Focus: Gender and Equity

Highlight 2: Empowering New Veterinarians in Malawi to Incorporate Gender and Equity in Their Work

A4NH’s cross-cutting work on gender, equity, and empowerment moves beyond research on these issues in the context of agriculture, nutrition, and health to operationalizing this research, moving it out of theoretical discussions and into practice. To facilitate this capacity development, the Gender, Equity, and Empowerment unit is supporting each A4NH research flagship with funding and guidance needed to ensure gender and equity are incorporated in flagship work.

Drawing on this support, researchers from the International Livestock Research Institute working in the Food Safety flagship developed a training for veterinary students at Malawi’s University of Agriculture and Natural Resources on how to implement equity and gender into their work as new veterinarians. They worked closely with colleagues at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources to implement the training, which took place over two days. The training had four key objectives:

• introduce concepts of equity, gender, and empowerment;
• demonstrate ways in which (in)equity affects veterinary work;
• demonstrate how equity can be integrated in veterinary work; and
• give practical lessons on how to implement equity and gender in veterinary work.

As equity and equality are often misunderstood terms, and some aspects of equity are often overlooked, the training began with a quiz that invited each of the 12 trainees to share how they understand these issues, how gender, equity, and equality connect and relate to one another, and what other categories beyond gender might define people and determine their social standing. The discussion that followed was an opportunity for open exploration of these issues, while providing a chance to ensure everyone was operating from the same basic definitions.

Not only did participants discuss issues such as age, income, geography, ethnicity, and disability in the abstract, but they also considered practical implications of these categories, and the potential for people to be marginalized because of one or more of them, in the context of livestock ownership and other real-world scenarios where veterinarians may encounter inequities. They reflected on questions such as, are male and female practitioners affected the same way? What differences might be encountered between rural and urban areas? How are smallholders treated compared with commercial enterprises? They also explored whether veterinarians have a responsibility to get involved in these situations, what role they might have to play, and how inequity can be addressed in practical settings. While there were engaging discussions about the many aspects of equity, gender emerged as the key area where inequity was anticipated in every context discussed. With equity explicitly recognized as one of the objectives to be considered in research questions, participants then spent time developing ways to incorporate equity into their existing research proposals. As the proposals were already approved and funded, the students have a clear path forward to use their new knowledge for immediate impact.

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