Two thirds of the world’s poor, rural people live in mixed-farming systems that combine extensive or semi-intensive livestock production with agricultural crop cultivation. Animals provide meat, milk, fiber, power, and manure in these systems. In addition, livestock are a form of savings and insurance against accidents, illness, and death. As social assets, livestock contribute to building social capital because animals are often used as gifts or in cultural ceremonies (i.e., weddings, fiestas).

Women are clearly recognized for their vital roles in small-scale livestock production, and this is usually a very important dimension of mixed-farming systems. This does not mean, however, that women formally own the animals or benefit from animal sales. In general, women have less access and control over grazing land, water, fodder, credit, markets, and veterinary services when compared to men. Women’s labor and responsibilities remain under-recognized and underappreciated in policy design and implementation.

Sheep Production in the Mixed-Farming Systems of Mexico: Where Are the Women?

By Veronica Vázquez-García

On the Ground

- Mexican scholarship has often obscured women’s contributions to small-scale sheep production by using imprecise descriptions as to who producers are, what they do, and why. Such women can become invisible to researchers and policy makers.
- A gender-based approach is needed to raise the profile of these women. This could include clarifying how and why sheep-production duties are allocated between women and men in households and understanding how and why policies differentially affect women and men in terms of their access to productive resources and entitlement programs.
- Mexico needs to increase sheep productivity. Women are key stakeholders in this process. Production interventions could be facilitated by targeting women clients and making better use of their knowledge and practical experience.

Keywords: gendered roles in livestock management, rangelands, diffusion of innovations, small ruminants.

La producción ovina en los sistemas agropecuarios mixtos de México: ¿dónde están las mujeres?

Perspectiva desde el campo:

- La ciencia veterinaria mexicana ha invisibilizado la contribución femenina a la producción ovina de pequeña escala, al dejar de lado el análisis de quiénes son los productores, qué hacen y por qué.
- Se requiere un enfoque de género para visibilizar a estas mujeres. El uso de dicho enfoque ayudará a entender la asignación de labores entre hombres y mujeres así como el impacto diferenciado de la política pública en términos del acceso a recursos productivos y programas de apoyo.
- México necesita aumentar su producción ovina. Las mujeres son actores clave en este proceso. Para aumentar el éxito de las intervenciones dirigidas a este objetivo, es necesario partir de los conocimientos y experiencias prácticas de las mujeres.

Keywords: gendered roles in livestock management, rangelands, diffusion of innovations, small ruminants.