

# Veterinary Medicine in Conflict Regions: Potential to Engage Women

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# Engagement of Women in Afghanistan

- **Moore, et. al. (2013) applied opinion dynamics to social networks to model how opinions related to international forces evolved in a community, and investigated how engagement teams of men or women interacted with gender networks**
  - Women's networks are far more robust than men's networks, and when a female engagement team member interacted with another women, that one Afghan woman could influence the entire women's network
    - **Those women would subsequently influence the opinion of their husbands**
  - They found that the influence of the male engagement teams were not as robust, and men's interactions were limited
  - Men did not interact in the same fashion, did not have as robust of networks, and did not have the same influence over opinions
- **Apply this concept to animal health and agriculture in Afghanistan and other low-resource environments**

# Veterinary Medicine in Low-Resource Environments

- **Veterinary services are weak or inadequate**
  - Especially true in Afghanistan
- **Veterinary care is typically limited to livestock and working animals**
  - Large and small ruminants
    - Sheep and goat flocks/herds predominate
  - Poultry
  - Donkeys, and horses
- **Dogs may require care if used as working animals**
- **Focus should be on improving animal production**
  - Extension
  - Establishing herd health programs
    - Disease prevention, reproduction, nutrition



# Livestock in Low-Resource Environments

- **Livestock provide food security, economic development, socio-economic status, and utility for work and sport**
- **In developing regions, livestock contribute approximately one-third of total agricultural output**
  - In Afghanistan, approximately 80% of families rely on livestock for food and/or income and agriculture contributes to one-half of GDP
  - 45 and 25 percent of the world's poor livestock keepers reside in South Asia and Africa, respectively (FAO 2011)
- **Livestock are kept as individual animals or as small or large flocks/herds**
  - Nomadic pastoralists exist in many regions and comprise a large fraction of the livestock sector; the Kuchis reside in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- **Food and Agriculture Organization for the UN (FAO) anticipates that the demand for animal source food (ASF) will increase**

# Benefits of Improving Animal Health

- **Improved animal health, well-being, and nutritional status will increase production capabilities and quantities, and economic returns**
  - Increased milk and egg production
  - Increased weight gain improves meat production
  - Enhanced food safety
- **Increased food supply and opportunities for economic development will improve public health and well being**
- **Elimination of specific livestock pathogens will allow countries to resume international trade, and will reduce zoonotic diseases**

**Egypt – Dairy Directive Project (DDP)**  
PROMOTING IMPROVEMENTS IN THE DAIRY SECTOR TO PREVENT CHILD MALNUTRITION & ILLNESSES

From 2001 to 2004, ACDI/VOCA's Dairy Directive Project (DDP) worked throughout Egypt to prevent child malnutrition and the illnesses associated with contaminated and spoiled dairy products by promoting improvements in the dairy sector.



# Women in Livestock Rearing

- **Women significantly contribute to livestock production in low-resource environments**
- **Women are largely responsible for raising sheep, goats, poultry, and caring for and milking milk producing animals including cattle**
- **FAO reported that in some rural livestock based economies, women comprise two-thirds (400 million) of the low-income livestock keepers**
- **Women's roles differ because of different economic, social, cultural, and even religious contexts**
  - In Afghanistan women care for animals in the small farm setting, the larger herds/flocks are cared for by men



# Gender Inequalities in Agriculture: Challenges Faced by Women

- **Women farmers are less productive, own fewer livestock units, and generate less income**
- **FAO found that women have less access to:**
  - Natural resources for animal housing, grazing, and water
  - Extension services to help improve livestock health and management
  - Fewer marketing opportunities
  - Limited financial services with less credit
  - Unable to make important herd decisions
  - **Veterinary services**
- **These challenges limit women's success in the livestock sector when compared to men**



# Veterinary Access and Gender Inequalities in Livestock Sectors and Veterinary Medicine

- **Men and women are unable to interact freely**
  - Male veterinarians are unable to communicate with women regarding animal health
  - Women livestock holders have limited access to veterinary advise when veterinary services are dominated by men
  - Women have limited resources to obtain relevant husbandry information and/or training because most resources are male
- **Few women to help reduce the gender gap by providing support to women**
  - Based region, women have less access to educational opportunities than men in low resource environments
  - Women, are therefore, are under represented in the veterinary profession



# Impact of Closing the Gender Gap in Livestock Rearing

- **Closing the gender gap would help promote economic development and enhance food security**
  - Improvement of nutritional status positively impacts communities: childhood development, resistance to infectious diseases, and increased work output
- **Creating equality between men and women in would increase agricultural output by 2.5 – 4 percent, resulting in 12 – 17 percent fewer undernourished (FAO 2013)**
  - One billion extremely poor people living in rural areas depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for livelihoods
- **Livestock contribute to one-third of total agricultural output**
  - Important in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa



# Using Women Veterinary Professionals to Close the Gender Gap in Afghanistan

- **Empowerment of women veterinary or animal health professionals to provide sustained support to women farmers**
  - Provide women veterinary professionals with advanced training emphasizing extension services
  - Invest in women in higher education
  - Develop incentives for women to join veterinary field
- **Develop women community animal health workers**
- **Women veterinary professionals can provide:**
  - Extension services
  - Improvement of animal health and development of herd health program
    - Enhance animal production, and therefore, increase marketing opportunities
    - Higher financial gains
    - Increase economic resources
    - Economic development would help women improve herds and/or flocks

# Potential Impact of Engaging Women and Closing the Gender Gap in Afghanistan

- **Perception of Western forces might improve if women veterinary professionals engage women livestock owners and provide services that improve production**
  - Models of the social networks show that women may have more influence than men in influencing community perceptions
  - Improved perception may result fewer sympathizers
- **Women livestock owners/caretakers will have access to services, which improve animal health and production**
  - Improved production results in higher yield, meat, milk, eggs
  - Families will have food security, suffer less malnourishment, and have a source of income making them less vulnerable to coercion by the insurgency
- **Production increases at the community, district and provincial levels**
  - Communities with food security are more productive, and may therefore, be more stable
- **Potential to improve public health through promotion of food safety and reduction of zoonoses**

# Summary

- **Engaging women in agriculture in Afghanistan could have many positive outcomes**
- **Positively influence the perception of western forces through social networks**
- **Reduce sympathizers to the insurgency through economic development**
- **Reduce vulnerability to coercion through provision of food security**
  - Food security is critical in conflict situations
    - **Media reports indicate that religious leaders have instructed people to consume dogs to prevent malnourishment**

