

Best Practice

Professionalising Veterinary Paraprofessionals

Gender: a key aspect of the professionalisation of VPPs

Objective: To systematically consider issues of gender at every stage of the project ('gender mainstreaming') in order to promote equity, improve the performance of veterinary services and address the specific needs of women, be they animal health professionals, livestock farmers or animal owners. Doing so contributes to the sustainable improvement of animal health, food security and the resilience of rural communities.

Method	Outcomes	Stakeholders
The guiding principle of the P3V project: <i>Diagnosis and Planning (C0 & C4)</i> 1. Collection of gender-disaggregated data on the veterinary network and training provision 2. Analysis of gender issues in veterinary services. 3. Review of monitoring and evaluation indicators 4. Training for partners on gender issues 5. Communication and dissemination of gender studies • <i>Regulatory Framework (C1)</i> 1. A target of 40% participation in national consultation bodies to ensure inclusive representation 2. Assessing the needs of livestock farmers and gender minorities in order to adapt communication plans • <i>Training and Curricula (C2)</i> 1. A target of 40% female participation in all capacity-building activities 2. Encourage the introduction of specific modules (e.g. gender and leadership) • <i>Employment and Economic Viability (C3)</i> 1. Analysis of economic viability broken down by gender to identify specific barriers (access to credit or land)	Knowledge generation: Gender assessment reports validated and shared with WOA and the AFD. Policy development: Inclusion of a gender perspective in WOA tools (PVS Pathway). Strengthened competencies: WOA staff and national partners made aware of gender issues in the animal health and livestock sector. Monitoring indicators: • Proportion of women participating in training courses, workshops and technical bodies (target: 40%)	Project Implementation Unit (P3V Project Coordinator and Technical Assistant, Focal Points) Technical Expert (WOAH, external consultants) National Authority (Relevant government departments and units, such as the Department of Veterinary Services or the Gender Equity and Equality Unit, e.g. MEPA in Senegal) Training institution (Teaching staff and representatives from the VPP training institutions partnering with the project) Relevant professional authorities (Veterinary statutory bodies and other equivalent bodies representing VPPs) Professional associations of stakeholders (Livestock farmers, former students, veterinarians, other animal health professionals, and, where appropriate, NGOs) Organisations representing gender minorities (Associations of female veterinarians and VPPs, e.g. the Association of Female Veterinarians of Senegal)

Conditions for success

- **Support from the project's backers:** It is essential that the decision-making bodies of the project owner (WOAH) and the funding body (AFD) take the lead on the issue of gender so that it is treated as a key element of project quality and not as an optional extra.
- **Dedicated expertise from the outset:** From the very start of the project (the initial phase), specialist expertise should be brought in to address gender issues specific to the livestock sector. If this expertise is not available within the implementation team, it is essential to engage technical advisers or external consultants to ensure that analyses are rigorous and communication is relevant.
- **Practical realism:** The target for female participation (e.g. 40%) should be used as a tool for advocacy to encourage the inclusion of women throughout the project life cycle, rather than as a rigid quota that could hinder activities.

Key points

- **Data collection:** This should not be limited to quantitative data. It is essential to understand the structural barriers (e.g. cultural and social obstacles, stigma, and issues of social legitimacy) that directly impact women's career mobility, their career aspirations, and their ability to practise in the field.
- **Inclusive communication:** Female role models should be promoted systematically within the profession to challenge stereotypes and inspire future careers.
- **An integrated approach:** Gender should not be treated as a one-time consideration or an optional extra. The issue of equity must be at the heart of discussions, whether these concern the reform of legislation or the professionalisation of initial training.
- **Collaboration with key contacts:** Identify and work closely with specialist national stakeholders, such as Gender Units within government departments, or professional women's associations (e.g. the Association of Women Veterinarians of Senegal), to tailor initiatives to local socio-cultural contexts.

Recommendations

- **Sustainability and recognition:** The findings of the P3V's gender studies should be used to highlight women's contributions and increase recognition of their role within the veterinary network among relevant authorities. The aim is to bring about lasting change in national animal health policies.
- **Strengthen training and build confidence:** The knowledge gained should be used to further improve training (both initial and continuing). The aim is to enhance students' practical skills and professional confidence, in particular by developing mentoring schemes that facilitate experience-sharing.
- **Ongoing awareness-raising:** The project evaluation showed that the concept of gender is still too often reduced to the 'participation of women'. It is crucial to continue disseminating the results of the P3V project in order to challenge persistent stereotypes within the veterinary sector.
- **Access to resources:** Advocate, where appropriate, for simplified financing schemes (such as microloans) that are specifically designed to help female VPPs, who are often more economically vulnerable, to set up their own businesses.

Conclusion

The professionalisation and empowerment of female veterinary paraprofessionals is a win-win strategy, bringing about profound changes for the livestock sector in Africa. This is not merely a question of equity, but an essential component in building resilient national animal health systems. Including the issue of gender in any project aimed at improving the veterinary network is not just a desirable option but an absolute necessity. Much work still needs to be done to remove the barriers that prevent women from entering the veterinary and veterinary paraprofessional sectors and the barriers that hinder their retention and progression.