

Still a minority: Gender analysis of training and professional integration of women in the veterinary sector in Senegal and Togo

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Although the number of women working in veterinary services in Africa has been increasing for several years, it has to be said that they are still in the minority among trained and active staff, with significant differences between men and women in terms of posts held and careers. These differences raise questions not only in terms of human rights and equality, but also in terms of their impact on the quality of animal and human health. In order to gain a better understanding of the constraints that women and men may face as *veterinary paraprofessionals*¹ (VPPs), WOAHA has undertaken this analysis, which covers not only access to initial and continuing training for VPPs, but also the challenges they face in practising their profession. **The results and recommendations offer a clear vision of the actions that can be taken to improve gender equality in the sector, and clearly identify the different players to guide them.**

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STUDY OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The general aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of the specific characteristics relating to women in the field of animal health so as to be able to promote an environment that is conducive to greater equality and equity between women and men within veterinary services, and to improving animal health.



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There were **two specific objectives**: 1) to draw up an inventory of gender-specific constraints, needs, opportunities and expectations in terms of access to information and training, and access to the veterinary professions (including veterinarians and VPPs in the public and private sectors); 2) to propose, on the basis of the findings and conclusions, recommendations for adapting

¹ WOAHA recognises that gendered language reinforces sexism and patriarchy. In order not to reinforce this, we try to use inclusive or gender-neutral writing as much as possible. Where this is not possible, we prefer to use the feminine gender.

² The P3V project covers the period 2020-2025. It aims to improve the quality of initial and in-service training for PPVs and to strengthen the institutional framework for their integration into national animal health networks.

conditions (rather than avoiding them³), as well as one or more strategic areas for integrating the gender issue across the board into the national strategies for strengthening the network of animal health professionals in Senegal and Togo.

THREE-PHASE APPROACH

1) **Documentary review** in both countries (gender strategies, demographic and veterinary network studies, gender-related studies in both countries, etc.).

2) **Bilateral interviews and focus groups (FG)**:

- In *Senegal*, bilateral remote interviews and a virtual presentation at the annual national coordination meeting of the P3V project, were conducted, with resource persons from the: Gender Unit of the Ministry of Livestock and Animal Production (MEPA), the *Association des Femmes Vétérinaires du Sénégal* (AFVS, Association of women-veterinarians), the *Conseil National des Vétérinaires Privés du Sénégal* (CNVPS, National council of private veterinarians), VPP women from the public and private sectors (FG), teachers and students from the *Centre National de Formation des Techniciens de l'Élevage et des Industries Animales* (CNFTEIA, National centre for the training of livestock and animal industry technicians) and the *Institut Supérieur de Formation Agricole et Rurale* (ISFAR, Higher agricultural and rural training institute) (FG separate women and men).
- In *Togo*, face-to-face interviews and *focus groups* (FG) during the annual national coordination meeting of the P3V project and during a field mission, with resource persons from the: *Direction de l'Élevage* (DE, Directorate of Livestock Services) and gender unit of the *Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Élevage et du Développement Rural* (MAEDR, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Rural Development), *Ordre National des Médecins Vétérinaires du Togo* (ONMVT, Veterinary statutory body), veterinarians and VPPs from the public and private sectors, technical and financial partners, teachers and students from the *Institut National de Formation Agricole* (INFA, National agricultural training institute) in Tové and the *Institut Supérieur des Métiers de l'Agriculture* (ISMA, Higher institute for agricultural trades) in Kara (separate women and men FGs), as well as farmers and training supervisors.

³ An avoidance strategy, based on anticipation, consists of moving away from a situation that seems problematic before it even arises, without considering the possibilities of adapting to this situation (e.g. for women, avoiding working with large livestock, because of a supposed lack of physical strength, rather than trying to acquire the appropriate equipment to manage this type of situation).

3) **Completion of three questionnaires by:** a) VPP students, b) VPP teachers, c) veterinary paraprofessionals:

- **Senegal** : i) 48 students responded, 16 of whom were women (33%) (38 students from the CNFTEIA (43% of the total number), 29% of whom were women (compared with the 20% representation of women in the total number) and 10 students from ISFAR in the 3rd year animal industry course (30% of the total number), half of whom were women, ii) four teachers, including only one woman from the CNFTEIA, iii) low proportion of professionals (15 out of 186 veterinarians and more than 300 VPP listed in the private/public sector), including 100% women-veterinarians (AFVS).
- **Togo** : i) 39 students responded, including 12 women (31%) (25 students in the 2nd/3rd year INFA (29% of the student body), including 28% women (compared to 22% women in the student body of these classes) and 14 students in the 3rd year ISMA in the animal sector (52% of the student body), including 36% female students (compared to 34% women in the student body of this class), ii) 16 lecturers, 25% of whom were women (including female lecturers from the INFA on cross-disciplinary subjects, with only one teaching specifically in animal-related subjects at the INFA), iii) low proportion of professionals (15 out of 191 listed) who responded to the questionnaires, including 2 women among the 7 veterinary surgeons who responded (the others being male VPPs).

MAIN FINDINGS ON GENDER ISSUES IN VETERINARY SERVICES

The study highlighted a number of issues relating to access to VPP and veterinary training, and more generally to scientific studies for women, right up to the interface with livestock farmers.

1) Limited information and apparent lack of interest on the issue in Africa to date.

A limited number of gender studies in the veterinary field are available in Senegal or Togo and other WOA member countries⁴.

⁴ Some studies do exist, however, on i) the identification of specific constraints for women in access to training and working conditions, carried out by the *European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease* (EuFMD/FAO, 2022), ii) the study "*Gender and intersectional analysis of livestock vaccine value chains in Kaffrine*", Senegal, USSEIN, 2021, which showed, among other things, that "women

"The current situation in Togo*"

- 191 people in the veterinary services in Togo
- 75 vets (5 women, i.e. 7%) and 116 PPVs (23 women, i.e. 20%), 70% of whom were in the public sector,
- 14% of women in the public sector, 3.6% in the private sector (Lomé)

In 2023, the ONMT had 119 members, 92 of whom were based in Togo: 55 private individuals, including six women (11%), one in a rural/suburban area (mixed clientele dominated by livestock) and five in an urban area.

Village livestock workers (*auxiliaires villageois d'élevage, AVE*): 5% women out of 1,847 AVEs in Togo.

Higher and technical education establishment (PPV)

- ISMA: 34% of PPV students are women (27 in total 3rd year)
- INFA: 27% women out of 127 PPV students (2022-2023).

* Sources: several sources were used, some of which proved to be contradictory.

"The current situation in Senegal*"

In 2023, there were 186 active veterinary doctors (19% of whom were women)

Public sector :

- 17% women in total, within the DVS and decentralised departments, and 19 women out of 56 veterinary surgeons, i.e. 34%.
- They occupy 17 out of 87 positions of responsibility, i.e. 19.5%.
- 58% of new recruits between 2014 and 2021 (under 40) were women,
- *Direction des Services Vétérinaires* (DSV, or Directorate of Veterinary Services): 10 women out of 19 (56%) spread as follows : 83% in Veterinary Public Health, 50% in Animal Disease Control, 25% in Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy.
- *Decentralised Technical Services* : 15% of technical staff are women (51 out of 346)

Private sector :

- 16 out of 138 private vets are women (12%), 81% of whom work in Dakar (the capital city).
- 11 women out of 49 Livestock Technicians (*Ingénieurs techniques d'élevage* or ITE) operate in private practice (22%): located in Thies (36%) and Dakar (27%),
- Five women out of 170 Livestock Assistants (*Agent-es Technique d'Elevage* or ATE) are privately employed (3%) in Thies (60%), Saint Louis (20%), Louga (20%).

P3V partner institutions for higher and technical education (PPV) :

- CNFTEIA: from 1964 to 2021, 20% women trained out of 1,090 ATE graduates (21% in 2022-2023)
- ISFAR: 15% women out of 400 graduates since 1960
- USSEIN: 35% women out of 43 Bachelor-3 students in 2021 (15)

* Sources: Several sources were used, some of which proved to be contradictory.

are not always involved in animal health decision-making", iii) the study on the institutionalisation and operationalisation of gender in agricultural education establishments, 2018, CRIGA/USAID-ERA, Senegal, iv) the study on the constraints faced by women livestock farmers in northern Togo (AVSF, 2013), v) the study on village livestock agents (*agents villageois d'élevage* or AVE) in Togo (AVSF, 2021).

2) Regulatory framework, policy and gender strategies.

In recent years, Senegal and Togo have both made progress on their gender regulatory and policy frameworks, bringing credibility and political legitimacy to discussions on the issue⁵.

3) Women are under-represented in the animal health landscape.

Despite increasing numbers, particularly in Senegal, women are still very much in the minority in the veterinary services sector and among students. The low representation of women in veterinary care is partly due to specific constraints, both social and cultural. These obstacles become apparent as soon as women start their initial training and these persist throughout their professional career, also having an impact on the recognition that is granted to women in this profession. These factors act as disincentives and contribute to the under-representation of women in the veterinary field.

4) Differential constraints on access to, and follow-up of education.

In terms of integration into partner educational establishments, the parents' occupation related to animal husbandry or veterinary care appears to be favourable for the orientation of girls and boys towards animal health



INFA students, Togo. Picture © AF Thierry

studies. On the other hand, a higher level of education in higher education for parents (mother or father) tends to have a greater influence on the choice of these subjects for girls.

Nonetheless, social reproduction, role models and frames of reference play a decisive role in girls' choice of literary subjects and less practical and remunerative occupations. This is all the more true given that information on livestock farming and animal health careers, which have a very masculine connotation (women are not given much visibility, stereotypes and prejudices are still very



ISFAR students, Senegal. Picture © WOA

much evident), is very inadequate, both among the general public and in secondary schools. This observation is in line with the lower representation of women in scientific subjects at secondary level in both countries, and when they *do* take up these subjects, they seem to find it easier to opt for more highly valued subjects ("more intellectual than technical").

In Togo, the livestock sector proved to be a default choice for the young women interviewed, although none of them regretted the decision in retrospect. The female students reported a greater interest than the men in animal care and the common good (caring for animals, the prospect of being useful to society, having a practical job) and a less marked focus on earning a lot of money and finding a job easily, as the triggers for their choice.



Male ISFAR students, Senegal.

Picture © A Ndour

Female students reported less support from their families than male students. The distance from the place of study was also seen as more of a constraint by female students than male students.

The notion of perception, particularly regarding the ability to get into institutions, also plays a key role in orientation. In Togo, 50% of female students compared with 11% of male students felt that their results were too low to be admitted, demonstrating that young female students are either more demanding or less confident in their results.

4.1. Non-discriminatory admission systems overall.

The gender-neutral competitive entrance and application systems in place in most of the partner institutions allow for anonymous corrections and avoid any discrimination, including based on gender. At the INFA in Tové, there is a mechanism for rebalancing or leveraging applications in favour of female students, who are in the minority at the institution.

4.2. Conditions of hosting need to be improved to take better account of the specific needs of women.

The hosting facilities are generally unsuitable (co-educational boarding schools, non-segregated or inadequate sanitary facilities, non-existent or unsuitable infirmary, lack of access to sanitary protection for women with menstrual problems and to contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancies).

Pregnancy policies in institutions are even more repressive than benevolent for pregnant students, with a high risk of them dropping out. The CNFTEIA, for its part, has

⁵ In *Senegal*: i) The National Strategy for Gender Equity (SNEEG) 2005-2015, was extended to 2016-2026 and applied in national policies; ii) Gender Unit set up within the Directorate of Veterinary Services (DVS); iii) MEPA Gender Analysis (March 2022) and the Livestock Sector Gender Strategy (July 2022).

In *Togo*: i) The 2011 National Policy on Gender Equity and Equality (PNEEG) is currently being updated; ii) Togo Gender Strategy (2019); iii) Gender Unit set up within the MAEDR; iv) Gender-sensitive budget document (*Budget sensible au genre* or BSG), applied to six pilot ministries including the MAEDR (2022).

introduced a distance support policy to prevent students from repeating a year. The four institutions interviewed do not yet have a formalised gender policy, but some have already put in place a number of milestones (e.g. INFA in Togo, gender focal point, proactive approach by management).

4.3. Under-representation of women in the teaching profession.

Female lecturers are clearly under-represented, if not absent, in both permanent and temporary posts. In the case of permanent posts, the reasons given are: i) the stereotype that women are not very motivated to teach, ii) the need to have 5 years' higher education, when fewer women achieve this level of study, mainly for cultural reasons, iii) the low profile of women in the sector, iv) possibly a lack of confidence in public speaking, v) little encouragement from peers to go down this



Lecturers at INFA, Togo.
Picture © AF Thierry

route. Similarly, female temporary workers are virtually absent, for the following reasons: i) less confidence in speaking in public, ii) the problem of availability in addition to the burden of the household (still largely borne by women), for a remuneration that is, moreover, relatively limited, iii) the tendency of establishments to turn first to male temp workers, who are more visible.

This finding is in line with the under-representation of women as experts or speakers in workshops on animal health issues and the virtual absence of women in management positions in partner institutions (only one woman-director at the CNFTEIA in Senegal).

4.4. Curriculum content to be developed. The gender issue has so far received little attention in curricula and teaching approaches (socio-economics modules exist at INFA and USSEIN, but no specific module on animal health ecosystems, no consideration of the specific constraints of working with male and female farmers). Zoonoses that pose a risk to pregnant women are covered, but not in sufficient depth, compared with the real risks taken by practitioners and farmers, particularly as regards preventive measures.



Male student at INFA, Togo.
Picture © AF Thierry

4.5. Attendance during theoretical and practical courses.

Generally speaking, female students seem to show better attendance and academic results than male students, this being facilitated by the presence of boarding facilities (at

the CNFTEIA, female students are more likely to be absent during their menstrual periods because of the distance from the establishment), with levels of oral participation judged to be equivalent by the teachers. Nonetheless, the lecturers found that the female students took less initiative, showed less leadership, were less proficient with digital tools and participated less in practical classes than the male students. The lack of computer equipment, insufficient practice in handling animals and the lack of equipment for practical work were nevertheless reported as common constraints.

4.6. Access and training conditions to the disadvantage of women.

Internship or locum sites are run almost exclusively by men, despite the presence of women farmers in the vicinity of the establishments. It was reported that some male placement supervisors in Togo informally refuse to accept female students, without clear justification (which is not the case for the female placement supervisors) or ask female students to do household chores over and above the technical tasks specific to the internship. It was reported that, in the context of a partnership for internships abroad, the host institution imposed discriminatory measures and explicitly excluded female students, again without any clear justification. There seems to be additional pressure on female students to be exemplary in their behaviour in order to ensure that female students in subsequent years are placed on placements, a pressure which is apparently less marked, or even non-existent, among students (Togo).

5) Career guidance and access to employment.

5.1. Distinct career positioning⁶. Career aspirations seem to differ between male and female students. In Togo, female students tend to want to continue their studies, while male students are more interested in a job in the private sector in rural areas or in an NGO. Female students are less attracted to positions of responsibility, even though they all want to settle down and be independent. In the end, whether in Senegal or Togo, women are more likely to work in the public sector and in urban areas in response to the constraints they face (security, less restrictive working conditions that are more compatible with family life).



VPP in Senegal. Picture © A Badiane

5.2. Strong sexist stereotypes in the profession and insufficient recognition of the specific constraints faced by women.

Stereotypes are still very marked in the interviews, coming from both women and men, particularly concerning a lack of physical strength and a fear of animals attributed to women: "women don't like physical work", "they are more fearful", "men are reluctant to hire women because they are afraid of animals", "women are less lazy

⁶ The P3V plans a specific study on this subject in 2024.

than men", "men are more committed". Nevertheless, there are major differences in perception from one generation to the next, and the current trend among young people is towards progress, with a lessening of these stereotypes (although there are disparities according to the geographical and cultural origin of the people questioned).

5.3. Additional constraints on setting up in private practice. Certain difficulties in setting up are common (lack or inadequacy of start-up bonuses for graduates, young graduates dependent on entrance examinations to the public sector, which are sometimes uncertain). On the other hand, certain difficulties are exacerbated for women: i) access to credit is more difficult for women-veterinarians in Senegal (lack of collateral, banks apparently more reluctant to lend to women "deemed less creditworthy" because of interruptions to their activity due to pregnancy and maternity), ii) lack of encouragement from peers to set up in private practice. Certain geographical and cultural areas also appear to exclude women (in Senegal, the southern and eastern regions, which are deemed too remote, and certain more traditional regions, and in Togo, the more traditional northern region).

5.4. Constraints on career development. Women find it more difficult to get promoted, apparently because one is less inclined in taking on a woman and women have less access to information about jobs. Women are also more affected than men by interruptions to their careers, particularly due to pregnancy and family responsibilities, which hampers their career development. Certain cultural constraints are imposed on them and exclude them from certain tasks and services (e.g. in Togo, women are not allowed to touch meat in slaughterhouses in certain cultural environments, in connection with menstruation).



Veterinarians and VPP, coordination meeting, Togo. Picture © LD Dahourou

At the same time, some women, both in Senegal and Togo, also reported intrinsic psychological constraints (but not shared by the majority of women interviewed). Added to this are other constraints linked to

security and travel, which means that women are more easily directed (and they direct themselves more easily) towards less physical tasks (selling medicines), which distance them from practice and the field, with a risk of losing technical skills in the long term. However, it is important to bear in mind that men also rarely travel alone, whether in Senegal or Togo.

5.5. Additional vulnerabilities in terms of health. Women are exposed to additional health risks, which are not sufficiently taken into account (zoonosis prevention measures for pregnant women are not systematically applied, lack of appropriate social protection, which leads women to continue their activities in the field for as long as possible and to travel with children to breastfeed).



Pictures © WOA

In addition to the constraints associated with their professional practice, women also face constraints in their family and personal lives (reluctance on the part of some husbands to accept their wife's profession, particularly as regards travelling and night work, a greater mental workload than men and the perilous reconciliation of family and professional life).

The situation in terms of equal pay has not been studied in detail and merits more in-depth work.

5.7. Continuing education. No significant differences between women and men were reported in Togo in terms of access to, and types of face-to-face continuing education, despite one case of a husband being reluctant to "let his wife go" for a long period. In Senegal, women reported difficulties in reconciling continuing education with family life, with training courses considered too long.

Access to information about training courses is considered to be more difficult, and selection by managers is not objective and works to the disadvantage of women. Geographical distance is also a limiting factor in Togo.

Online training is considered more difficult to access, due to a lack of information on the subject, complex registration procedures, and problems using digital tools and computer access (both in Senegal and Togo).



VPP in Senegal
Picture © D Bessane

5.8. Low representation and visibility of women-veterinarians and VPPs in the profession. Women are poorly represented on the boards of veterinary statutory bodies, although they are present among the members. Gender equality/equity issues are not explicitly addressed within veterinary statutory organisations. In Senegal, an association of women veterinarians (AFVS) was formed in 2020 to enable women to be more visible and better included in discussions about the profession.

6) Gender-based and sexual violence

At the level of initial training, the discussions enabled open exchanges with students, lecturers and management teams on the issues of gender-based and sexual violence and the mechanisms for coping and combating it. Verbal



Woman poultry farmer, Togo.
Picture © AF Thierry

and psychological violence (cases of intimidation) were reported at locum sites or within the schools, mainly by placement supervisors, but also by other students and lecturers. For the time being, the institutions do not have well formalised and appropriate mechanisms for reporting and dealing with complaints (emergency number, admissions to the infirmary, etc.), with well-trained

staff for this purpose. In some schools, however, there are focal points among the teaching staff and management. In Togo, it appeared that students must by and large work alongside their studies in order to meet their daily needs. It has been reported that, in certain extreme situations, female students in particular are reduced to "prostitution" in order to support themselves during their studies, with deleterious effects on their personal development and unwanted pregnancies.

In the workplace, the majority of the women interviewed reported almost systematic verbal sexist violence from farmers (denigration of women's skills, explicit lack of confidence linked to gender), but also from colleagues and line managers. Cases of "flirting" in the workplace were also reported.

7) Constraints on access to veterinary care for women-farmers.

In addition to studies already carried out on the subject, notably by the FAO and AVSF, this study has also highlighted the less favourable conditions for women farmers. This is due to reduced access to healthcare, lower financial capacity, poor access to property and greater vulnerability to illiteracy. However, the wives of livestock farmers are very much present. They help their husbands handle the animals. When they own animals (including cattle), they



Woman cattle farmer, Togo.
Picture © AF Thierry

handle them themselves, particularly for injections. On the other hand, they generally ask their husbands for their opinion on treatment beforehand, although the opposite is less true (Kaffrine study in Senegal, USSEIN) and they are further away from information, medicines and veterinary services (place and times of visits not always adapted to the family constraints of women farmers, access to

training is more difficult, and travel is limited due to the reluctance of husbands, the cost of travel, the burden on the household, training schedules, inadequate communication channels, and the lack of a structured organisation of women livestock farmers).

SUGGESTIONS FOR GREATER GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY IN THE VETERINARY SERVICES

This study has shown that, in addition to issues directly linked to human rights, taking gender equality and equity into account has emerged as a positive factor for animal health. In this respect, WOAHA must be a stakeholder, also through the P3V, in:



Picture © WOAHA

i) **integrating these issues** into the support provided to Member Veterinary Services in Senegal and Togo, by adapting its evaluation and support approaches and tools (e.g. PVS) and

ii) **improving the visibility of women** veterinary and VPP experts (pool of female experts). The P3V project can now offer **female leadership** modules to students and professionals, encourage the **recruitment of female trainers** and incorporate some of the recommendations proposed in the full study report into the national strategy for strengthening the network of animal health professionals (including VPPs) in Senegal and Togo.

The line-Ministries, **MEPA** in Senegal and the **MAEDR** in Togo, which already have gender strategies and units, also have a leading role to play, along with the **DSV (Senegal)** and the **DE (Togo)**, hosting the directorates of veterinary services, in **applying gender guidelines** in the livestock sector and veterinary services, by:

i) **raising awareness and training staff** in gender mainstreaming,

ii) **supporting establishments and statutory organisations** in setting up internal gender policies,

iii) setting up a **policy to combat gender-based violence** within the two ministries and

iv) **taking better account of the specific characteristics of female livestock farmers** in access to healthcare.

The **MAEDR** could also follow the example of the **MEPA** and carry out a gender audit.

In terms of **educational establishments**, the main challenges are:

i) to **raise the profile of women** in the veterinary and VPP professions, particularly among future students (information to be disseminated in secondary schools and to the general public),

ii) to create **favourable hosting and teaching conditions for women in educational establishments** (introduction of a gender policy, scholarships, appropriate health and hosting facilities, recruitment of female teachers, adaptation of curricula to take better account of socio-economic factors and zoonoses that put pregnant women at risk),

iii) **promotion of appropriate techniques**, whatever the physical abilities of practitioners; and

iv) combating **stereotypes and sexist and sexual violence**.

Statutory veterinary bodies and professional organisations also have a role to play in

i) **raising the profile of women** in the veterinary and VPP professions by promoting female role models in the field, identifying **female experts/speakers who** can be mobilised at national and international events, and by creating an **environment conducive to equality and equity between women and men** (appointment of gender focal points in statutory bodies),

ii) **combating gender stereotypes** in the profession,

iii) **promoting the profession of women VPPs** among livestock farmers in order to lift distrust, ...

iv) **adapt practices** and interventions to certain constraints encountered by women (availability of necessary equipment such as restraining ropes, promotion of techniques already mastered by women-farmers),

v) **help reconcile women's work-life balance** with the constraints of working in rural areas,

vi) encourage **the organisation of women-veterinarians and VPPs** and

vii) promote the **representation of women in the decision-making bodies** of veterinary statutory bodies and professional organisations. Statutory bodies also need to take **greater account of the specific needs of women livestock farmers** in terms of access to veterinary care.

Male and female livestock farmers must also be involved as stakeholders,

i) by raising community awareness of the **appointment of women as village livestock workers** (*auxiliaires villageois d'élevage* or AVE) and of gender **equity issues** in communities,

ii) by encouraging **the organisation of female livestock farmers** within the various sectors and promoting the **representation of women in the decision-making bodies** of professional organisations, and

iii) by ensuring that **training courses are adapted to the constraints** and mental burdens of female livestock farmers.

These recommendations are backed up in the full version of the two specific reports on the study carried out in Senegal and Togo. Each of the links studied still needs to be analysed specifically and much more comprehensively in order to identify how the constraints and their consequences actually affect animal and human health, to what degree, and how to remedy them more precisely.

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