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Gender Implications of the Introduction of Forage Chopper Machines

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Abstract

The mechanisation of agricultural labour processes is often associated with a decreased work burden and improved production for small-scale farmers. However, empirical evidence suggests that consequences of mechanisation may vary for men and women within households or communities. Technological interventions are known to interact with gender norms, gendered access to and control over resources and decision-making. Therefore, to fully understand impacts of mechanised production gender analysis is required.

In an effort to curb the labour burden and amount of time consumed in manual feed processing among livestock keepers the USAID-funded R4D project Africa RISING introduced forage chopper machines in seven villages in Babati (Northern Tanzania). In 2016 - one year later — a team of social scientists evaluated the gender implications of the new processing practices through focus group discussions, matrix scoring, linkage diagrams and a survey. Male and female respondents were selected from among the farmers' groups that were formed for the management and use of the chopper machines.

First findings show that the technology reduces in particular women's labour burden and decreases the time needed for livestock feeding. At the same time, additional labour and cost implications of operating the machine impeded actual technology use for some farmers. Access to the forage choppers is influenced by various factors - among others membership and gender dynamics in farmers' groups. Men tend to operate machines more frequently, which they in part justify by claiming "lower technical skills" and "lower physical strength" of women. On the other hand, the benefits from improved feeding through the sale of milk and eggs have allowed some women to become financially more independent. The results of this study will not only inform the R4D project's further livestock work, but will also feed into the ongoing gender and mechanisation debate.

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