

## **Impact Report**

### **The role of this project**

S.H.E.E.P. (Sheep Health and Economic Empowerment Programme) is a livestock lending project administered and funded by Ghana Medical Help. To support the S.H.E.E.P. project, I carried out an LIA was carried out in the rural village of Goldema, in north-eastern Ghana in May and June 2023. This project sought to develop, pilot, and use new survey instruments to undertake a demographic and socio-economic study of the village population. These data will also be used for setting clear inclusion criteria for the second round of the project.

### **The S.H.E.E.P. Project: History and Structure**

Livestock lending projects involve donating pregnant livestock to households in a community. After the livestock produce a previously agreed number of offspring or have been bred for a previously agreed number of generations, families who received livestock return one of the offspring – usually a healthy, young, pregnant female – to the organisation. The returned livestock are then distributed to a new cohort of families in the village who didn't benefit in the first round of donations. The key benefit of this project structure is its sustainability: if the livestock reproduce at a sufficient rate, the project is self-sustaining, and can grow far beyond the initial group of beneficiaries.

GMH began its first livestock lending project, S.H.E.E.P., in the rural village of Kadema in 2019, using a breed of sheep from Burkina Faso. These sheep are larger, more resistant to disease, and more economically productive than more common breeds of sheep in northern Ghana. In general, small ruminants such as sheep are very economically useful for rural households in northern Ghana. While almost all households farm some crops, and many rear fowl, fewer own larger animals. Rearing small ruminants like sheep and goats is not only economically beneficial through the sale of their meat – they also function as a way to save for large or unexpected expenditures (Adams et al., 2021). This is particularly important in an environment where access to traditional financial markets is non-existent. Livestock also offer a variety of non-pecuniary benefits, through the use of their manure as fertiliser and through their effect on soil erosion. The project also aims to empower women in the village, as primary responsibility for the sheep and for project participation rests on the female head of the household. Once a sheep is returned to GMH, the remaining sheep become the property of the female head of the household. This provides women with some independence in the management of resources in their household. Finally, the project was combined with public health information workshops open to the whole village, meaning it provided an educational benefit both to participants and the wider community. Due to difficulties associated with disease among the sheep and the covid-19 pandemic, this project never reached the first round of re-distribution. The S.H.E.E.P. project is now being trialled again in the neighbouring village of Goldema.

### **The current project**

Sheep were delivered to families in Goldema in September 2023. After the pregnant female sheep has given birth to two lambs, one of the lambs will be released back to GMH for distribution to another beneficiary. The livestock lending part of the project will be combined with workshops on public health and veterinary care – one such workshop has already taken place. There is also improved access to veterinary care, as the project team includes a veterinary doctor and beneficiaries will work along with the project team to ensure that sheep are vaccinated on the necessary schedule. For further care of the sheep, a dipping pond and shelter will be constructed at the home of the project local leader and village sub-chief, Nab Emmanuel Akaateba. Finally, a savings group has been established among the project beneficiaries to prepare for emergency expenditure in the future.

## Methods

The main component of the LIA project was the development and use of two survey instruments. The first was used to interview the group of confirmed beneficiaries who received sheep in the first lending round. The second survey was an abridged version of the first survey, intended to gather data from a larger sample of households who were not included in the first round of lending. The surveys were developed in English, and translated to Buli, the local language. This data will be used to supplement the in-depth surveys in describing the community and characterising the level of need in the village. A combined dataset of both surveys will be used to develop well-defined assessment criteria for inclusion in future rounds of the programme.

The in-depth beneficiary surveys consisted of twenty-five structured interviews. The sample was provided by the Goldema village sub-chief, and participants were visited at their home. The abridged survey consisted of fifty-five structured interviews. Again, a sample of interested households in the village was provided by the village sub-chief, and participants were interviewed at their home. For all questions, the respondent was the female head of the household.

The continued success of the project is dependent primarily on the health of the flock of sheep. This has been the focus of most of the updates to the project structure and should improve the sustainability and long-term impact of the project. However, other challenges include monitoring and impact assessment. The flock's size and reproductive health will be monitored quarterly, socio-economic indicators will be measured on a regular basis to assess areas of progress for the participants, and participants will be interviewed to ascertain their thoughts and feedback on the programme. The data collected and presented in this preliminary report will be used to inform a more complete analysis and to inform clear inclusion criteria for the future expansion of the project.

## Reflective Report

My experiences in the Laidlaw programme have helped me to develop my understanding of leadership. When I joined the programme, I knew that leadership was important, but I didn't understand just how useful it would be to regularly reflect on developing my leadership skills. I thought that because I was interested mostly in working as an academic, that the main skills I needed were technical in nature – skills such as sociological analysis, quantitative methods, and being able to understand and critically engage with the literature. Of course, I understood that teamwork is important in any professional setting, but I didn't quite understand the benefits of great leadership.



Figure 1 – Goldema, Builsa North, Upper East Region, Ghana

Having completed the Laidlaw programme, my understanding of the importance of leadership is now much better developed. I understand leadership as taking the initiative to do something and working with others to get it done – this sounds simple, but the drive, determination, skills, and experience needed to take on this challenge are significant. Practicing leadership has its own unique suite of skills that are mostly similar across disciplines and purposes, and which can only be truly learned through experience. However, reflection and discussion, especially with people on different paths, helps to learn these lessons quicker. It's easy to get caught up in the specific challenges of your own tasks while losing sight of the more general skills and techniques that makes a leader successful. This is part of what made our LEAD workshops so successful. These workshops with our fellow scholars were always informative and inspiring, in no small part because of the diversity of scholars in our cohort. Both of my projects were based on social science research, but it was always invaluable to hear from scholars studying science, medicine, languages, or engineering, and working on a diverse range of issues. While their experiences were not superficially similar to mine, often you can learn even more from people in different fields.

While LEAD workshops were a highlight of my Laidlaw programme, leadership development can only occur with practice and experience. Through working on my research project and my LIA, I have developed my leadership skills in a variety of ways. For instance, one important skill I have learned is the importance of not only setting goals, creating a schedule, but allowing flexibility and changes where necessary. For instance, one challenge I found on my research project was my difficulty in setting a robust schedule. In my LIA, I instead approached scheduling and setting goals with a greater degree of flexibility. Indeed, halfway through the project, in a meeting with GMH staff and after some consideration, I made the decision to change the structure of the research and alter the schedule – the original timeline had in fact underestimated the rate at which our team was able to collect data, but the project structure as it existed had changed significantly enough to warrant a new overall plan for the research.

My experiences from Laidlaw will be invaluable in helping me to achieve my future goals. These include applying to and completing a master's degree, most likely abroad, completing my dissertation, achieving high grades on my final modules, and successfully leading and publishing an undergraduate journal of sociology and politics. All of these tasks require elements of leadership, whether it involves managing deadlines, communicating with others, or working in an unfamiliar environment. Being a Laidlaw scholar has been one of the highlights of my time at college, and has helped me to both achieve my goals and have a positive social impact – and I believe it will continue to do so in the future.

## References:

Adams, F., Ohene-Yankyera, K., Aidoo, R., & Wongnaa, C. A. (2021). Economic benefits of livestock management in Ghana. *Agricultural and Food Economics*, 9(1), 17.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-021-00191-7>