



ATSAF Academy
Academy for International Agricultural Research for Development

Junior Scientists Tandems

Final Report

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Start and end date of career exploration stay: Mar 2024 – Aug 2024

Title: Pastoral women's information needs and gaps related to livestock production and marketing: integrating role-play as a tool to elucidate tacit knowledge

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Introduction and preparation for the stay

I am Keerthana Sri, currently pursuing a master's degree in tropical agriculture and agroecosystem sciences. My interest in transdisciplinary and socio-ecological research sparked after completion of the course at my university with Prof. Dr. Brigitte A. Kaufmann. The course on social ecology in livestock production systems encompassed numerous informative lectures close to my research interests and for my stay in Kenya, such as the significance of indigenous/practitioner knowledge and the importance of utilizing tools appropriately, rather than merely extracting data from participants. The curriculum included stakeholder analysis, positionality and ethics, knowledge co-creation, collaborative framework, and the application of visual tools for conducting participatory research. Prior to my departure for Kenya, Dr. Margareta Amy Lelea co-supervised my preparation for fieldwork, which involved the development of a logical framework, literature review for the topic, and methodological considerations. Following an initial meeting between Dr. Lelea and myself with Dr. Alessandra Galiè, the ILRI team provided invaluable assistance with the scholarship application process. Despite initial apprehension, both the ILRI and DITSL teams offered exceptional support and resources, thereby facilitating a successful and harmonious stay at ILRI and in Kenya.

Overview of the program and experience at ILRI

This master thesis research is a part of Inforange project funded by the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forshung. My data collection and master thesis belongs to the Inforange project focusing on information needs of pastoral women from the Rendille and the Borana communities and during my stay at ILRI, and I worked with the gender team in the Horn of Africa – Regional Livestock Program, Mercy corps with study locations in Wajir and Garissa county. After I arrived, I had a short in-person meeting with Dr.Galiè, and we clarified each other the structure of the tandem scholarship and my tasks as a part of collaborating with ILRI. Subsequently, Phase 1 of the fieldwork was completed in the Lower Laisamis region, specifically in the Ngurunit, Lependera, and Namarei sublocations. During May-June, I was based in Nairobi, working closely with the ILRI team. Close collaboration was established with Nelly Njiru, ILRI Researcher, and Milcah Asamba from Mercy Corps. Nelly Njiru provided training in coding the previously collected data from Wajir and Garissa using NVivo software.

As part of my CGIAR collaboration, I conducted qualitative data coding for the RLP project in conjunction with two other researchers, provided assistance to Nelly with literature review for report writing, and engaged with researchers and staff from the gender team and the policy, institutions and livelihoods (PIL) team. From March to the present, I have participated in the gender team's biweekly meetings, delivered two presentations and solicited feedback from the team, and been involved in regular PIL meetings, including the CGIAR corporate strategies meeting.

The ILRI gender team had exceptional hospitality, providing comprehensive assistance with office-related matters. The staff exhibited a high degree of collegiality and resourcefulness.



Inquiries were met with prompt and thorough responses. The experience facilitated the establishment of new professional connections, exploration of novel research topics, identification of potential information sources, and consideration of career prospects. Additionally, it offered exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and fostered engaging intellectual discourse that extended beyond the duration of the visit. I'm glad to share that I'm still in contact with most of the colleagues from the ILRI gender team.

The overall experience proved intellectually stimulating and conducive to personal growth. Beyond the research activities, the opportunity to interact with the researchers behind published scientific literature was particularly valuable, it is always great to speak to the minds behind some impactful research. Whenever I needed guidance on something, there was always a colleague available to provide direction or suggest relevant resources. Collaborating with this exceptional team was a highly rewarding experience, and if granted the opportunity close to my interests – I'd choose anyday to work with a CGIAR institute.

Experience in living with the Rendille and the Borana communities

I lived with the Rendille and Borana communities while conducting my data collection, primarily working with women. Despite being two distinct communities, they both extended a warm welcome to me. I would especially like to thank Rufo Roba Halakhe, a doctoral student, and her entire family for hosting me. Fieldwork-related support and transport were provided by CRDD (Center for Research and Development in Drylands), Marsabit. Project assistants from CRDD were very helpful in locating interpreters and transcribers, finding affordable housing in Ngurunit, Korr, and Sololo, and locating transport options. The people, i.e., the research participants, were extremely enthusiastic during our interactions. It was also appreciated that visual aids like colored sticky notes for conducting activity and knowledge analysis and drawings on the clock to explain daily activities were used during the sessions. In contrast to other forms of participatory research, role-plays were far more engaging, and every woman reported that they felt more like they were having fun in their spare time than they were bored and never felt like they are actively contributing to a research project. In addition to staying and gathering information over the course of four months using focus groups, activity clocks, and role-plays, I also got to know their cultures and ways of life. For me, it was a memorable experience.

Research highlights – preliminary results

- Gendered household roles and activities are present in pastoral households in both communities. The majority of time-consuming livestock-related household chores, such as caring for the animals, preventing illnesses, milking the animals, and traveling great distances to gather fodder, were performed by pastoral women. While their role as livestock caretaker involved the above mentioned activities, as their role as mothers – they were solely responsible for taking care of their children.
 - Pastoral women are incredibly skilled observers; for instance, by observing their respective calves and young, they can determine which goats and sheep produce milk
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of a high quantity and quality. Their wealth of knowledge and experience allows them to solve or avert potential issues like pest or disease outbreaks by utilizing resources that are readily available in the area.

- Each location had very specific information gaps and needs. For instance, the Walda sublocation needed more information about milk processing and marketing because it was close to a highway and marketing channels. The people of Ambalo, a border town with Ethiopia that lacked access to markets, talked about how they wanted to have quick access to information about the availability of pasture, fodder, and water so they could live easier and complete their tasks faster.
- In Korr sublocations, where the Rendilles were exposed to numerous NGOs and research activities - since raising chickens for eggs and meat would be profitable, they decided to take up the new hobby. They sought specific knowledge on how to construct shelters for the birds as well as how to recognize and treat poultry diseases. Common information needs in all the regions were related to livestock diseases – symptom identification and control and drought management strategies.

Challenges during the stay and suggestions

Logistics challenge : It was challenging to find reasonably priced housing in Nairobi. Dr. Lilli Scheiterle helped me locate a suitable location. I would recommend that before traveling to a new country students always have a resourceful person to turn to for information.

Personal challenges: It is without little doubt that the research participants will face personal obstacles such as gender-based violence, financial constraints, and domestic abuse. When we as researchers encounter such experiences, it is crucial to pay attention to their stories, show empathy, and offer them emotional support. If we feel powerless in these circumstances, we should also seek professional assistance. Being women, our safety is the firstmost priority. In two situations, if not for my friends in Kenya – I would've faced bigger constraints than I did so I'd advise that every student forms a trustworthy support system as soon as they reach a new country.

Professional & personal growth + Key takeaways

I rediscovered aspects of my interests and abilities that I had not previously acknowledged while working at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI). One of the most important things I realized was how much I liked using visual aids to communicate science. My love for scientific illustrations and science-related art was ignited by this experience, and I now see these mediums as opportunities to communicate difficult science to a wide range of audiences, regardless of their educational background. I haven't yet looked into this very specialized talent.

My interactions with ILRI's communications team were particularly enlightening, as they not only introduced me to a variety of communication strategies but also provided me with valuable career advice for life after completing my master's degree. Beyond these personal discoveries, my time at ILRI gave me a profound understanding of the operational infrastructure of the



CGIAR centers, and ILRI in particular. The staff, researchers, and collaborators were incredibly generous with their time, explaining in detail about ILRI's research activities, which span multiple disciplines and incorporate inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinary approaches.

This experience was transformative not only professionally but also personally. I found myself developing a greater sense of responsibility and a more rational approach to professional decision-making. Previously, I may have been quicker to react, but my exposure during my stay at Kenya's diverse and collaborative environment has taught me the value of patience—particularly the importance of listening carefully, observing and absorbing information before responding. These new perspectives helped me consolidate my existing knowledge while expanding my understanding of how scientific research functions in a global context. In conclusion, my stay at ILRI was a defining moment in my academic and professional journey, enabling me to grow both as a researcher and as a more thoughtful individual.

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DITSL

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ILRI

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Habiba, Abubhakar Anwar Arbele, Elema halakhe, Korr gathis guest house team, Hassan and everyone who made me feel comfortable and at home. I have the utmost gratitude for everything you all did for me.

Photos



Role-plays in Ngurunit and Korr



Feedback session, Korr



Daily Activity Clock sessions, Ngurunit
