



**Food and Agriculture
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Applying a gender lens when developing a Veterinary Paraprofessional Competency Framework

The gender gap to veterinary service access

Despite their significant contribution to global livestock production, agro-pastoral and smallholder livestock productivity remains low in many contexts due to the impact of animal diseases, and lack of access to extension services, and quality animal health and production inputs. There is a strong gender dimension to this issue; women, who constitute 60 percent of livestock keepers living in poverty, are disproportionately affected (World Bank et al, 2009 cited in Galie' et al, 2017). A gender gap persists in access to knowledge regarding good livestock practices and veterinary services (Pyburn and van Eerdewijk, 2016). Women farmers continue to face barriers in accessing information and training and are too often excluded in conversations with animal health professionals. An FAO survey showed that worldwide, female farmers received only 5 percent of all agricultural extension services (FAO, 2007). This exclusion from information and resource chains perpetuates gender disparities and creates weak links in animal and human health systems (Pyburn and van Eerdewijk, 2016). Despite the recognition of women as a priority group for last-mile animal health services, gender is often overlooked as a factor influencing the provision of veterinary services (L. Henderson, 2021).

Veterinary Paraprofessionals: an important channel for reaching rural women and men farmers

Veterinary Paraprofessionals (VPP) outnumber veterinarians on average 10 to 1 (FAO, 2021) and are more present in rural areas, with closer ties to livestock farmers. As accessible, cost-effective and mobile animal health service providers, VPPs are strategically positioned to improve service delivery outreach to women and men farmers, particularly in rural areas. Given the need to pro-actively expand veterinary outreach to women, there is also a need for VPPs to adopt a gender-intentional approach in their work. However, many VPPs face challenges in terms of business stability (black market competition, cold-chain challenges, etc.) and receive little to no support in terms of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) after training, including on the relevance of gender. Training programs for VPPs often do not include business and soft skills, and may not address the gender determinants that influence access to veterinary services in the most remote areas. As a result, VPPs' lack of specific skills to respond to gender-related issues at farmer level poses the risk of excluding women farmers from service delivery, leading to incomprehensive history taking, less effective disease prevention and response practices, and an inability to address the needs, aspirations and constraints faced by women. Moreover, while women VPPs can be an important channel for reaching female smallholders, especially in communities with prominent seclusion norms, they often make up a small minority of their profession and themselves face gender-specific challenges in their work (time and mobility constraints, harassment, issues with animal handling, pay gaps, bias and mistrust etc.), further widening the veterinary services access gap.

Applying a gender lens to a Veterinary Paraprofessional Competency Framework

In order to respond to these issues, and promote the delivery of comprehensive and inclusive animal health services, competency building and awareness raising with regards to gender is needed to better support women and men livestock farmers. Incorporating gender-sensitivity into the development of VPP competency frameworks is critical to this approach. This involves reviewing each core competency with a gender-lens and, where appropriate, modifying it to promote the inclusion and benefit of both female and male farmers and VPPs in a given national context. When applying a gender lens, adequate stakeholder representation and gender balance in the composition of working groups is crucial in order to ensure that diverse viewpoints are considered, and open discussion is encouraged. For reference, please review an [example group chart](#).

Example gender lens application

As a social construct that changes over time and space, gender constraints are not universal, but will vary from country to country and across different farming systems (smallholder, agro-pastoral, commercial etc.). When applying a gender lens to the [Nigerian VPP Competency Framework](#) under the core competency: Communication the following behavioral indicators relating to gender were included:

Beginner:

- Describe impacts of gender discrimination on VPPs and Small Holder Farmers (SHF).
- Explain role of VPPs in decreasing gender discrimination.
- Be able to communicate unpleasant news, manage conflict and respond to gender discrimination.

Intermediate:

- Comply with gender-sensitive communication principles to ensure gender parity, recognize that farmers have different gender roles, challenges and needs and adapt communication and delivery of services to meet women farmers' needs.

The below table is an extract from the Nigeria Veterinary Paraprofessional Competency Framework for the core competency communication. Gender elements are highlighted in yellow.

Core Competency 4: Communication	
Definition: The knowledge, skills, and practices necessary for conducting the effective exchange of information between various individuals, institutions, and public audiences for the purposes of informing, guiding, and motivating action in relation to animal production, health and welfare.	
Why it is important: Most complaints are related to communication problems and improved communication leads to better outcomes for animals and humans.	
Competency Framework	
Level	Behaviour Indicators
Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the principles of effective oral communication: questioning techniques, listening, body language, confirm message, tact, empathy, constructive feedback, consideration of diverse opinions and acknowledgement of experience of others - Describe principles of effective written communication (simple language and structure, legible handwriting) - Use common computer and phone applications such as messaging for effective communication - Use various medium of communication to target audience - Describe impacts of gender discrimination on VPPs and Small Holder Farmers (SHF) - Explain role of VPPs in decreasing gender discrimination - Be able to communicate unpleasant news, manage conflict and respond to gender discrimination
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choose and use appropriate methods of communication based on goals and target audience (individual or group) - Communicate and deliver livestock extension information - Make public presentations - Create communication platform - Express self-confidence in dealing with others - Demonstrate emotional intelligence (interpret mood of audience and adapts communication style) - Build VPP-client confidence and trust - Comply with gender sensitive communication principles to ensure gender parity, recognize that farmers have different gender roles, challenges and needs and adapt communication and delivery of services to women farmers' needs
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train other VPPs to prepare reports, develop extension messages and make public presentations - Manage interactions with business partners - Explain certain technical details - Properly observe and understand field situations - Share information and create farmer awareness using appropriate channels

References

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