

# Socio-economic and gender issues in draft animal technology: *A Lady Farmer's commentary*

by

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## 1. Introduction

When I was born, at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, I found that my parents had two donkeys. My sisters and brothers always teased me that the donkeys were older than I was and I could seek advice from them. Truly, I tried many times to ask the donkeys questions. When I got my own piece of land, the first gift I received was a donkey.

Kenya Network for Draft Animal Technology (KENDAT), of which I am Vice-Chairman has done a feasibility study on animal power in the Kenya. I was privileged to be in the team that travelled around the country talking with and asking farmers their opinion on animal power.

In the many of the places we visited, we demonstrated all aspects related to animal power including health care of animals, adequate loading, how to till and conserve the soil, the tools for the job and how to select the best-suited animal for these purposes. The farmers were very excited and enthusiastic about the new and improved ideas. However, almost as soon as we left their places, the enthusiasm went down and most farmers went back to their old ways. They did this as if they had never heard or seen better ways of dealing with their animals. This was very clear especially around my rural home area, Limuru, Lari and Naivasha; where I have spent a lot of time in recent days, after migrating from my city home. This paper is based on my observations during the said interaction with my people, with whom I have never lost real contact.

The whole situation caused me a lot of concern. I had seen cases where poor people are given expensive options, which are beyond their meagre income and other times, where the technology is too complex for them. This could have been another one of these. I therefore decided to do something about understanding this behaviour. Maybe we had been a bit theoretical in our approach.

As a way towards understanding it all, I decided to throw myself into DAT (draft animal technology) activities. I started a small donkey transport unit. This opened my eyes to a complex new world of reasoning and of seasons of life. I had convinced myself that I knew the complexity of small-scale farming only to find myself learning many things I had never known in my conception.

Before this new realization, I had looked after my farming activities on part time basis because I was employed. Since retirement, five years ago I have been a small-scale farmer.

There are things I had always known. Like that, *farmers live and grow with nature*. Now, my realization is that there must be a more complex system than just the introduction of new or improved technology which determines whether farmers accept or do not accept an idea or concept. Any new or improved technology targeting the farmer must be approached from a holistic point of view and the farmer must be a participant all the way from the initial thought. Whatever is being introduced or improved must fit into the existing links that make the chain of activities which form the whole existence of the farmer.

## 2. The Limuru, Lari and Naivasha experience

### 2.1 Farming and land care perspective

Since the beginning of time, people in certain communities have been farming to feed themselves. A community of people determined their own needs in food and provided for those needs themselves.

As population increased and people moved further afield to different parts of the land, they grew different types of food crop that did well in that environment. When they had more than they needed, they bartered with their

neighbours for what they did not have. This was the natural beginning of trade in farm produce and thus the economy of a people.

Farming has always involved more than digging and planting seeds. There were always symbolic and spiritual issues surrounding the farming activities of a given community. In my own community, no one would plant until certain rituals were performed. These would culminate in the eldest mother of the clan planting the first seed and therefore opening the planting season. This had to be a woman who had finished bearing children and who was thus considered the most noble of all. There were grounds, which could not be used as farmland such as burial forest, slopes, holy grooves and where certain plants or trees grew. If the crop failed, animals died, or rains failed, it meant that the God was not happy with the people and certain cleansing rituals had to be performed. When the soil was tired, the community cleared virgin land and left the old land to bush.

With colonisation, this system came to an end. The colonial settler took all the good cultivation land and moved the people to the poorer, drier and sloppy land. Systematically the traditional farming system with its rituals was destroyed, leaving a naked people; stripped of their pride and spiritual stronghold. No wonder the destruction of fauna and flora has now become common place. The protection of the environment had been incorporated into and was an integral part of traditional system of farming.

This new order brought about new laws of land ownership. In my tradition, a man owned land through his wife or wives and land belonged not to an individual but the family. No person could sell or buy land without the consent of families of both the buyer and seller. The new order where an individual owned land with a title deed ("paper land") instead of family land ("earth land"), deprived the woman and her children the legal right over the land. This has brought about landless people and at the same time individuals for prospecting. There is a need for fair land ownership laws with woman put into consideration. Kenya has created laws to this effect but the practical reality is still very different. This is so because land board members are men. Often women are manipulated by their husbands and generally, they do not know that such laws exist or they cannot read for themselves.

## 2.2 Use of DAT in the traditional way

My people have used the donkey as a pack animal since the days of our ancestors. They used the animal to transport food to the market place and building material from the forest. When the colonialist colonised the land, the use of oxen and the wheel were introduced. Even with this introduction, the donkey was never harnessed to the cart. There were many reasons for this but I shall mention one or two.

One, the colonialist kept the wheel as his prerogative. Secondly, the wheel was not easily available, neither were there wide enough paths in the native reserves to allow for the use of a cart. The donkey continued to be used as pack animal until the early seventies. This was after independence. The use of the wheel became possible because of the availability of ageing vehicles. The *Jua Kali* artisans bought the scrap axles and wheels and build carts on them.

My maiden home was is situated in Central Mt. Kenya district and was a plateau with many valleys and rivers. In the traditional system of land demarcation, each family land had access to a valley with a river. Women travelled short distances to fetch water. With the new land order, rivers were never put into consideration in the demarcation. The result is that women have been forced to travel long distances in search of water.

In addition, the market place was centralised according to a development plan. This brought about more need for wheeled transport as it was faster and in most cases cheaper. However, as the economy has become poorer and inflation risen, price of fossil fuel has risen. Farmers have found their buying power drop. All these factors put together, have given draft animal power a new place in the economy of the farmer.

My area now is famous for mistreating the donkey. At first I thought that arresting these young handlers would solve the problem. As I have become more involved in finding solutions to this mismanagement of the donkey, I have discovered that it is an interrelated social problem that cannot be dealt with, in isolation from a host of other social issues.

## 2.3 Capacity building and self reliance

My people have existed for thousands of years not in a stagnant situation but evolving in their

time and their place. They have aligned themselves with nature and their environment. They managed this because they reflected on their past. They noted where they came from and reflected on where they wanted to be. They improved on what went wrong in their very existing foundation. It is therefore very important, first to discover what the people are capable of and thereafter to find out what they anticipate so as to achieve their desired goal. My people are very good farmers but the difference today is that new farming methods, new seeds and change in the climatic seasons have made them lose their steps.

To assist us gain our balance in this new situation, we have formed women's groups in each area according to its needs. These groups have been looking for financial assistance in the areas of small-scale farming activities e.g. seeds, grade animals, and tools.

It is unfortunate that we have not found financiers who will fund certain areas of small holder farming activities, such as intensive market farming of fresh produce and sheep or goat rearing. Most financiers say there is no security, collateral or accountable stock in these activities. Yet the area in question is the one with farming activities which feed Nairobi, a large metropolis. Being near a big city, the area occupied and worked predominantly by women. Unlike the higher potential farming, those farmers who have a stall or kiosk at the market place have received loans to assist in the market business.

With this lack of capital, growth in smallholder intensive market farming is very slow and in many cases it is a subsistence development operated on a "hand to mouth" basis. Despite all this, the woman farmer remains a very hard working and productive provider.

To circumvent the issue of credit facilities and collateral, the women's groups decided to lend one another part of the money we as individual members contribute. One group has brought itself a plough, another group started a pig project. Women farmers in this area know what they want and are very hardworking. When the pig project did not succeed very well due to veterinary problems and feed costs, we decided to seek professional advice. We decided to invite different organisations that deal with farm produce. We have had visits from a chicken hatchery, the largest pork factory, and a milk processing unit. KENDAT and the Kenya Society for Protection and Care of Animals (KSPCA) are our regular visitors,

working hand in hand with us in the technology and health of the DAT animals.

#### **2.4 Woman issue in small scale farming**

In our traditional setting, a man owned land through his wife or wives. In case he did not have a wife by the time the land was divided, members of his family would hold his piece in trust until the time that he would marry. The woman determined how much land her husband would own through her hard work and land management. She said how much land should be cleared for her. The man dug and she planted, weeded, harvested and stored the produce.

If her husband was also hardworking and they had many goats, sheep and cattle, she would persuade him to marry another wife to help her with the family work. All female members of the family would be involved in looking for a suitable girl. By that marriage they would increase their land. All unused land belonged to the community not to the individual family. An African man was never described as "rich" but as "wealthy". This is because that status was a holistic one, inclusive of the health of his family, the many children, a huge extended family, goats, sheep, cows and a huge granary.

Woe to the African woman, slavery, servitude and colonization brought her tumbling down. Paper-land uprooted her off her earth-land. Foreign laws pushed her to oblivion. Despite all this, she remains the farmer and the land manager but not necessarily, the recipient of the fruits of her labour. She labours for the dairy cow, in the tea, coffee, sugar and rice plantations. At the co-operative union where farmers are paid for the farm produce, she receives nothing and everything is registered in the name of the man. It could be the name of her husband if she is married, or her father or her brother. The woman is left in waiting. She will not receive according to her hard work, but according to the man's wish.

In recent years our government has passed laws to the effect that women should inherit land and be incorporated in land ownership. This law is taking root but at very slow pace. Most farmers have not accepted this and when they divide their land to their children, they leave the girl child out of inheritance. As a result, women have been forced to assume a status comparable to that of squatters on their father's, brother's or husband's land.

The woman has realised that the lack of a land certificate is not losing it all. She has learnt to rent land for cultivating food crops so that she can produce much more than her family needs. The left over, she sells at the market place.

This provides her with a little extra money which she can use to buy her farm inputs, pay a casual worker, and contribute to her womens group. This has given her a certain degree of freedom and confidence in herself. She can manage her affairs without waiting upon her husband all the time.

A woman has a lot of activities to carry on within the same time frame. Those who have managed to acquire a donkey have found it very helpful. A donkey will accomplish the digging that would be done by two men for three days, in a day. A donkey's one journey to the water point covers five journeys of a woman. Women are very satisfied by the work the donkey is doing for them. They are conversant with the importance of DAT in their daily activities. In situations, where the

husband would not allow his wife to own a donkey or where she cannot afford one; we are organising to buy a group donkey. In our meetings we are continuously looking and searching to find what can, in the quickest way possible, bring accessibility to the technology that would assist the woman to alleviate the drudgery.

### **3. Conclusion**

This paper is based on our local experiences in struggling to make ends meet. There is no conclusion to it because life is a process of successes and failures.

We would like to share with others their local experiences both in Africa and around the world. The contact address is at the beginning of this paper. We wish you all the best in your endeavours.

Thank you.