
- Women may own livestock, acquired through the market or inheritance before or during marriage, but may not have decision-making authority over them.
- The relative informality of livestock property rights can be disadvantageous to women when their ownership of animals is challenged.
- The assets owned by women are of a significantly lower value than those owned by men.
- It has been shown that putting assets in the hands of women increases their bargaining power, their role in household decision-making and household spending on children's education and health.

measure of gender inequality and women's economic empowerment compared to indicators such as income.

The role of livestock as an asset for women has been analysed in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique and the results provide a better understanding of the potential role of livestock in improving women's welfare.

In Kenya, for example, studies found that the majority of women who owned livestock did not feel able to sell even small animals, such as local or improved poultry, without consulting their husbands.



in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, followed by goats (Figure 1). But despite the high proportion of households where women owned livestock, women still owned fewer livestock compared to men.

For example, men owned ten times more cattle than women in Kenya and 18 times more in Tanzania. Mozambique had the lowest gender disparity, with women owning 0.8 head of cattle for every one owned by a man.

In contrast, over one-third of women indicated that their husbands could sell larger livestock owned by the women without having to consult them.

Study results indicate which kind of strategies - inside and outside the livestock sector - are likely to have the biggest impact on empowering women and reducing gender asset disparities. For example, interventions that increase women's access and rights to livestock, and protect them from dispossession, theft or untimely death of their stock, could help women to move out of poverty.

## Livestock ownership

Evidence of the extent of women's ownership of livestock is scant. Due to the varying value across species, breeds and age of livestock, understanding the gender disparities or inequalities in livestock ownership, based on this data, is often difficult.

In order to help women secure, build and safeguard their assets, there is a need to use participatory approaches to understand what ownership means for men and women, before collecting data on asset ownership.

To gain a better understanding of gender inequalities, it is also important to look at whether women own or don't own livestock, the numbers and value of what they own and the gap between what women and men own.

The study found that chickens were the most commonly owned livestock species by women

The patterns of livestock ownership also differed substantially across the three countries. In Mozambique, women owned 40.7% of the cattle (compared to 5.2% and 2.7% in Kenya and Tanzania) and owned, on average, six head of cattle, compared to 0.1 head in Kenya and 0.2 head in Tanzania.

### Recommendations:

1. Analysis of livestock ownership by women should use multiple methods and look at different dimensions of ownership. This will allow capturing of data on ownership and the extent to which they make decisions on the livestock they own.
2. Increasing access to livestock by women should not only focus on having more women-owned livestock, but on ensuring the gender gap in livestock ownership is reduced.
3. Increasing women's access to credit and designing innovative mechanisms such as livestock leasing schemes, where women access livestock and repay through product sales, should be explored and scaled out where these are found to work.



Paula De Sousa, from Mozambique, feeds her pigs

## Means of acquisition

For livestock, there is typically no legal title or document to show ownership. In the studies, women said they had purchased their livestock using their own income, or had received the animals individually through an NGO grant.

Gifts, inheritance and inkind payments of livestock were a more common source in Tanzania and Mozambique than Kenya. Acquisition through grants from NGOs, in the form of restocking, breed improvement and nutrition interventions, was only recorded in Kenya, and focused particularly on exotic chickens, dairy cattle and goats.

While purchase was the most common means of livestock acquisition by women across all three countries, a key constraint is access to, and control over, capital. Findings from a Zimbabwean study revealed that 60% of women lacked the capital to purchase livestock because men controlled cash incomes generated from crop and livestock sales.

### Recommendations:

1. A better understanding of how households accumulate livestock is required to inform the design and implementation of development interventions.
2. While livestock grants can build up the assets of the poor and contribute to a reduction in chronic poverty, overlooking the gendered access dynamics may jeopardise benefits, or even have a negative effect on the intended female beneficiaries.
3. This and other studies recommend the provision of micro-credit as one approach to reduce women's limited access to cash and enable their purchase of livestock. This needs to be accompanied by interventions to increase livestock productivity and sales to optimise benefits from livestock by women.

## Factors determining women's ownership

The probability of women owning livestock across the three countries increased with women's ownership of other domestic assets, but it did not influence the numbers of livestock owned by women. In contrast, the studies showed that belonging to a group or having primary or higher education did not



In Niger, Aissa Akila and her son tend to one of their goats in a Toureg encampment

influence the probability of women owning livestock but did influence how many animals women had, with group members having more than non-members.

While only low numbers of women actually acquired livestock through group purchases, the role of groups in helping women accrue assets is, nevertheless, highly significant. Group membership may serve different functions, helping women save money that can be used to purchase livestock, and increasing access to credit, grants and output markets, all of which can play a role in helping women accumulate assets.

## Important livestock for women

Despite evidence on the role of small ruminants as an asset for women, cattle were a more significant component of women's livestock than goats, sheep and pigs combined, across all three countries. Balancing this, however, women were often found to have more decision-making authority over their small ruminants than over large animals such as cattle. Given the variation in importance of different livestock for women, a species focus should be carefully guided by this, rather than by a general assumption that small livestock are the most important for women, or that women are more likely

to own these species.

In terms of ownership patterns, a significant proportion of the livestock assets in Kenya (more than 50%) and Tanzania (slightly less than 50%) were jointly owned.

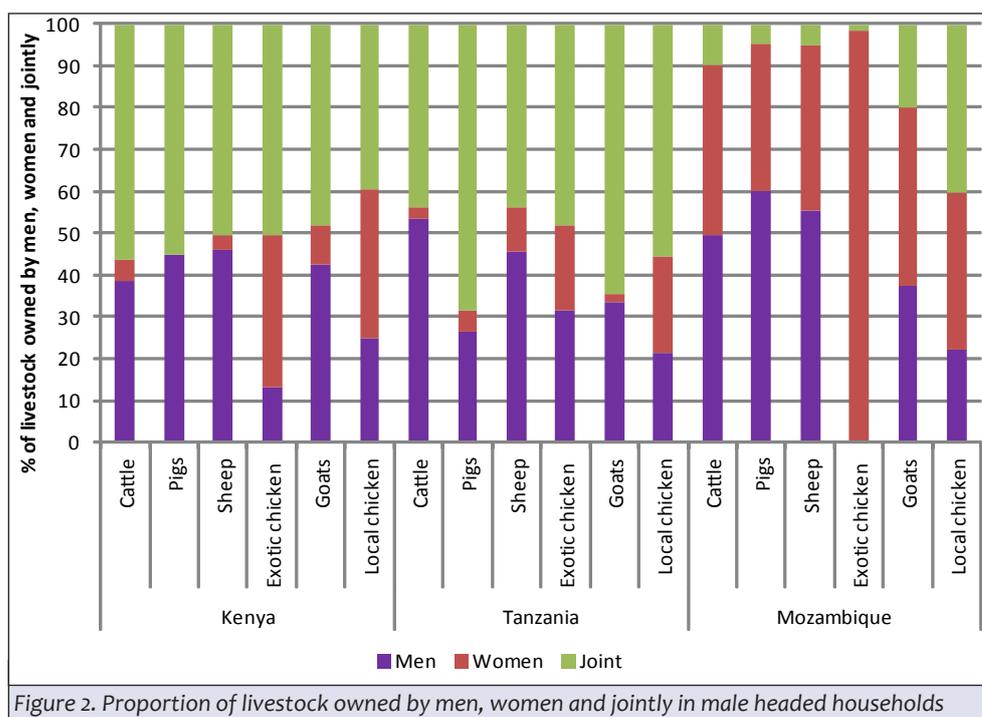
In Mozambique, most of the assets were either owned by men or by women, with only about 11% owned jointly.

In all three countries, livestock were much more important to women's asset portfolio than men's. For example in Mozambique, livestock made up 55% of men's assets, and 73.8% of women's.

It is important to note, however, that ownership and rights over livestock are complex and that women may be able to derive benefits from livestock irrespective of whether they own them or not. For example, a woman may have the right to obtain and even sell milk from certain animals, even if she does not formally own them.

**Recommendations:**

1. Care must be taken to ensure that women do not lose ownership and control of cattle as evidence shows that larger animals are more likely to be controlled by men than by women.
2. Further research that looks at species ownership alongside benefits that women get from these species would be useful. Women, for example, may own fewer of a particular species but derive more benefits from them than from another species of which they own more.



## Ownership and decision-making

The concept of ownership is complex and can differ depending on the cultural context as well as the production system. To cope with this complexity, compiling information on the rights that women have over their assets is important.

For example, even when women own livestock, the marketing and decision-making on the use of money earned by these assets may still be in the hands of men, thereby undermining the benefits that would be expected to result from women's 'ownership'.

**Recommendation:**

1. It is essential to establish whether women are able to make decisions independently or have to consult other members of the household. These questions provide a more nuanced understanding of women's livestock ownership and what rights and responsibilities are attached to the livestock assets that women own.

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