

8. Problems and solutions

The potential problems of sheep production by groups of women are innumerable but, as the author saw in the Project of North Togo, with care and commonsense most of these problems can be avoided. The following list is based on what the women in the groups and the staff of the Project of North Togo consider would be problems if the appropriate action were not taken, as well as problems that have arisen in similar circumstances elsewhere.

Almost all these problems would arise also with men's groups for sheep production. Only item 15 (support of husbands) is exclusive to women. Two further items, the support of the village leaders (item 14) and literacy (item 20) are likely to be more serious problems for women than for men.

1. The women have no capital so they are unable to start a group unless they are given a loan to buy equipment and supplementary food and veterinary care for the first year. Some women are able to provide their own ewes; others are not.

2. Many village women do not know how to look after sheep. The groups must receive advice and training from the field staff.
3. It is difficult to herd a new flock. For the first few days it will be necessary for more than two women to herd the flock until the sheep recognise each other and know where their night enclosure is.
4. There is a potential conflict of labour between the needs of the group and the needs of the family (carrying water, looking after children, working in the fields, etc). In the Project of North Togo the water supplies to the villages were improved so that the women no longer have to carry water from up to 15 km away. They are able to use for sheep production some of the time they previously spent carrying water.
5. The work with the flock may be inadequately performed because the group as a whole do not realise the value of cleaning the water troughs, shepherding the flock for at least 8 hours, etc. The field officer must give adequate training to the women and check that the basic tasks are being performed adequately.

6. Some individual women are lazy and do not do their share of the work. It is necessary for these women to know why their work is important to the success of the group, and to be given pressure to work harder by the rest of the group and particularly by the president.
7. Some members live too far away to fully participate in the activities of the group. All members must live near one another.
8. All the members of the group must feel involved with the group and must care about its success.
9. In the early stages the women feel that they are doing a lot of work and getting little reward. The loans must be arranged so that the group gets some financial benefit in the first two years.
10. In groups where the women each provide ewes when the group is formed, there can be problems in later years if the women have initially provided different numbers of ewes. These problems relate to how the profits of the group are distributed and whose lambs are sold to repay the contract. The

solution is either to insist that all the women provide the same number of ewes, or that the use of the lambs is discussed and understood by all the members when the group is formed.

11. Occasionally a woman leaves the group because she marries, leaves her husband or her family moves away. How many sheep is she entitled to take with her? How much should she pay the group for the services her sheep have received? How much should she receive for the work she has done with the communal flock? These questions must be resolved by discussion within the group.
12. A woman who has initially provided ewes wants to remove one or more for her own purposes. This action must have the approval of the whole group, and the woman must pay the group for the services her sheep have received.
13. If some or all of the ewes, or the land for the night enclosure, have been provided by an outside body (e.g. church, philanthropic neighbour) but there is no written contract, misunderstandings can arise regarding how much the group should pay back. It is advisable to have a written contract between the

group of women and any outside body with interests in their sheep flock.

14. The village leaders control the activities in the village, and unless they support the women's group, the group will find it difficult to operate. For instance, land is traditionally allocated to men who are regarded as the head of the family and the women have no right to demand land for their sheep. The women must secure the support of the village leaders.
15. The women must have the support of their husbands who should understand the duties of the women and the benefits of sheep production.
16. The production system must be a technology which has been tried and tested and shown to work satisfactorily in the area.
17. There must be technical solutions to potential disease problems.
18. There must be a reliable supply of the necessary inputs such as mineral blocks, supplementary food and veterinary drugs.

19. The field officers employed in the project must be well-motivated and capable of dealing with potential problems.
20. There may be no woman in the group who can read and write sufficiently well to keep the records for the group. If this is so it is necessary for an outsider to keep the records, and train one of the women so she is able to do so.
21. The record books may not be filled in because the secretary does not realise their importance. The secretary, in particular, needs repeated training.
22. No donor agency can be expected to support a development project indefinitely. Therefore the long-term aim must be to make the groups able to survive on their own when the project finishes. Once they are able to operate without a financial subsidy, they will still need advice and veterinary care. With government backing, sheep production groups can be serviced by staff of the national extension service.

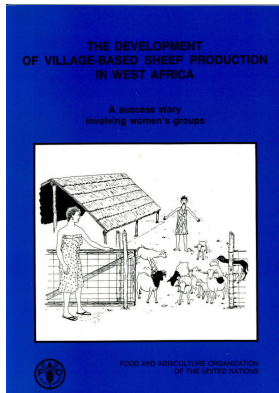
Assumptions. Culling plus death rate of ewes is 0.2, i.e. survival from one year to the next is 0.8.

Lambing interval is 8 months.

At each lambing, a ewe produces on average 0.43 female lambs that will survive to their first lambing (see footnote to table).

First lambing at age 18 months.

Initial ewes lamb in 6th month of first year.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF VILLAGE-BASED SHEEP PRODUCTION IN WEST AFRICA:

A success story involving women's groups



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Preface

The peoples of West Africa have traditionally depended on small scale village based systems of animal production as a source of income generation and money reserve. Additionally animal protein plays a critical role in the nutrition of the peoples of West Africa. Lack of resources coupled with trypanosomiasis challenge, so prevalent in the region, have dictated small scale livestock production based largely on small ruminants and poultry. The traditional production system is a nil-input uncontrolled management system in which in most cases, the animals scavenge on whatever by-product or refuse feeds are available in the villages. Herded or tethered grazing is largely in the control of the village women and/or children. Production efficiency is normally very low and characterized by very high levels of lamb and kid mortality, very poor growth rates and fluctuating reproductive rates.

Against this background FAO/UNDP in conjunction with the Government of Togo initiated in 1980 a pilot village based livestock development project in the Kara region of North Togo. The project has been very successful in tackling the major

aspects that constrain village based livestock production in North Togo. On the one hand, it has clearly demonstrated that the introduction of simple animal husbandry technologies can have a very marked effect on animal production. Ewe productivity for example has been increased from 7 kg to over 30 kg lamb per ewe per year and the project now embraces more than 15,000 ewes and 350 farmers.

A key element in the success of the project has been the development/extension strategy followed which not only emphasised simple technologies and easy to understand training methods but also focused on specific target groups.

Women's groups have played a big part in the focus and success of the project. The purpose of this publication is to summarize and highlight how the women's groups were formed, how they operated and the direct benefits which accrued to them, in the improvement of their livelihoods as a consequence of their participation in this development programme. Clearly the manual must embrace technical aspects of livestock production as well as the range of issues pertaining to role and development of women's groups.

To facilitate more easy reading these separate themes are presented in the text in

different colour marked sections. This manual has been produced jointly by the Human Resources, Institutions and Agrarian Reform Division (ESH) and the Animal Production and Health Division (AGA) in FAO: It is hoped that it will serve as an effective example of how women's groups can be focused and guided in the development of village based livestock production.

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ABSTRACT

This publication on the role of women's groups in the development of village based sheep production in West Africa summarises the development approach, methods used and achievements realized in an FAO/UNDP project in North Togo. On the one hand, it clearly identifies the manner in which women's groups were

formed, operated and succeeded in developing worthwhile sheep production systems. The manual also highlights the extension strategies and simple animal husbandry techniques on which the project was successfully developed.

Key Words

Sheep, goats, breeding, nutrition, management, humid tropics, West Africa, women's groups, formation, training, extension.

Introduction

In many traditional societies it is unacceptable for individual women to own sheep. Yet sheep can provide women with a substantial and much-needed income. The answer may be for a group of women to jointly own and look after a flock of sheep. Women's groups for sheep production are successfully operating in northern Togo, West Africa¹.

This booklet is written for groups of women and extension workers concerned with the development of sheep production in tropical countries. It contains both technical and socio-economic information about the establishment and operation of women's groups for sheep production. Each section is written for two audiences. On coloured paper, the main points are presented in a very simple form for village women who have little reading ability. On white paper, more detail is given for extension workers and other interested persons.

¹Organised through the Project of North Togo (PNT), financed jointly by the Togolaise Government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-BIT TOG/78/009 and UNDP-FAO TOG/81/001). PNT initiated improved sheep husbandry by individual men and groups of men in 1981. The first group of women started keeping sheep in 1983. At the time of the visit by the author in December 1986, there were a total of 274 sheep flocks in the project, of which seven belonged to groups of women.

The principal people responsible for the success PNT are Mr G. Van

Vlaenderen, Mr Yodoufai Noukoum and Mr Luc Vandeweerd.