11 Lifting the barriers of gender integration in livestock production

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In conversation with Nicoline de Haan*

International research institutes in agriculture such as the centers within the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) have historically aimed to produce good science to increase food productivity globally and have re-framed their contemporary goals along the lines of increasing food security and sustainability. The International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) is a centre within the CGIAR system that was originally set up with the goal of increasing livestock productivity through scientific research as a strategy for reducing poverty. Today, it promotes sustainable and scalable science-based practices to achieve better lives through livestock development by working with both smallholder farmers and commercial livestock producers. It aims to provide persuasive scientific evidence for decision-makers that will enable bigger livestock investments envisaged to deliver better socio-economic, health and environmental dividends. ILRI also recognises women's key productive role in agriculture and in particular, the livestock sector, where they are seen to be often responsible for raising animals and processing and selling their food products (ILRI, 2013).

Nicoline de Haan currently serves as interim director of the GENDER (Generating Evidence and New Directions for Equitable Results) Platform launched in January 2020, operating across 15 centres and aiming to build on the wealth of gender research in the CGIAR system. This position, and its associated program of work, comes about after a long but somewhat uneven development of gender research within the CGIAR (van den Burg, 2019). The CGIAR GENDER Platform was launched in part to raise 'gender knowledge' from being lowest in the ladder of sciences within the CGIAR (van den Burg, 2019: 49) and to offer a vision of 'a world in which gender equality drives transformation towards equitable, sustainable, productive and climate-resilient food systems' (CGIAR Gender Platform, 2019: 6). Recent work has charted the evolution of gender research within the CGIAR, culminating with this new focus (van der Burg, 2019). In this chapter, we develop and nuance this story further with the experiences Nicoline has had in developing gender work within the CGIAR, specifically through her work with ILRI. Given the discursive and historical context of ILRI and the

CGIAR as a whole along the lines of food productivity and sustainability, we wonder how gender experts like Nicoline navigate past and present knowledge hierarchies and the increasingly favourable discursive spaces presently devoted to gender policy. Through our conversations with Nicoline, we reflect on how gender equality and inclusion can be advanced in the work of technical organisations like ILRI, an organisation committed to generate good science on livestock development to accelerate food security through livestock investments. Where do the tensions lie, and what kinds of knowledge coalitions are forged to enable gender equality in the research and policy agenda? We begin with a brief overview of the context of gender research within the CGIAR and ILRI specifically, before turning to the themes that emerged in our discussion, specifically, tackling misunderstandings of gender equality, positions to gender equality, issues in navigating the technical and social interface in multidisciplinary research, the agility of gender expertise, and the implications of building the business case for gender equality in the context of ILRI's work. Our conversation with Nicoline reflects on working within an international food research organisation, a possible site where women's economic inclusion in agriculture and livestock production is seen as an important step on the road to addressing gender equality more broadly.

Positioning gender in the CGIAR and ILRI

The place of gender within the CGIAR has evolved through different discursive pathways. A gender scoping study in 2010 stated that the CGIAR Centres historically have not had a clear gender policy although since the 1980s, there were exceptional examples of gender mainstreaming efforts which, however, were generally not sustained (Kauck et al., 2010). Margreet van der Burg (2019) chronicles the discursive shifts in gender policy and practice over the years up until 2011. International agriculture research began to turn attention to people on fields and farms together with the momentum of the UN Year and Decade for Women (1975–1985). This led to research exploring the differentiation of adoption impacts of new agricultural crops and technologies between farmers groups including women and men, leading to the use of gender to disaggregate research findings. The next wave of gender practices employed a user perspective that targeted women as farmers and natural resource users. CGIAR centres that were more concerned with natural resource management research (forests, land and water) drew from Elinor Ostrom's body of influential work on plural rights, multiple formal and informal institutional arrangements, collective action and polycentric governance among communities in natural resource use settings (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2012; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014). This led to a new gaze on gendered resource control rights and institutional arrangements that likewise influenced livestock and agricultural research. For example, ILRI and USAID-supported studies have shown that there is need for women to secure and build their livestock assets which they often acquire informally through non-market channels, such as through acts of gift-giving or bequests, but which can also be easily threatened or lost (Kristjanson et al., 2014; Rubin et al., 2010).

Understanding how these informal access and entitlement arrangements shape livestock management is crucial in order to avoid adverse impacts on women who care for and own livestock (Westholm & Ostwald, 2019: 7). Kristjanson et al. (2014) also point out that there is need to increase and sustain women's livestock productivity by improving animal breeds, feeds and health, which are all core to ILRI's scientific work and goals. In addition to the focus on local institutional dynamics and how this provided an entry point for gender research within the CGIAR, the wider application of the farming systems approach began to unpack the farm household, shedding its unitary nature to highlight its differentiated character (van den Burg, 2019).

ILRI (2013) recognises women's key role in food production is central, with recent results estimating that improving women's access to inputs and services has the potential to reduce the number of malnourished people in the world by 100–150 million. This chimes in with the World Bank's view that livestock is primarily an asset for optimising economic well-being and as a social protection measure and economic buffer during stress and shocks (World Bank et al., 2009). Further, 'applying a gender lens to identify and address women and men's different needs and constraints related to livestock production systems and value chains is important for determining the most optimal outcomes as well as the most effective use of resources' (World Bank et al., 2009: 601).

At the time of this conversation, Nicoline guides a team of six researchers at ILRI who explore the linkages between gender and livestock research. She and her team identify entry points to initiate gender-sensitive research that leads to policy action. She works with all technical teams and formulates gender-related research questions, which she sees as the gender mainstreaming part of her work. Nicoline also contributes to the wider gender-related initiatives across the CGIAR centres under the current umbrella of the CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) for livestock together with other centres such as ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas) and CIAT (International Center for Tropical Agriculture). The team also conducts standalone gender research, which Nicoline describes as 'strategic research', which she points out to be 'research that we want to do ourselves, how we can position gender more centrally in the livestock research field. Among the themes we pursue is how can livestock empower people. And for this we have funding support.'

Misunderstanding gender and feminism through binary oppositions

Becky: Was there general acceptance of gender in livestock development research at ILRI?

Nicoline: More than five years ago, gender mainstreaming meant that everyone had to integrate gender – the obligations, work and access rights of women and men – in all their work: livestock and animal health, genetics, feed and forage development, institutions and livelihoods, for example. Technical specialists reacted and were questioning why they had to be 'gender mainstreamed'.

They felt threatened by the strong push to bring in gender into their work. They had no clue about how to go about this task, and they did not actually admit that they didn't know. Gender was a top-down thing – although needed then – but it frightened a lot of people. Generally, there is a hesitancy among our technical specialists to deal with social issues, which explains the fear of doing gender work especially in the context of the CGIAR where traditionally, the chief concern and goal was to increase (crop) productivity through scientific means. Gender represents something personal and therefore is strange for many people here.

Babette: Maybe they thought that gender was about being 'anti-men', and of course, this repels people because it's a divisive idea. I hope that this idea has somehow receded?

Nicoline: Years ago, in northern Nigeria we were working on crop and livestock issues focusing on efforts to get manure to be brought to the fields. A team of scientists were meeting and discussing plot sizes to assess how to remove the parasitic weed on plots. I asked if they had asked who owned the plots as this would be important for any follow-up action. Those plots were owned by women and they were not able to get the manure to kill the weeds. It was a powerful moment since I was not a threat anymore to the scientists nor was I the feminist or gender person, but someone who was trying to help scientists do their job better and women with their weeding problems. We were all collectively trying to figure out how to do a good job and make lives better. This avoided the tricky question of empowering women against the men – which makes people uncomfortable.

Popular imagination has persistently retained the oppositional character of feminism and more notably its focus on binary gender relations, splitting roles, interests and actions between women and men, and focusing on recalibrating, evening up between men and women. As Cornwall and Rivas put it (2015: 203)

the use of the word 'gender' frames two oppositional categories. Like all dichotomies, these are mutually exclusive. Anything that fails to fit the frame is shunted out of it. 'Men' are equated with 'power': 'woman' with powerlessness. 'Men' are the victimisers: 'women' are their victims. Efforts, then, are made to recalibrate these dualisms with talk of 'male responsibility', echoing the dualism in which women are responsible, and men are not; or of 'women's empowerment' in which 'men' are the ones with power and 'women' without. These discourses are premised largely on making good that which is not. They do not offer us the radical reconfiguration of the frame through which social and gender relations are experienced.

Thus, gender mainstreaming and advocacy is also usually tethered to a subordination model, which in framing empowerment as a zero sum game between men and women, could alienate as people may find its missionary and at times adversarial nature deeply uncomfortable (Zalewski, 2010). After having worked as gender

advisor in two very distinct development organisations, Ines Smyth reflects on the ‘moralism’ that sometimes accompanies feminism and gender advocacy in a righteous way, which is defined as ‘the pursuit of singular essentialist righteous truth claims about women’s lives’ (Barriteau, 2003: 132 in Smyth, 2013). As Nicoline’s experience shows us, this may frighten others. One way of addressing the limitations of an oppositional binary framing of gender is to draw on feminist post-colonial research literature, which suggests the need to contextualise women as they respond to complex realities and instead depart from the use of reified images of women (often subordinate and victim), without considering how they enter into and engage in social relationships with men within the institutions in their societies (Mohanty, 1988: 77, 78; and Rao, 1991: 11). Experiences in the field, as Nicoline relates, where social complexity is laid bare to demonstrate to technical specialists how technologies such as weeding and manure collection are entangled in gendered resource and property rights, which therefore cannot be sidestepped if technologies are to be adopted. However, another tack is also taken, which rather than challenging the binary frame (as Cornwall and Rivas, 2015 suggest), builds a business case for empowering women in terms of efficiency and raised productivity, which is taken up in a later section. Thus, gender experts fall back on positive messages that associate gender equality with increasing food productivity to gain traction.

The social and technical interface

Babette: I understand that gender research is now more acceptable throughout the CGIAR system. It must be because of years of producing credible gender research in agriculture. Maybe also a lot of intellectual coalescing with technical specialists?

Nicoline: You see, we need to understand where technical specialists are coming from. Generally, they refer to human beings as a research variable. They believe that if you get the technology right, people will adopt the technology. Social scientists will want to know what people want and need and getting them the technologies that would respond to that. I grew up with a father who was a technical specialist, and this made me curious about why they did not ask about people.

Babette: Whereas in the social sciences, we examine how technologies are fundamentally socially created. It must have been strange for technical specialists to think about how gender fits in their work.

Nicoline: Gender mainstreaming seemed a fuzzy idea in earlier years at ILRI. But now we are asking ourselves where and how we can invest on gender and where it can strategically make sense. And this is a change I welcome. What I currently enjoy in my work now is talking with a lot of technical people to try to figure out where and how gender fits in their work. We try to figure out what the gender questions are in each of their themes, such as for instance in animal health. This leads to asking whether we can include women in health care delivery. Or, where and how they can access health

care for their livestock. Although I still see that in the past that my work was mainly addressing the main operations in the organisation and leveraging that, we now see an equal balance between gender mainstreaming and standalone strategic and transformative gender research. We had to go through a process with all the technical scientists to see whether gender actually makes sense in their technical areas. By going through this process, they do not need to decide whether gender was important or not in their work, as we help them identify in which areas of their work gender can be relevant. These consultations also enabled me to get to know their work more.

Becky: Could you share with us some examples of how this integration and engagement happens?

Nicoline: Yes, for instance with reference to vaccines: does it really make sense for a vaccinologist to be involved in gender issues? No. But when we talk about the delivery of health care, then it becomes interesting, so we talk to the people who are in charge of that part of livestock health and care. In the past, the focus of efforts was to ensure that women were beneficiaries of our interventions, but we were not looking at what would actually make specific sense for poor women to become beneficiaries. Livestock health and care may make better sense to women who are pastoralists or who take responsibility for them.

There is now constant engagement with technical scientists, and sometimes we want to be a step ahead of them and assess how we can later address gender issues jointly, which I think is the fun part since it's intellectually challenging. We've also reached a point in the work situation where I can tell them: 'that's your work, and this is where I come in'. As a result, there's now more of a conversation about each one's expertise. Which I think is good, because in the past there was a tendency by others who were non-gender specialists to take up the task and say, 'I'll do the gender part.' And we end up with 'bad' gender work. This approach also puts people at ease knowing that we're there to support them, and that they really don't have to do everything. I usually assure them that 'we're not trying to make you gender experts, but we need your help, and then we'll take it from there.' It's not like we're trying to get it into their work, it's just that we're trying to figure out how their research efforts can also help women. I don't see it as us bending it's just that we are trying to develop some options for society. It's actually using technologies to improve everybody's lives.

Reflexive dialogues both with technical colleagues and people on the ground open up opportunities for the inclusion of other voices and bring different knowledges and disciplines into conversation. Reflexivity in a dialogue between gender and technical researchers can also bring to the fore their respective intellectual standpoints and values, which may shape possible collaborative ways forward (Davids et al., 2014). The account above reflects the intellectual boundaries that gender experts often navigate.

These epistemological and normative encounters and interfaces also bring to light what feminist science scholars Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen Longino (1996:

2) have said long ago about the propensity of gender ‘to open up an entirely new window on the nature of scientific inquiry.’ Nicoline’s interactions with technical specialists like vaccinologists, for example, demonstrate how science and technology are often naturalised as self-evident (Björkman, 2005): in the case of producing vaccines, they are taken for granted as a scientific and an interest-free means to boost livestock development. Yet, far from being interest-free, producing vaccines for livestock is intrinsically moored in ILRI’s food productivity trajectory described at the beginning of the chapter. Despite this tacit mooring, vaccine production is usually considered a form of neutral, disembodied knowledge until the gender expert, the interlocutor, manufactures an encounter that starts to tie it in with ‘what makes sense to women’ or what could potentially empower them. ‘What makes sense to women’ or women’s embodied knowledge is usually grounded in their livelihood and personal histories, their gendering process (or how they have become constituted as women-tending-to-livestock), their relational arrangements, and entitlements around raising and caring for livestock together with the animals themselves with their own histories as living beings (Bacchi, 2017; Whatmore, 2002). Vaccines, formerly assumed to be disentangled from social arrangements, visibly acquire a social placement in this interface. The role of the gender expert in these encounters between science and society is that of interlocutor, demonstrating that science, nature and society are intimately intertwined and co-constituted. Feminist science studies have also argued that research has reality-producing effects (Trojer, 2017), since science does not stand apart from the world but actively intervenes in it, re-ordering relationships between humans and non-human others and in this case, re-positioning gender along the elements in the food chain (Greenhough, 2009). Technologies and knowledge also transform when they are adopted, learned and passed on (Björkman, 2005).

Babette: I wonder whether gender specialists like you need to know and be familiar with technical domains and systems.

Nicoline: It is important to be able to carry a conversation, and so for this one needs to understand the technical aspects of livestock breeding as a gender specialist. I was trained as a rural sociologist at Wageningen University, an agricultural university in the Netherlands, so I am somewhat knowledgeable about some of these technical areas. Because of this, I am able to have conversations that I might otherwise have been constrained to have. When we hire people for gender-related positions, I always investigate whether they have a background or understanding about agriculture, otherwise those without will only speak about gender in a vacuum, they may be too theoretical and in the end, this may not be useful for the work that we’re doing here. In fact, I moved from the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) because my technical knowledge of livestock is so much better than water systems. I also felt that in the water discussions at IWMI, there was little mention of people.

On one hand, reflexive dialogues provide specialists from diverse backgrounds opportunities for creating epistemological interfaces. On the other, gender experts

at ILRI would have fluency in the technical dimensions of livestock management. By knowing these aspects, they then proceed to identify ‘entry points’ for gender integration and this creates complementary roles for the gender expert and technical specialist, especially if they share the same development goals. This draws attention to the ‘agility’ of gender both as a concept and as a specific expertise in its capacity to embed itself in diverse, even technical, contexts.

The agility of the gender expert

Becky: Do you think gender work is something anyone can take up?

Babette: That’s right, you said earlier that the work of non-gender specialists proved to be counterproductive. I recall that in many places this is done in the extreme: as long as you’re a woman, it is assumed that you can do gender-related work.

Nicoline: I would be cautious in hiring someone for a gender position. In the past when the practice was to require all staff to include ‘gender’ in their work, some people with more technical backgrounds became ‘gender literate’ but in a way that was unhelpful and generally resulted in unsatisfactory gender research. For hiring gender specialists, I would ask whether the applicant really understood gender, had the theoretical background for it, and understood the issue of power. Those with technical backgrounds, unless they’ve been trained in gender studies, usually fall apart, and they end up not doing the job very well, which does not help in the long run. For example, when I was relatively new in the job years ago, we were starting to conduct participatory research. I was pleased that my technical colleagues were willing to get involved. So, we trained them and allowed them to do participatory research. Later, I observed that for them, applying the participatory approach meant simply asking farmers questions, which was not fully what participatory research was all about. The results were far from useful, as being participatory requires that farmers and specialists look at problems and solutions together. I am similarly concerned that the same will happen with gender research if we’re not careful about who does it. I’m happy to encourage technical specialists, but also think that caution should be exercised if we are to move the gender equality agenda forward. One needs to understand the theoretical foundations of gender.

Research on gender experts has shown that gender expertise by itself is elusive, and is not bound by any one academic discipline, and may be defined by various feminisms (Hoard, 2015; Kunz et al., 2019). However, from her research, Hoard (2015) suggests that the core element in gender expertise is feminist knowledge. Interestingly, Çağlar (2010) further underscores the practice of combining specialist feminist knowledge with other types of expertise in order to engender policy. It is the same with Nicoline who requires fluency in technical agricultural knowledge and feminist knowledge of potential recruits. This draws attention to the agility of ‘gender’ as a concept and its capacity to embed itself in diverse contexts, negating the idea of a ‘universal knowledge’ of gender. Gender is ‘messy’,

both multi-dimensional and intersectional through different axes of power and identity, but also firmly context-driven and socially embedded. In effect, gender expertise is transversal knowledge that crosses disciplinary boundaries and is also contingent on institutional requirements, culture and political circumstances. Harding (2011) further suggests that like race and class, gender is both an analytical and descriptive term, in which as an analytical term, it can frame and explain its diverse manifestations in social relations in different contexts.

Babette: But there are all sorts of responsibilities tied to being a gender expert in an organisation. And we're often tapped for additional services. Nicoline, you did say that there were moments that weren't very comfortable when you were being referred to as a gender professional.

Nicoline: I am uncomfortable when people are talking about being a 'gender person' in a Human Resources (HR) sense, I'll be honest. Which is interesting because there are links between gender in the research and gender in the workplace. That's when I'm uncomfortable. People think because you're the 'gender' expert in research that you're also an HR person and can deal with sexual harassment in the workplace for instance. Having said that, in a lot of cases you do have more theoretical grounding on such issues than a lot of other people. But, still, it's very uncomfortable. It's also very uncomfortable when people use it as a way of pushing responsibility away from themselves. And, I've experienced this where I sense that people are fearful about taking responsibility for looking at gender issues because they're worried about getting it wrong in my presence. I think it would be more useful if we just were at some level considered as social scientists. We will be able to do more because then gender expertise just becomes one of the many identifiers and then people wouldn't be as hesitant to engage.

Gender experts are different from other professions in the sense that there are more explicit ethical and political dimensions attached to their work, largely addressing the general and unsettling goal of transforming unequal power relations and gender inequality in society, including the workplace. This becomes a point of tension especially when organisations declare 'in-house' gender expertise. Prügl (2015) remarks that gender equality is rapidly becoming a valuable goal for organisations and firms because it facilitates achieving all kinds of social goods, including better company management, which creates a good reputation. Strikingly, part of achieving social goods is the growing interest in women's inclusion in economic growth agendas that involve the private sector.

Empowerment by economic means

Babette: How does the current focus on the private sector and including women in value chains relate with the goals of empowerment and gender equality? Your experiences and involvement in these dynamics can probably shed light on this relationship.

Nicoline: For land you need a title deed and usually for a lot of businesses you need actually some title and you need some collateral. Well with livestock, it's there and no deed is needed. You have it, you already have it often so that's a simple one. You can take it with you if you get divorced, or if you're in a conflict area. It self-perpetuates and I call it an ATM. It gives you some money constantly, either through milk or through eggs. And yes, it doesn't mean that you're a big farmer with 7,000 chickens straight away but it gives you some independence, so it gives you some empowerment. It gives you some decision-making power. It gives you that power to make the decision about whether you actually invest in a child's education or not. All those things which give people dignity and it gives them a sense of self-worth. So, I do think that raising livestock makes business sense. We also talk now a lot about what we call the livestock ladder. This is how we can help women who have a few chickens build up to having more. So, if you had a few chickens how can you build up to a few goats? From a few goats, how can you build up to cattle if you would want. Or how can you use that to buy a sewing machine, a milling machine, whatever you want, a chopper for your forages? There are some very interesting things you can do with livestock. With regards to the private sector, I do think we're being pushed more and more into that. But I think let's figure out how we can co-opt it and how we can actually address what women want. I think we often talk about how important it is for women to have their choice. But not all women want to work more. One of the big areas of research we're actually doing right now is also looking at what point does it become a business. But those are also very interesting things especially when you start talking about business and entrepreneurship.

Becky: Actually, some of what you said is somewhat linked to a conversation we had with one of the other contributors in the book about working within the productivity paradigm. How do you demonstrate that there are wins all around if you deal with gender because it will actually enable people to meet many other end goals?

Nicoline: One of the things I do want to say to that is, it was a paradigm I knew when I got into it. I mean, I don't think we're victims of this. No, I knew that, but I wanted to work within the system, and I think we can do a lot and leverage a lot on economic empowerment for women within agriculture. We have to have this bigger end goal of gender equality, yes, but that takes little baby steps.

The discourse of women's economic empowerment has increased currency among a number of influential international development organisations. Women's economic empowerment is considered a requirement for sustainable development and pro-poor growth (GENDERNET, 2011), and is often manifested by women's involvement in market activities and their improved educational attainment. Underlying this principle is a belief that there is a win-win relationship between gender equality and economic growth. The research of Kabeer and Natali (2013)

tells us that only certain dimensions of gender equality can positively promote economic growth such as gender parity in education. Whereas the converse, the prospect of economic growth leading to gender equality, is probably unlikely. This is in large part due to the complex and multiple drivers of gender inequality which cannot be mitigated by economic benefits alone. Perhaps enabling economic gains are the little baby steps that need to be taken, but as Kabeer and Natali's research demonstrates, economic gains by themselves do not fully define equality and empowerment.

Conclusion

We saw that there was fear among technical specialists with the prospect of integrating gender issues with their work. We surmise that this is because gender advocacy has been traditionally associated with a sense of moralism that seeks to reduce women's subordination that sometimes elicits contentious reactions. However, over time, and by instigating constructive and exploratory dialogues that provide occasions for reflexivity among small groups of gender, social and technical researchers, a few epistemological interfaces began to create constructive socio-technical *modus operandi*. Gender experts integrate gender issues with science and technology research as they serve as interlocutors linking science and society, dispelling myths that science stands apart as disembodied knowledge. This process of interlocution has also inadvertently reduced the fear of gender integration among technical specialists.

As a 'traveling rationality' (Mosse, 2011), the discourse of women's economic empowerment also travels and circulates widely across different types of organisations, embedding itself as well in research organisations with mandates to address food insecurity and productivity through science. It will be worthwhile to further investigate the ways in which 'women's empowerment' is being integrated into neoliberal economic growth logics and imperatives that have become core to the mandates of contemporary agricultural research institutes and their outcomes on farm communities. As Elisabeth Prügl (2015) suggests in her work on neoliberalism and feminism, it may be necessary to assess what is lost in the process and perhaps what is gained.

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