



A different

Gender integration in livestock and fish research

kettle of fish?

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14 GETTING BY IN THE DRY SEASON: OLOLILIS IN TANZANIA

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Organizations

ILRI

Species



Methods: Separate-sex focus-group discussions

Summary: A study of gender relations in dry-season grazing reserves in Tanzania.

Locations



THE DRY season is the tough time of year for Maasai pastoralists. For 4 or 5 months between June/July and October/November, there is not enough grass for their animals to eat. The men take most of the herd out into the bush in search of pasture, leaving the women and children behind with some of the lactating cows, the calves, and animals that are injured or too ill to walk long distances.

To feed the animals that are left behind, the men build a fence of thorny trunks and bushes around a piece of land. They prevent animals from getting into this area during the rainy season, so the grass can grow undisturbed. During the dry season, the women let the animals they are looking after into the enclosure to graze. They bring them out again after a few hours to continue grazing on the sparse vegetation outside.

This enclosure is called an *ololili* in the Maasai language. A typical single-family *ololili* may be around 0.8 hectare and is enough to support 5–6 cows plus 2 calves for the dry season. *Ololilis* may also be jointly managed by a group; these tend to be larger: around 2–4 hectares. The *ololili* system is crucial for the pastoralists in the Morogoro region in northern Tanzania. It enables the women to maintain the animals they are looking after and to nurse sick animals back to health. They can produce milk to drink and sell: this is vital food and income in the dry season when milk may be the only food available for weeks on end. Once the men return at the end of the dry season, they hope to find a healthy group of animals that they can sell or use to produce milk.

A solution for forage shortages?

Pastoralists are not the only people who like *ololilis*. Researchers are intrigued by them too. The *ololili* system is a proven way to bridge the forage shortage in the dry season. This shortage is the most important cause of low productivity of meat and milk, and of food insecurity in pastoralist areas in East Africa. Forage specialists are looking into ways of using *ololilis* more effectively, for example by introducing better grass varieties and by improving forage management and feeding strategies.

We knew already that both men and women were involved in managing *ololilis*, but no research had been done on the gender relations in this system. We need to understand these relations in order to find ways to improve the system to boost production and improve the incomes and livelihoods of the people concerned.

We are also faced with a worrying trend: the use of *ololilis* seems to be declining, with fewer households maintaining them each year. We need to understand the reasons for this decline if we are to find ways to prevent it.

Observing *ololilis*

As part of the “More Milk in Tanzania” project, we held 16 single-sex focus-group discussions with 80 men and 88 women in five Maasai villages in Mvomero and Kilosa districts in the Morogoro region. We talked to men and women separately because we wanted both to participate freely in discussions. In most Maasai communities, it is inappropriate for women to speak in front of men unless they get the men’s approval each time they want to say something.

Families in these villages were mostly sedentary: they stayed in the same place for most of the year but during the dry season, the men (and sometimes the whole family) migrate in search of pastures, before coming home at the end of the dry season.

We examined three types of *ololilis*: individual, group, and collapsed (villages where some *ololilis* have fallen into disuse). This allowed us to compare among these situations and to explore the reasons for the collapse of the system. We looked at various aspects, comparing gender relations in *ololilis*: the division of labour and decision-making responsibility, constraints and benefits offered by the *ololili*, and the impact of their collapse. We also asked the respondents what they knew about the local forage crops.



Labour and decision-making

“Since in the past, the situation was like this, when the man leaves, the woman is the one who is taking care of the activities in the ololilis, but when the man returns he continues with his responsibility of looking after ololili together with the woman”

– Woman, Makutire hamlet.

Men and women tend to have distinct roles in ololili systems and making decisions about their management (Table 14.1). Boys generally help their fathers, while girls help their mothers.

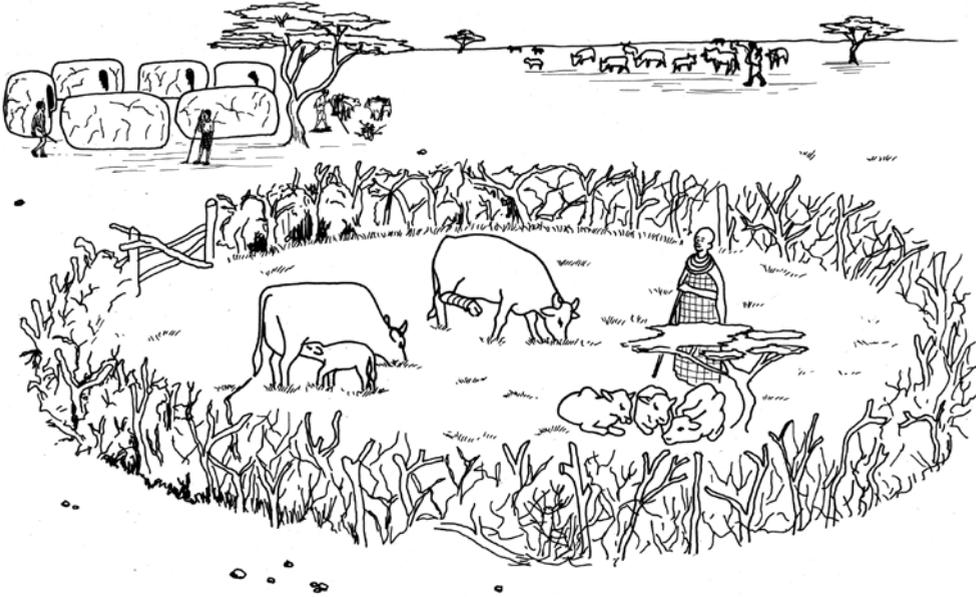
Constraints to *ololili* management

Both the men and women said that wood for fencing the *ololili* was expensive and hard to find. Building and maintaining the fence were mainly the responsibilities of men. In addition, the women said they felt unable to confront the owners of animals that invaded their *ololilis*. They also pointed to their many domestic tasks that prevented them from guarding the *ololili*.

Widows faced additional hurdles if none of the boys in the house had come of age. Some tasks meant dealing with unrelated men – which is frowned on in Maasai society. And women are also perceived as often lacking the strength to

Table 14.1 Responsibilities in managing an ololili

| Men | Women |
|--|---|
| Choose the area to establish the ololili | Look after the animals left in the household in the dry season |
| Procure and buy the wood for the fence | Collect water and feed for injured animals that cannot walk to the ololili |
| Build and repair the fence | Take animals to the ololili |
| Set rules for using the ololili and what each family member does in managing both livestock and ololili (though these rules are fairly standard and seem to vary little) | Manage animals grazing outside and inside the ololili |
| Protect the ololili from invasion by others' livestock | Find animals that get lost while grazing |
| Decide which and how many animals to leave at home in the dry season | Warn the men when the fence needs repairing, or when others' livestock have invaded the ololili |
| Take the herd to the bush during the dry season | Procure supplementary feed |
| Treat sick animals | Treat sick animals when the men are away |
| | Fix the fence when men are away |
| | Clean the livestock area |
| | Milk the cows |
| | Sell milk (in 2 villages only) |



do heavy work. So it was difficult for widows to establish an *ololili*, build and repair the fence, or protect the enclosure.

In villages where *ololilis* no longer existed, we explored possible reasons for this. Both women and men there said it was difficult to protect their own *ololilis* from the animals of neighbours who had no *ololili* of their own. Hungry animals would break through the fence, and the neighbours were understandably reluctant to do anything about it. Families without an *ololili* had to buy forage for the cattle and milk for themselves. Re-establishing an *ololili* was expensive: it meant rebuilding the fence, and the grass inside had already been eaten. Plus, more powerful members of the community set up large *ololilis*, leaving poorer people with no suitable land for their own.

The poorest women in such villages mentioned some additional problems in maintaining livestock: collecting forage to feed to their animals, procuring feed supplements, looking after animals that had become sick and weak because a lack of feed, and looking after family members who were also going hungry.

Benefits of the *ololili*

Who gains most from the *ololili* system, and who would be affected most if it collapses? Both men and women said that *ololilis* were good for the family as a whole: by helping produce milk, preventing cows from dying of hunger, reducing disease incidence, fattening cattle for sale, and avoiding the costs of buying extra feed. They both said children gained the most: they drank the

milk, and the family could spend the money they had saved on school fees. They agreed that the men benefited because they could sell more animals, or get a higher price for animals that were in good condition. They could pay for household expenses (which they regarded as their responsibility) – and also use the leftover money on beer and dining out. A few men said that they left the extra money to their wives, but that the women needed their permission to spend it.

When it came to the benefits for women, we found a difference among the villages. In two of the five villages, women were in charge of selling milk, while the men sold animals. The men covered the basic household needs – such a food, health care, school fees and clothes. They spent any extra on themselves. The women spent the money they earned on kitchen necessities such as cooking fat, salt and cooking pots. They could invest any extra in women’s savings groups.

In the other three villages, the men, not the women, sold the milk. The women rarely drank the milk (that was reserved for the children), and did not earn anything. Despite this, they still benefited in other ways: they did not have to spend as much time tending animals or collecting grass. Both the family and the livestock were better fed and healthier – so the women spent less time caring for them. And fewer animals wandered off and got lost: their husbands did not hold them responsible and beat them in punishment.

Knowledge of forage plants

We wanted to learn what women and men know about the forage plants that grow in the area. This was to ascertain who would be best placed to choose what crops and varieties to use to improve the forage mix in the *ololili*. Both women and men knew a lot about 10–15 types of grasses, bushes and trees. They knew where each species grew, which tolerated heat best, which the animals liked to eat and were best for fattening, which could be used for medicine, and which grew well with other species.

But the women disagreed with the men when it came to ranking the forage types: the women thought highly of certain species, while the men selected other ones. Both were interested in planting forage and dual-purpose crops that the researchers suggested – even though they were pastoralists who do not usually plant crops. They recognized that they would have to begin planting crops because of frequent droughts, unpredictable weather, a lack of land and food insecurity.

The rewards of work

Ololilis are clearly important for both men and women, and for children too. They improve the families’ income and food security in the hungry part of the year when milk is the only source of food. They are vital for women as the family food providers at this time. If we look at workload and benefits, everyone does

some work and benefits in some way. Both boys and girls help their parents – and in return get milk and can go to school. Men invest money and work during the rainy season, and reap most of the financial rewards. During the dry season, the women manage the *ololili* and benefit mainly indirectly: the *ololili* reduces their workload. In a couple of villages, they are able to sell milk and earn some money.

However, three aspects of the *ololili* system merit further exploration in terms of equity. The first is decision-making on which animals are left with women and children when men leave with the herd. Women do not have a voice in such decisions despite having to manage with whichever animals are left behind. Women are responsible for a critical task but cannot make the choices that affect its success. Their well-being and that of their children during the dry months depends on decisions outside their control.

Second, women who are responsible for animals when their husbands are away with the herd are also at risk of gender-based violence. Both men and women explained that if animals under the women's management are lost, then it is perceived as acceptable for husbands to beat their wives.

“If the woman failed to safeguard ololili and animals invaded it, then the man can beat her.”

– Old woman, Twatwatwa village.

This topic might be considered as beyond the scope of agricultural research, but actually directly affects farming and agriculture. There are far-reaching consequences of gender-based violence on physical and psychological well-being. It affects a woman's ability both to perform her agricultural tasks fully and to make choices that affect her own life.

Third is the fact that women do not confront their neighbour when the neighbour's animals invade their *ololili*. This may be related to gender norms that do not condone women confronting men. Or, it may be related to other kinds of community power dynamics: higher-status families cannot be reprimanded for ignoring community arrangements.

The collapse of the system

The collapse of an *ololili* system can be a disaster. With nowhere to feed their animals in the dry season, a family has to buy milk for themselves and feed for their animals. They lose income from milk; the animals go hungry and produce less, so are worth less in the market. Many animals fall ill (meaning more work for the women); some die. The family may be forced to take their whole herd – even the sick and weak animals – off in search of pasture. The women and children must follow so they can continue to have the milk that is critical to their survival. The family has to leave its house and take up a more mobile lifestyle. The weakest animals die, and the children are pulled out of

school. Increased mobility may also have gender implications, but these were outside of the scope of this study.

The poorest herders own only a few animals, so a mobile lifestyle is not viable for them: they could not risk losing their weakest animals on the trek. Such families would stay on in the village and face a spiral of poverty: rising expenses for food and feed, along with spiralling debt and declining productivity. They could not earn enough to rebuild their *ololili*. Being the weakest members of the community, they are unable to prevent their neighbours' cattle from invading their *ololili* land and eating up the remaining grass, or to stop encroachment by more powerful community members. This process of marginalization and weak land governance are important reasons for the decline of *ololilis*. We would expect that widows are especially badly affected, although this has yet to be studied.

Directions for research

What can researchers do? *Ololilis* are important conservation systems with a cultural relevance, so we need to find ways to support them, and likewise, to take gender into account in the solutions proposed. Forage improvement seems to be a good place to start. Widows need special attention given their vulnerability and the constraints that they face in managing the *ololilis*. We need to find ways for widows to break through restrictive gender norms that prevent them from things like getting wood for fencing or defending their *ololilis* from invasive neighbours.

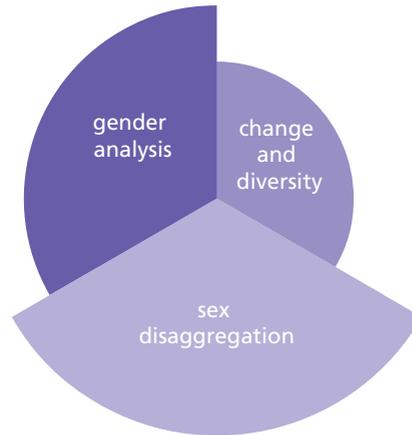
We are trying to identify forage crops and varieties that are suited to the *ololili* system and might reduce forage shortages. We will ask women and men to select the crops and varieties they prefer, and hold on-farm demonstrations on how to combine certain types of forage. We plan to launch a “forage champions” initiative – where we identify the best woman and man forage producers. This will showcase the best forage practices and also give visibility to women as farmers and managers. If women are invisible to research, the quality and effectiveness of the research suffer. If women are more visible to household and community members for their good forage and *ololili* management, their status might improve; so might their ability to share decisions about what animals the men leave to women to feed the family, and to confront neighbours who invade their *ololili*. We will plan further initiatives as evidence emerges about the effectiveness of these strategies to enhance forage production and gender equity.

Situating the research

The project addresses both overall gender-integrated research questions, although the ololilis are not an actually a technological or institutional solution of the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock and Fish, but rather an existing practice in the region.

The project looks at how gender division of labour and decision-making are organized in the management of the ololilis. It also looks at constraints in ololili management and whether there are specific constraints for women and men; it gives special attention for the constraints faced by widows and poorer women and households. The project contributes to the second research question by looking into how the ololilis benefit women and men differently, what the rewards they garner from their work, and how these are distributed among household members. In considering the impact of the collapse of the ololilis in certain communities, the chapter also looks at how this impacts differently on women and men.

- Data are collected **from and about** both women and men on the constraints in ololili management.
- Gender analysis explored the **gender division of labour; decision-making** on ololili management and livestock keeping; **access to and control over resources** in terms of who enjoyed benefits and rewards of work; and **gender-based violence**.
- This study paid attention to diversity by looking at widows and poorer households. However, it did not focus on changes in gender relations or desired changes in gender relations.



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