Livestock Development for Food Security in Afghanistan

A Question of Gender
Reflections from a Livestock Project Perspective

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# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

2. What is “gender” ............................................................................................................. 2
   2.1 Sex ......................................................................................................................... 2
   2.2 Gender .................................................................................................................. 2

3. Roles of men and women ............................................................................................... 3
   3.1 Traditional Roles .................................................................................................. 3
   3.2 Changing Roles ..................................................................................................... 4

4. What are gender issues and why is gender a development issue? .............................. 5
   4.1 Differences ......................................................................................................... 5
   4.2 Levels of difference ............................................................................................. 5

5. Gender Development Policy ......................................................................................... 6
   5.1 Women In Development (WID) ........................................................................... 6
   5.2 Gender and Development (GAD) ........................................................................ 6

6. Approach to gender issues taken by the FAO Livestock Project ..................................... 7
   6.1 Overview .............................................................................................................. 7
   6.2 Gender issues and the FAO livestock project: strategy ........................................... 7

7. Problems faced by the FAO livestock project: Reality of Afghanistan situation .............. 12
   7.1 Challenging the edict on women ......................................................................... 12
   7.2 How far can the FAO livestock project go? .......................................................... 12
   7.3 Careful, timely evaluations .................................................................................... 13

8. Role of the technical agencies in addressing gender issues ............................................ 14
A Question of Gender –
Reflections from a livestock project perspective

1. Introduction

Gender is an emotive topic. Gender is sometimes seen as a women’s issue, of concern to women, having little to do with men. However, in practice many men and women are concerned with gender issues because gender is actually about relations between men and women on several levels.

This paper includes some reflections on the issues of gender from a practical perspective, rather than an academic one. It is not an exhaustive debate on gender issues in development, or the various approaches to gender analysis. It is based on experiences of developing livestock projects in rural areas, and of the FAO livestock project in particular. Even though some of the arguments that follow may be controversial, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the debate of gender policy and strategy with the UNDP program, and to share the experiences of the livestock team.

The first part of this paper includes a brief discussion on gender issues in general, and then considers the approach taken by the FAO livestock project in addressing gender issues. The following topics are considered: -

- What is gender?
- Roles of men and women.
- What are gender issues?
- Why is gender a development issue?
- Gender development policy.
- Approach to gender issues by the FAO livestock project.
- Problems faced by the FAO livestock project.
- Role of the technical agencies in addressing gender issues.
2. What is “gender”

One of the first steps in understanding the root of gender issues is being clear on exactly what we mean by gender. We need to consider the difference between a person’s “sex” and “gender”.

2.1 Sex

This is biologically based, fixed, unchanging: a person is either a woman or a man. Associated with this are certain physiological differences that are equally fixed e.g. women have babies, men don’t. Some people may also argue that there are other inherent differences between men and women that make them masculine or feminine e.g. women are generally more intuitive and feeling, whereas men are more logical and “in control of their feelings”. However, this is controversial, open to much debate, and is the point where we move into the area of gender differences.

2.2 Gender

It has been argued that apart from the fixed biological factors, there are inherently few differences between men and women. Most of the differences that occur are learned, and based on cultural factors. Culture greatly influences people’s perceptions of what makes a man or a woman. Within a given culture there are rules which determine appropriate behaviour, dress, aspirations and codes of conduct for men and women. Until fairly recently in western cultures such “rules” include women can’t do mechanical things like fix a car, men can’t cook or use a vacuum cleaner. Society, our parents, and our teachers teach these rules to us. Because our cultures have developed over long periods of time, through many generations, these “rules” are so deeply ingrained in biological and us that we tend to believe that many of them are fixed. Gender is therefore culturally, and not biologically based.

There are also gender differences between cultures. What is considered appropriate behaviour or dress for men and women in one culture may not be in another. For example, building houses is considered women’s work in parts of east Africa, yet considered men’s work in parts of Asia.

*Gender is about the relationship between men and women.* It is not solely a women’s issue of little concern to men. As will be seen below, addressing gender issues requires the cooperation of both men and women.
3. Roles of men and women

3.1 Traditional Roles

Gender differences are closely related to the specific roles of men and women in society. Associated with this are certain expectations from society about how men and women will behave, their aspirations, responsibilities, and what work they will do, and how they will relate to one another.

One approach to gender analysis divides the traditional roles of men and women into 4 categories. These categories are only generalizations, but do serve as a useful basis for analyzing and understanding the dynamic nature of gender. The are as follows:

- **Domestic.** Includes work carried out in the home, such as child care, food processing and preparation, managing the home, collection of water, collection of fuel for cooking & heating; childcare. Mainly undertaken by women.

- **Income & food production.** Includes work carried to produce food for the household and cash crops for sale; activities carried out at home to generate income; and employment outside the household. Undertaken by both men and women.

- **Community managing.** This usually includes unpaid work done for the community e.g. caring for the elderly, maintaining community water sources (for household consumption), managing community projects eg. tree nurseries. Usually undertaken by women.

- **Community politics.** Includes decision making at the community level, and engaging in politics at a regional and national level. Usually undertaken by men.

**Summary**

- **Domestic** Women
- **Income & food production** Women + men
- **Community managing** Women
- **Community politics** Men

It can be seen from this analysis that women have three major roles in society and men have two.
3.2 Changing Roles

However, as we know, the roles of men and women are changing. Gender is dynamic. There are many examples of this throughout the world e.g. UK society no longer expects that each woman marry at an early age and raise a family with her husband and stay at home. Women are engaging in activities that were once the sole domain of men. Women’s earning capacity in many parts of the world has vastly increased. Likewise certain professions traditionally considered the domain of women are becoming increasingly open to men e.g. nursing, childcare. Women now play an increasingly important role in international politics. Traditionally in the UK men were considered the “bread winners” of the family. Increasingly, women are taking on this role, especially in single parent households. Likewise, in many parts of Africa, a substantial proportion women are solely or largely responsible for providing food for the household.

This further suggests that the roles of men and women that were previously believed to be biologically based and unchanging are in fact learned and based on culture.
4. What are gender issues and why is gender a development issue?

4.1 Differences

Gender is about the relationship between men and women. It is based on their roles in society, which are constantly changing. However, gender continues to be a development, as well as social and political issue, because of the differences that exist between men and women from a gender (not biological!) perspective.

These differences include:

- **Division of labour** – these are linked to the roles of men and women – men and women have specific tasks which they undertake in livestock keeping e.g. women do the milking, men take animals for grazing;

- **Division of decision making** – these are linked to the roles of men and women, as well as their positions of authority and power. Some argue than women generally have less decision making power over their own lives than men e.g. use of household income, family planning/fertility issues;

- **Ownership of resources and income** – generally owned by men rather than women;

- **Political power** – more often in the hands of men, especially at a national level;

- **Access to services** – e.g. education, technical training (sometimes designed to address problems faced by men in their traditional roles and rather than those of women);

- **Cultural factors** – in some cultures codes of conduct for women may be more restricted than for men.

Gender is an issue because these differences tend to disadvantage women. Generally women may be regarded as having less power, owning fewer resources, having less access to services, doing more work, and receiving less income, compared to men.

4.2 Levels of difference

These differences occur at several levels:

- **Household** – relationship between men and women in the household;
- **Society** – cultural codes of conduct/behaviour/dress etc. and expectations of men and women;
- **National** – legislation, constitution, judicial law e.g. right of men/women to vote, laws on domestic violence etc.
5. Gender Development Policy

Since the 1970's, two general approaches to addressing gender issues have developed. These include:

5.1 Women In Development (WID).

This approach is aimed primarily at women, and focuses on assisting women to do their work better in their existing traditional roles (see section 2 above).

Development projects would include:
- vegetable gardens and back yard poultry to increase food production and income; improved methods of food storage and food preparation;
- improved domestic water supplies e.g. wells;
- tree nurseries to increase availability of fuel, fruit, timber.

The essence of this approach is that it does not generally challenge the status quo, or the roles of either men or women. It does not essentially challenge the fundamental gender differences between men and women. This approach is also referred to as a “practical” approach.

5.2 Gender and Development (GAD).

This approach focuses on both men and women. In may include a practical approach, which aims at assisting both men and women to do their work better within their existing roles. This approach is also referred to as gender in development (GID).

GAD also includes a “strategic” approach to gender issues that challenges the roles of men and women. It challenges the gender differences between men and women, and aims to redress the imbalances in power, ownership of resources, opportunities, access to services, and decision making.

Examples of development projects with a strategic objective include:
- equal education & training opportunities for girls and boys, men and women;
- changing legislation on such issues as land ownership;
- credit facilities which take into account the conditions of women (e.g. loans may require collateral, yet women may not own any);
- technical projects that provide women with skills and knowledge to carry out activities previously done only by men – provided this changes their decision making power and control over income, for example;
- projects that increase women’s access to services e.g. banks, veterinary and human clinics;
- income generating projects which provide women with significantly increased incomes over which they have control;
- projects which increase women’s control over their own fertility;
- Projects which increase the representation and real decision making power of women at a community level, and/or national level.
6. **Approach to gender issues taken by the FAO Livestock Project**

6.1 **Overview**

The various programs that fall under the FAO Livestock Development for Food Security in Afghanistan Project include:

- Veterinary services - VFU’s; training of vets, paravets, BVW’s; Veterinary Association;
- Livestock Production Program (LP) - fodder, poultry, breeding;
- Piham - improving the delivery of livestock services by the VFU’s; livestock production;
- Livestock Initiators Program (LI) - focuses on livestock issues of concern to women farmers; livestock production, animal health;
- Epidemiology - disease surveillance and monitoring; identification of diseases; laboratories, vaccine supply.

6.2 **Gender issues and the FAO livestock project: strategy**

The strategies for addressing gender issues within the FAO livestock project include:

1. **Roles of men and women.**

Understanding the roles of men and women in livestock keeping is a vital first step. This includes division of labour; the who makes what decisions concerning management and use of livestock and livestock products; and ownership of livestock and livestock products. Within Piham, the Livestock Production Program and the Livestock Initiator Program, field staff have been trained in simple gender analysis techniques such as labour analysis, matrix ranking. The VFU veterinarians trained under Piham are also trained in gender issues in livestock and given the skills to carry out the analysis. Surveys carried out by the Livestock Production, Livestock Initiator and Piham programs analyse problems in livestock keeping from a gender perspective.

The central role of women in the management of livestock in Afghanistan is well recognised by the project. When animals fall sick, it is usually the woman that first notices, and it is the woman who treats the animal, often with traditional medicine. If the animal does not recover she may then ask a male relative to take the animal to the VFU (as she is often not able to due to Taliban/cultural restrictions). Women play a central role in livestock feeding, care of young stock, poultry keeping, milking and milking processing.

If FAO Livestock wants to significantly improve livestock production, food security and household incomes, they must work with women farmers. An example helps illustrate the effect this simple gender awareness training has had. During the first phase of the Piham program in 1996 ten male veterinarians and livestock productionists were selected to be trained as “Piham Initiators” (5 modules over one year). Three days into the first course a session on gender issues in livestock keeping was run, which included understanding the role of men and women, decision making, access to resources, and ownership of resources. The vital role of women in livestock
keeping became clear to the participants. They stopped the course and insisted that some women vets be employed and join the Piham program. The course was stopped and two women were duly employed. They joined the training and implemented Piham in villages with women farmers (they subsequently had to stop in 1997 due to security reasons).

2. Differentiating problems.

Obviously, in order to have an impact on both livestock production, and gender inequalities between men and women the project most go way beyond just understanding the roles of men and women. Because men and women have different roles in livestock keeping, they face different problems. If FAO livestock were only to address the problems faced by male farmers, the amount that could be done to increase livestock production would be limited. The project therefore attempts to understand livestock problems of concern to both men and women.

3. Differentiating activities & solutions.

As the roles in livestock keeping and the problems faced by men and women differ, so too may some activities and technical solutions/innovations/assistance. For example, poultry; care of young stock and animal health are of particular concern to women, so any training and projects developed can be designed to meet their needs.

4. Gender issues from a livestock perspective.

Approaching gender issues from a livestock perspective, rather than a political or social one has been found to be a very effective way of bringing gender issues into the center of the FAO project. It raises the awareness of gender issues amongst male management and field staff in a non-threatening way, and also in such a way as to make them feel responsible for addressing livestock problems faced by women farmers. The men recognise, that for cultural reasons, they eventually reach a point in their programs where they can go no further because it is difficult for them to interact with women farmers. For example, the fodder team under the Livestock Production Program is working on increasing the availability of feed for livestock. Feeding is of concern to both men and women farmers. Women in particular play an important role in the daily feeding of livestock, yet the male members of the project cannot reach women farmers to provide them with training in the used of improved fodder crops. This is where the LI program has an important role to play (amongst others).

The LI program is well supported by male colleagues in other programs. Men and women of the various programs have no problems discussing livestock issues and planning activities (see sections 6 and 9 below).

In Afghanistan several male vets trained in Piham complained bitterly of not being able to work directly with women farmers. They explained how frustrating it could be at times trying to treat animals brought to the clinic by men, who had little knowledge on the history of the illness of the animal, because it had been treated by a woman in the household. “Why don’t you train women vets in Piham?” they asked.
VFU vets have requested us to look at ways in which the links between male vets in VFU’s and women farmers can be improved - under current conditions in Afghanistan which limit the contact between men and women.

5. Livestock Initiators (LI) Program.

The Livestock Initiator Program was developed in an attempt to mainstream gender issues in the FAO livestock project. A brief outline of the LI program is attached. At present there are 12 women vets employed as initiators who carry out fieldwork, two women vets employed at management level, and one international staff member.

The program name was changed from “women’s program” because gender issues are not the sole concern of women. The term “women’s program” seems to imply that women’s issues in livestock keeping have little to do with the rest of the project, and are some “other thing” that goes on at the side somewhere. In fact the danger in having an isolated “women’s program” is that gender issues may end up being sidelined because men in other programs may feel that they no longer have to worry about gender issues because they are being taken care of by the women’s program.

The other programs are not referred to as “men’s programs”. How strange it would appear if we had a whole series of programs under the FAO Livestock project (epidemiology, Pliham, veterinary services etc) all run by women professionals and aimed specifically at women farmers, with a “men’s program” looking at issues of concern to men farmers. The establishment of the LI program as a program that spans the whole FAO project rather than being sidelined, is a reflection of FAO livestock’s serious commitment to addressing gender issues in livestock development.

The LI Program was also formed as a way of addressing gender issues in the field in a practical way, because of the difficulties facing male livestock professionals in working with female farmers. The LI program spans all other programs under FAO Livestock, so that the policy on technical issues is the same across all programs, and for men and women (eg. cost recovery for drugs, participatory approaches to working with farmers). The LI program acts as a vital link between all programs and women farmers. The LI program makes the rest of the FAO project aware of the problems faced by women farmers. It enables women farmers to have access to technical solutions, innovations, technology and information in the same way that male farmers do.

The approach therefore is not “let’s have a women’s program and think about what we can do with women concerning livestock”. The approach is based on technical issues e.g. insufficient fodder for animals, and goes as follows: - farmers in Afghanistan face problems in keeping livestock. How can we help farmers address the problems? We know men and women play different roles in keeping livestock and as a result face different problems. If we want to help families address livestock problems, we need to look at problems and develop appropriate solutions for both men and women. The two cannot take place in isolation. Both must be tackled with the same approach (participatory, needs based), and with a common technical projects. FAO livestock does not have one policy or project for fodder for men, for example, and a different one.
for women. It is one fodder project. However, some components of the project may be of more interest to women farmers than men, because of the different roles of women and men. For example, we may need to work with men in planting and managing plots of improved fodder crops, and work with the women on how best to feed these crops to the livestock.

The LI program was therefore also formed to ensure that livestock issues of particular concern to women are addressed by all programs e.g. poultry production, animal health, care of young stock. As well as addressing practical gender issues, the LI program can be used as a forum for addressing strategic gender issues (i.e. women's access to livestock services and resources, gender balance within the project itself).

In future there is no reason why male livestock initiators could not be employed.

6. Practical and strategic activities.

Gender issues within the FAO livestock project are addressed: -

- **Practically** (helping men and women in their existing roles to increase livestock production) e.g. increasingly milk production through better feeding and health care;
- **Strategically** (challenging the status quo and the differences between men and women) e.g. improving access to livestock services and livestock education for women. The aim is to increase the general level of knowledge and skills amongst women farmers in villages in livestock management. Previous experience in Afghanistan and other areas has shown that people's attitudes (especially men's) changes towards women when they gain greater technical know how. It increases their decision making power and ability to act to deal with livestock problems. For example, compared to men, women have far less access to western veterinary drugs because:
  a) women physically have more difficulty obtaining the drugs (therapeutic and vaccines) due to movement restrictions;
  b) women often have less skills and knowledge in the use of these drugs because they have less access to technical training and education.

Women play a key role in the treatment of sick animals. If they had better access to drugs and skills in their use, not only would this increase their ability to deal with health problems, but also probably challenge peoples (men and women in villages) attitudes towards the role of women. It may begin to alter the status of women. There is an example of this from Mazar, where two women Basic Veterinary Workers (BVW's) worked closely with their local VFU (run by a male veterinarian). Most of the time the women traveled around villages providing a basic animal health service for women farmers. Every week the BVW's spent a day at the VFU working with the vet to vaccinate and treat animals. The attitudes of both the vet and male farmers were very positive towards these two BVW's.

Another way in which FAO livestock challenges people's attitudes is through Piham. The Piham vets are trained how to carry out simple gender analysis with men farmers (using sticks and stones). The Piham initiators and vets have said that this seems to increase the awareness of the men of women's role in livestock keeping.
7. Employment of women livestock professionals.

Within the FAO Livestock Project women livestock professionals are employed at senior management and field levels. It is important that project staff are professionally qualified in livestock subjects so that they are able to discuss livestock issues with women farmers, who are themselves experts in livestock keeping. The staff needs to have a deep understanding of the technical, social, political, economic, and gender issues effecting livestock production. In the end, after all the talking and planning is done, the project must be able to assist farmers to improve the production of their livestock. This involves addressing livestock issues in practical and strategic ways. At the end of the day, a farmer must be able to get more milk from her cow, and have better access to livestock services.

It must be said, that just employing more women is not the answer. This in itself will not address gender issues in livestock development. Yet, because of the current conditions in Afghanistan, addressing gender issues inevitably requires the employment of women field workers, because it is far easier for women livestock professionals to work with women farmers. However, this should only take place once a gender policy and strategy for the whole project has been developed, irrespective of whether there are men or women working in that program, ie. all programs must be addressing gender issues in their particular technical area. Within this framework, the project can then work towards improving the gender balance in terms of staffing.

8. Integrated program planning and implementation

FAO livestock is committed to a process of integration, not only concerning gender issues, but also technical issues, and the approach taken by the individual programs (e.g. participation of farmers, activities based on needs, cost recovery and sustainability). This integration takes place at all stages including planning and implementation.

The practical mechanisms by which integration takes place includes:

- Annual NPPP conference in which all programs (Islamabad and field staff) attend;
- Meetings at senior program level;
- Meetings at regional level between programs;
- Training courses which cut across all programs (e.g. Piham runs courses of participatory approaches to working with farmers/behaviour and attitudes, and PRA);
- Coordination workshops, where field staff from different programs discuss issues and plan activities;
- Reports of the various programs.

The LI program is in the process of planning projects to carry out in the field with farmers. As part of this planning process, a workshop will be held in October where staff from the Livestock Production and Piham programs, as well as VFU veterinarians will join the Livestock Initiators in planning integrated field projects aimed at meeting the needs of women farmers. This follows on from a workshop held in August, where field staff from the Piham, the LP and LI programs all met to discuss practical ways of planning and implementing integrated livestock activities in Afghanistan.
7. **Problems faced by the FAO livestock project: Reality of Afghanistan situation.**

7.1 **Challenging the edict on women**

FAO livestock reaches a point beyond which we can go no further without the assistance of other UNDP programs (diplomats?). A point is reached where changes at a national and political level need to take place in order for further projects to be developed which address gender issues at a strategic level i.e. that enable FAO livestock challenge the status quo and inequalities between men and women such as access to veterinary services. This work is beyond the scope of FAO at the present time.

An example illustrates the point. Women play a major role in the treatment and care of sick animals. They are often the ones who first notice an animal is sick, and administer treatment, often using traditional methods such as herbs. We can train women to treat animals, but under current conditions in Afghanistan the movement of women between villages and to bazaars is restricted. This means it is often difficult for women to go and buy the medicines they require. It is difficult for women Basic Veterinary Workers (BVW’s) to provide a service to villages. In particular women have limited access to professional veterinary help – a sick animal is most often taken to the clinic by a male household member, who often is not fully conversant with the illness of the animal - this makes treatment by the vet difficult. If the vet comes to the home to see the animal he still faces the same problem if he is not able to talk to the women directly. During the LI program survey, there were repeated requests by women farmers to open more VFU’s. Technically it would be possible to open VFU’s run by women vets, for women farmers (and men), so as to improve veterinary services for women. There is interest amongst LI’s in doing this. The problem is that current conditions in Afghanistan prevent it.

7.2 **How far can the FAO livestock project go?**

There is a limit to how much the FAO livestock project can challenge the authorities about women being able to work openly and to travel freely. Opening a VFU run by women vets may be too high a profile project under current conditions. We are doing as much as possible (and stretching the limits) within the confines of current policy of the local authorities. The LI’s are working in villages, despite the Taliban edict. However, it is beyond the scope of FAO Livestock to change the “legislation” in Afghanistan that would allow the implementation of a project like a VFU run by women vets. This is where the policy section/diplomatic section of the UN has a leading role to play, and their assistance is sorely needed.

At a local level, FAO livestock, through it’s project partners has been able to challenge the official edict and obtain permission from local authorities for the LI’s to carry out work. This is very positive. However, the LI’s are only able to work in a low key fashion, moving quietly and unobtrusively from city to village and between villages. At one point it was not possible for the international manager to visit the LI’s in the field because it would draw undue attention to the program and possibly jeopardized the work, and the safety of the LI’s.
### 7.3 Careful, timely evaluations

The LI program is an initiative that is taking place on the ground, and building the foundation for solid community based livestock projects. This takes time. The approach FAO livestock is taking is to build the capacity of the project to implement livestock activities with communities, through a comprehensive training program for field staff. It also takes time and patience to build an ongoing dialogue with a community - this requires frequent visits to discuss problems and plan projects. Yet without this relationship it very difficult to develop sustainable projects. Gender issues must be considered within this context. Developing projects that challenge the gender status quo and increase the status of women in particular cannot be done over night or in a few months. There is a danger of rushing in and evaluating the “gender sensitivity” or “gender impact” of a project at a field level too soon. Gender is particularly sensitive in Afghanistan. If we go in prematurely and start asking village men and women how the livestock project (for example) has affected the status of women, we could unwittingly undo all the careful ground work and challenges that have taken place. We might then find ourselves face to face with a cultural or political gender wall.

The experience of the male Piham initiators and vets has been that even though they carry out gender analysis with male farmers, the subject has to be approached extremely carefully and sensitively. It is not appropriate, traditionally in many parts of Afghanistan, for men to discuss their women with other men, even if it is only about who does what work concerning livestock keeping. And yet the Piham initiators have succeeded in having these discussions because they have carefully built up a relationship with communities over time, and they approach the issue sensitively.

So, while gender is a central issue for the FAO livestock project, and knowing how the project effects that gender relations between men and women is crucial, let us not unwittingly uproot the small seeds that have been sown by high profile evaluations too soon. These delicate seedbeds need careful nourishing and support.
8. **Role of the technical agencies in addressing gender issues.**

There is a need to clarify the role of technical projects like FAO livestock in challenging the status quo and the gender differences between men and women in Afghanistan. At the same time there is a need to clarify the role of other agencies like UNDP (e.g. the Resident Representative?), because there comes a point when we start to move into the realm of national and international politics, into which technical projects like FAO livestock cannot go.

FAO livestock is a technical project. The bottom line in addressing gender issues at a project level is:

- Gender issues are being addressed on a **practical** level - the project addresses livestock problems faced both by women and men in their traditional/existing roles. E.g. helping the farmer get more milk from her cow; increasing household income;

- Gender issues are being addressed at a **strategic** level. E.g. the farmer has better access to veterinary services for her animals; the male run VFU’s actively try to improve services to women farmers; gender issues in livestock development are addressed by each of the programs; the role of men and women in livestock keeping is discussed with men and women farmers.

It would assist in developing a unified gender policy for UNDP if we could clarify how far the technical projects can realistically go in addressing gender issues, and at what point we need to hand over to more senior levels in the UN.

**Glossary of terms**

- BVW  Basic Veterinary Worker
- FAO  Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- LI program  Livestock Initiators Program
- LI’s  Livestock Initiator’s
- LP program  Livestock Production Program
- VFU  Veterinary Field Unit