

Engaging communities in participatory methods to identify and prioritise issues of concern to owners of working horses in Lesotho

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Introduction

In 2007, a UK-based equine charity established a training programme in Lesotho covering farriery, saddlery and equine nutrition skills. Lesotho is a small, independent country (population ca. 2.0 million) landlocked within South Africa (Fig 1). It lies entirely more than 1,400m above sea level and is one of the fifty poorest countries in the world. There are an estimated 75,000 horses and ponies, and 144,000 donkeys in Lesotho. **The aim of this study was to use a participatory approach to identify and prioritise the equine issues that were of most concern to owners of working horses in Lesotho.**



Figure 1: Lesotho is an independent country landlocked within the Republic of South Africa

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to;

- (1) create local horse owner discussion groups;
- (2) create community maps of the areas covered by owner discussion groups;
- (3) facilitate discussion by owners of issues relating to horses;
- (4) enable owners to rank these issues in order of priority so that future educational interventions could be targeted at those topics deemed most important by owners.



Figure 2: Lesotho horse owners were invited to join a participatory discussion

Methods

Drawing on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques, three one-day participatory workshops for horse owners were organised in three different geographic locations (Mafeteng, Matsieng and Malealea). Owners worked together to create a map of their local area (Fig 4), sketched out on the ground, using locally available materials such as bottle tops, small stones and maize cobs. Features incorporated in the map included roads/tracks, rivers and water sources, location of villages, number of horses in each village and availability of horse related services, such as a farrier, saddler and equine health advice/drugs. Each participant also identified the location of their own home on the constructed map.

As the map was created, owners were encouraged to identify and discuss issues (Figs 2 and 3) associated with owning horses (such as available grazing areas and challenges related to nutrition). These issues were then ranked in order of their relative importance, using a matrix, also drawn on the ground (Fig 5). Issues were written onto cards and then compared against each other in the matrix to identify which was the more important. Owners themselves decided and agreed on the issues and the criteria for their discussion thereby enabling owners to determine those which they perceived as having the greatest impact on horse health and welfare. At the end of the ranking exercise, the number of times each issue had been selected as the priority issue was summed to calculate overall scores for each issue and thereby create a summary ranking scheme.



Figure 3: Lesotho owners gather to discuss issues associated with horses



Figure 4: Lesotho horse owner discussion group creating a local resource map



Figure 5: Lesotho horse owner discussion group ranking priority issues

Table 1: Mafeteng horse owners' issue ranking

Ranking	Issue
1	Mouth problems
2=	Nutrition problems/hunger
2=	Infectious disease
4=	Foot problems
4=	Parasites

Table 2: Matsieng horse owners' issue ranking

Ranking	Issue
1	Mouth problems
2	Disease
3	Nutrition problems/hunger
4	Horse husbandry
5	Foot problems

Table 3: Malealea horse owners' issue ranking

Ranking	Issue
1	Mouth problems
2	Nutrition problems/hunger
3	Disease
4	Foot problems
5	Horse husbandry

Results

In the Mafeteng area, 26 owners attended the discussion group and created a local map showing three villages, with 62 horses. In the Matsieng area, 14 owners attended, creating a local map with ten villages, containing 60 horses. In the Malealea area, where 16 owners attended, a local map incorporating 15 villages covering 163 horses was drawn.

Topics prioritised by each group are shown in tables 1-3. For purposes of aggregation, for each group, issue rankings were converted into scores, taking account of variations in issue definition between groups. Aggregated ranking scores are shown in table 4.

All three discussion groups expressed interest in convening follow up meetings to further explore the issues identified. Participants requested support in the form of learning materials that could help them address the problems and concerns discussed in these initial meetings.

Table 4: Aggregation of results of three participatory owner discussion groups

Category ranked	Discussion group			Total	Rank
	Mafeteng	Matsieng	Malealea		
Mouth	5	5	5	15	1st
Disease (including infectious disease and endo/ectoparasites)	3.5+1.5	4	3	12	2nd
Nutrition	3.5	3	4	10.5	3rd
Feet problems	1.5	1	2	4.5	4th
Husbandry (including tack-associated wounds)	-	2	1	3	5th

Discussion and conclusions

Whilst there was considerable overlap between groups in the issues identified by owners, priorities did vary somewhat between locations. There is a clear need for owner education on a broad range of topics. Further owner group discussions could refine the scope of topics to be incorporated in learning materials and lead to the establishment of ongoing 'learning communities' whereby horse owners continue to discuss issues and enact locally generated solutions to problems they have identified.