

A study of gender and livestock in Assam

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Livestock management plays a key role in improving the rural economy of Assam like other developing countries of the world. Both the genders participated in livestock rearing, production and management. Out of them, women's participation in above said sector is critical as compared to men. But their contribution and involvement is not well documented and not considered as a paid work. The present research study had been designed to determine gender role, responsibility, access and control in livestock management activities of Assam. A multistage random sampling along with purposive sampling technique was used for selection of respondents. The total size of the sample was 1800 respondents both male and female belonging to 900 households. Data were collected with the help of interview schedule by personal interview method. The result of the study showed that majority of the activities related to livestock management were well performed by women but men's complete access was higher than women.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Gender, Role, Livestock management

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Poverty in Assam is a rural phenomenon. The occurrence of poverty in rural areas has always been higher than urban areas and about three-quarters of the country's poor are living in rural areas. Majority of the rural poor (both male and female) are engaged in agriculture sector as small owner-operators, share cropping tenants, and laborers. Livestock sector is an important sub-domain of agriculture in Assam's economy. The landless farmers are taking livestock production as a vital activity, which augment their family income and explore employment opportunity in addition to their off farm occupation. Livestock provides food, or more specifically animal protein in human diets, income, employment and possibly foreign exchange. For low income producers, livestock also serve as a store of wealth; provide draught power and organic fertilizer for crop production as well as means of transport. Consumption of livestock products in the developing countries, starting from a low base, is growing rapidly.

Gender, especially women play an important role in activities dealing with livestock such as care and management or transformation and marketing of certain livestock products. Women's participation in livestock development is

significant and varies from region to region according to socio-economic, agro ecological, ethnic, and religious factors. In rural areas women's participation rate in agricultural and livestock management activities is high as compared to men. Rural women get up early the morning and work from morning to evening in the field or at home. In their varied roles as agricultural labourers, fetching managing water and fuel, cooking, cleaning and maintaining the house, and taking care of the young and old and participate in all operations related to livestock management. It was estimated that rural women spend an average 2.5 hours per day caring for livestock, compared to six hours performing domestic chores. In spite of all these involvement women work is not considered as paid work as mentioned by FAO (1998) in its various report and census. Now we can say livestock caring is women domain but they are disadvantageous in training and extension programmes. No doubt women's contribution in livestock sector is incredible. They are required to participate in agricultural decision-making. But they have no power to take decisions especially with regard to livestock production activities. Women do not enjoy complete legal equality with men.

In view of women’s significant role in livestock production, it is vital to address gender concerns in the sustainable management of livestock in mixed crop-livestock farming systems and in marketing. It is believed that, without the involvement of women farmers from the very beginning, no livestock development programme can be expected to succeed. Unfortunately, there have been only a few studies carried out on gender issues in relation to livestock systems in Assam. Keeping this view in mind, the present study was carried out with the objectives to study the profile of the farm families, to assess the gender role in livestock management activities and to identify the access to resources in livestock management.

The data were generated under the project titled ‘Gender Specific data base on farm families ‘as a part of the All India Co-ordinated Project on Home Science (Extension Component) from the state of Assam. The data were collected from six agro-climatic zones namely, Upper Brahmaputra Valley Zone, Central Brahmaputra Valley Zone, North Bank Plain Zone, Lower Brahmaputra Valley Zone, Barak Valley Zone and Hill Zone. From each zone one district was selected. The size of sample was 150 households from each selected agro-climatic zone. Nine hundred families were proportionately selected from different landholding categories. The total size of the sample was 1800 respondents belonging to 900 household’s comprising of 900 male and 900 female members of each household. Data were collected with the help of interview schedule by personal interview method. The gender role was assessed in terms of role participation independently; joint either with male and female members. The access profile was in terms complete, partial and no access for both male and female members separately. The data were analyzed in quantitative measures with frequency and percentage.

Data of Table 1 show that 41.18 per cent of the farm families belonged to upper middle age group followed by

32.06 per cent and 26.76 per cent to young and middle aged groups, respectively and were educated upto High School level and formed to schedule caste category (32.06%). It is

Sr. No	Item	Group	% of the respondents
1.	Age	Young (18-30 years)	32.06%
		Lower middle (31-45 years)	26.76%
		Upper middle (46 years and above)	41.18%
2.	Family education	Illiterate/unlettered	9.7%
		Can read and write lettered	7.40%
		Primary School	17.10%
		Middle School	18.40%
		High School	30.00%
		Post Metric Diploma Graduate and above	13.40% 4.10%
3.	Caste	Backward	24.72%
		OBC	26.76%
		SC/ST	32.06%
		Upper caste	16.46%
4.	Family type	Joint	24.00%
		Nuclear	76.00%
5.	Main occupation	Business	4.46%
		Farming	63.58%
		Daily wage earner	21.26%
		Enterprise	6.24%
		Service	4.46%
6.	Land holding	Large	1.33
		Medium	9.67
		Small	47.33
		Landless	41.67

Livestock	Female			Male		
	Independent	Joint with female	Joint with male	Independent	Joint with female	Joint with male
Breeding of animal	3.76%	5.56%	71.03%	20.00%	53.23%	7.56%
Care of livestock	24.96%	6.20%	65.02%	6.26%	82.70%	5.44%
Care of sick animal	4.24%	5.26%	83.87%	25.16%	62.99%	8.28%
Feed of animal	25.44%	8.05%	61.35%	4.76%	81.29%	5.95%
Fodder storage	4.99%	4.30%	76.59%	26.90%	54.29%	9.40%
Fresh excreta Mgt.	24.12%	11.74%	51.93%	7.64%	74.87%	5.26%
Grazing of animal	3.73%	4.66%	57.84%	27.49%	39.38%	9.55%
Growing fodder	3.21%	3.21%	45.89%	22.66%	34.08%	7.61%
Marketing of produce	4.17%	4.00%	63.48%	28.76%	41.65%	8.60%
Mgt. of cash	4.71%	4.17%	66.12%	28.08%	46.40%	5.82%
Retention of produce	3.81%	5.18%	76.10%	20.78%	59.84%	6.88%
Shed management	24.04%	10.7%	46.90%	20.88%	58.54%	5.69%

evident from the data personated in the table that there was the joint family system where 76 per cent found to be nuclear family. Farming was their main occupation (63.58%) and a large majority *i.e.* 47.33 per cent of the farm families belonged to small land holding category.

The data of the respondents according to their roles in livestock management are presented in Table 2 which reveal that in livestock management activities joint participation of both male and female members was higher than independent participation. But the activities like care of livestock (24.96%), feeding of animals (25.44%), and fresh excreta management (24.12%), and shed management (24.04%) women's independent participation was higher than independent participation men. Men's independent participation was higher in breeding of animal (20.00%), care of sick animals (25.16%), engagement of labour (25.00%), fodder storage (26.90%), grazing of animal (27.49%), growing fodder (22.66%), marketing of produce (28.76%), management of cash (28.08%) than women. The data indicated that women were performing the activities along with their household tasks which once reflected the multifarious role of women.

The data were therefore, analysed to identify the access to livestock management related resources and which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that majority of the male members completely access in livestock management like feeding of animal (77.39%), care of sick animals (74.19%), purchase of cattle feed (73.20%) etc. Female members had partial access in major livestock management activities like feeding of animal (8.85%), care of sick animals (8.72 per cent), purchase of cattle feed (9.20%), procuring of fodder (8.85%) etc. This may be due to busy schedule of their home activities. Studies related to the present investigation have also been conducted Singh *et al.* (1994) Ramaswamy (1999), Bordoloi *et al.* (2005) and Sindhu (2007).

Recommendation :

–Organise gender sensitization programmes for men and women to ensuring gender equity in access and control of resources.

–Women's predominant role in animal husbandry should be recognized and encouraged.

–Trainings for women should be preferably demonstrations and should be organized on the days and time convenient for the women.

–Women must be involved in decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. This action will bring some changes in the gender relations in the society.

–Women must be aware regarding their existing rights, access to judicial relief, removing discrimination through legal reforms and providing legal aid, assistance and counselling.

	Female (n=900)			Male		
	Complete	Partial	No access	Complete	Partial	No access
Labour management	5.00%	52.41%	20.00%	49.29%	9.72%	19.61%
Breeding	6.38%	75.59%	12.75%	63.21%	20.73%	10.71%
Care of sick animals	8.72%	84.70%	5.69%	74.19%	23.43%	1.87%
Feeding of animal	8.85%	86.06%	4.14%	77.39%	18.38%	3.68%
Fresh excreta mgt	10.16%	81.67%	6.90%	68.79%	23.10%	7.24%
Grazing of animal	6.88%	63.67%	7.65%	58.40%	16.98%	3.92%
Growing of fodder	7.57%	59.33%	13.20%	54.52%	17.56%	9.03%
Mgt. of cash	6.65%	70.86%	15.29%	66.04%	13.99%	13.14%
No. of animals	9.84%	84.63%	3.63%	75.66%	21.71%	1.64%
Purchase of cattle feed	9.20%	79.12%	8.32%	73.20%	19.60%	6.37%
Storage of fodder	8.38%	82.37%	7.50%	72.43%	20.93%	5.81%

Conclusion :

Gender roles in agriculture became an important subject. The livestock sector offers advantages to women over other agriculture sectors because of the reason that almost all household members of most societies have more access to livestock than to land. High variation was found between the gender participation in livestock related activities. In case role profile women's participation was high in most of the activities whereas, in access profile men's independent participation was higher than women in livestock related activities.

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