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# The role of livestock in African agriculture

In sub-Saharan Africa, hardly any smallholder farmer is without livestock. Projected growth in demand of animal products offers livestock-dependent poor new options but at the same time new challenges as they might not be able to cope with the high quality standards required by the national and international agro-industries and retailers. National livestock policies must particularly take the small-scale farmers' needs into account, such as a functioning animal health system.

Livestock production contributes about 35 percent to the agricultural Gross Domestic Product in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA); if non-food products and services were added, this share would even be higher. Livestock contributes significantly to increased food supply and nutritional security, serves as a source of

income and a means for capital accumulation, generates employment and supplies inputs and services for crop production. Livestock is also an important source of raw material for the agro-industry sector. Further, non-market exchanges of livestock represent an important factor for social integration. The large variety of animal breeds reared in the continent is also a very important source of genetic pools and a relevant contribution to biodiversity conservation.

From a socio-cultural perspective, there is hardly any smallholder family which does not have some livestock in

SSA, and studies around the continent have demonstrated that smallholders' capacity for innovation and risk-taking is correlated with livestock keeping and it is the greatest anthropogenic use of Africa's land surface area. For most smallholder farmers in Africa, livestock represent the only asset that can be converted into cash – a truly indispensable source of economic opportunity. Generations of pastoralist producers have demonstrated that livestock production is probably the most viable economic activity for these territories because of pastoralist ability to adapt to and exploit an unpredictable environment. Pastoral systems

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are characterised by a high degree of mobility, guided by the need for managed access to water and grazing land, often without regard to state borders.

### ■ Challenges and opportunities

There has been a huge increase in the demand for animal products due to the combined effect of population expansion, the tremendous rate of urban growth, changes in lifestyles and increasing household incomes. Projected growth in per capita consumption of animal products is generally above that predicted for consumption of other food items, offering opportunities to improve the incomes and livelihoods of the livestock-dependent poor. This growth in demand for animal products can be met largely by in-country and/or in-continent production which is one of the few opportunities to improve livelihoods among the poor, many of whom are animal keepers.

These trends present real opportunities for poor animal keepers, but also present challenges. Questions arise whether

- the poor will not be sidelined in the competition to satisfy growing demand for safer animal products;

- a reduction of government involvement in the provision of animal health services will threaten small-scale producers who cannot comply with more stringent public standards and private standards increasingly required by large agro-industries and retailers;

- poorly developed access to technology and other services, access rights to land, water and high value marketing chains will become insurmountable barriers to improving animal production at the level of small-scale producers. Apart from the impact of the export subsidies and dumping practices, that have heavily affected the African livestock sector in the last decades, but are likely to be phased over the coming years, African producers may be destabilised by world animal-product market leaders like South American countries, New Zealand and Australia.

International standards governing the global livestock trade currently focus on the geographical origin of a product, and the disease status of that region. This favours developed countries that have eradicated significant livestock diseases, have maintained effective veterinary services and have continued to assist the livestock sector

with investments, targeted research and subsidy. Countries or regions with transboundary animal diseases have little chance of fully eradicating these diseases in the near future, implying fewer options for accessing lucrative international markets.

Across Africa, the ability to tap into new market opportunities is often erratic, unsystematic and inadequate, while often concentrated on the supply of raw livestock commodities with limited value addition. This is the consequence of a lack of investments in co-ordination, particularly at regional levels, and, frequently, of poor market intelligence. Finally Africa has been poor at negotiating trade standards with international bodies such as the World Animal Health Organization, Codex Alimentarius Commission of the World Trade Organization and large trading blocks, especially the European Union.

### ■ Rethinking livestock development for SSA

Agricultural history tells us that livestock development in Europe and North America was not primarily hampered by technological constraints but farmers were willing and able to adopt existing technologies once an enabling policy and institutional environment were in place. This enabling environment is influenced by economic and institutional factors that are beyond the households' immediate control. Thus, in order to reverse the negative trends of livestock development in SSA, major institutional and policy reforms are

*International standards and the disease status of a region govern the global livestock trade; for many African producers these constitute insurmountable obstacles to accessing world markets.*

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*Most national African policies fail to appreciate the role of livestock in poverty reduction.*

required at national, regional and pan-African levels.

Strategies to meet the challenge of an annual 4.2 percent growth rate of the livestock sub-sector would have to focus on the higher potential regions of Africa, that is, the semi-arid, sub-humid and highland zones, by enhancing the role of livestock in the agricultural intensification process, and promotion of market-based livestock development. Private and public investments in value adding activities, such as processing and branding of animal commodities, are equally important to stimulate livestock growth, employment and better utilisation of livestock products and by-products.

Development of these broad strategies would require strengthened policy analysis, planning and implementation capacities both at national and regional levels, to ensure effective delivery of different programmes identified and therefore increased public investment into the sector of at least 3 percent of the total budget.

### ■ Combining livestock production and poverty reduction

Most national policy documents fail to appreciate the role of livestock in poverty reduction; in particular, they treat livestock production and poverty reduction disjointedly, and implicitly assume that the overall objective for the sub-sector is to increase meat and milk production, rather than mitigating poverty through livestock production. Policies aimed at increasing production, however, do not necessarily benefit the poor livestock keepers who are an extremely heterogeneous group and often, being extremely poor, max-



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imise a survival rather than a production function.

Poor livestock keepers could benefit from the projected high demand in animal products if robust livestock policies are developed to target the following:

#### 1. Access to natural resources

- Secure an adequate access to land, water and pasture for animals. Inadequate access to land and lack of feed and forage are the main developmental constraints for poor livestock producers and there is a growing conflict between pastoralist and settled farmers.

- Climate change and adaptation options: Recognising the short and long-term impacts of climate variability and climate change on livestock production, adaptation planning should take into account both the need to increase the current ability of pastoral communities to cope with the impacts of extremes

as well as the need to conserve and improve the resilience of pastureland.

- Maintaining and sustaining pastoral mobility: In areas where the quantity and quality of rainfall, pasture and water resources vary considerably from one season to the next, mobility is essential for animals to access fodder and water where they exist. It enhances complementarity between pastoral and agricultural systems. Pastoralists and farmers in the Sahel have traditionally benefited from reciprocal arrangements: transhumant herds manure farmers' fields; farmers' livestock are raised in neighbouring pastoral areas; pastoral herds are often the main source of traction animals. Carefully negotiated livestock movements make these connections possible.

#### 2. Improving production, productivity and value addition and branding

- Securing access to veterinary services.

- Investment in biotechnology: recent advances in agricultural biotechnology have resulted in improved research leading to increased pest and disease resistance in livestock, new, refined diagnostics and vaccines for livestock diseases, genetic improvement and animal feeds and nutrition.
- Securing access to financial services and other inputs.

### 3. Enhancing competitiveness of the livestock sector (support and expand livestock markets)

- Promoting provision of livestock-based public goods: this includes food safety, environmental protection, public regulation and management of disease surveillance; veterinary services; quality control; food safety regulations.
- Promoting the establishment of livestock producer's organisations at local, national and regional level, which is extremely essential to provide small-scale producers with access to services and to high-value market chains. The inclusion of association in policy formulation will ensure the formulation of well-targeted and robust policies.

- Stimulating participation of small farmers into a value-adding chain. Empowering small-scale producers requires availing accessible credit, and the provision of well-targeted technical and marketing supports.
- Trade with an acceptable level of risk.

One important alternative is for international standards to adopt a 'commodity-based' approach. Commodity-based trade (CBT) focuses on the quality of each product and how it was produced and processed, rather than the origin of the product. Such an approach would not undermine disease control and eradication measures, as countries would actually have greater incentives to strengthen veterinary services and improve disease control. Currently, such commodity standards are almost non-existent.

Adoption of CBT would preferentially benefit poor livestock producers and also strengthen the propensity to invest as lessening the requirement for proof of geographic freedom from transboundary animal diseases (TADs) would increase market access for food supply chains that are presently under-represented in regional markets because

of the presence of TADs but which have potential for significant growth.

Alternatively, African countries are required to invest in developing regional standards that could be mutually recognised under the "equivalent" principle of the WTO-SPS agreement. Although developing standards is a capital and science intensive process that requires massive investment and commitment from governments, the returns to be realised, in the form of exports proceeds, are worthwhile.

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### ■ Conclusion

The contribution of the livestock sector to food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable economic growth will be improved with renewed commitments from governments and a review of international standard-setting policies, especially where trade and markets are concerned. If this is done, then huge potentials could open up for Africa, particularly in regions like southern and eastern Africa, with potentials for attracting new markets and trading partners, the in-flow of private investment for new production technologies and the provision of ethically produced and sourced foods to niche markets.

### Zusammenfassung

Die Tierproduktion hat einen Anteil von 35 Prozent am landwirtschaftlichen Bruttoinlandsprodukt der Länder Subsahara-Afrikas. Der erwartete Anstieg im Verbrauch tierischer Erzeugnisse bietet gute Chancen, die Einkommenssituation der von der Tierhaltung abhängigen armen Haushalte zu verbessern. Gleichzeitig stehen jedoch die armen Tierhalter vor zahlreichen Herausforderungen. Werden die Armen im Wettbewerb zur Deckung der wachsenden Nachfrage nach sicheren tierischen Produkten nicht an den Rand gedrängt? Wird ein geringeres Engagement des Staates bei der Bereitstellung von Tiergesundheitsdiensten das Überleben der Kleinerzeuger gefährden? Und werden die armen Produzenten in der Lage sein, die strenger werdenden Qualitätsnormen der Agrarindustrie und Händler zu erfüllen? Werden

der beschränkte Zugang zu Land, Wasser, Technologie und starken Vermarktungsketten zu unüberwindlichen Hindernissen bei der Verbesserung der kleinbäuerlichen Tierproduktion? Eine tragfähige Politik im Tierhaltungs-Sektor ist nötig, um den Zugang zu den natürlichen Ressourcen zu gewährleisten, Produktion und Produktivität zu steigern, Mehrwert und Markenpolitik zu fördern und die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit des Viehzuchtsektors zu stärken.

### Resumen

La crianza de ganado contribuye con un 35 por ciento al PIB agrícola en el África subsahariana. El crecimiento proyectado del consumo de productos animales ofrece oportunidades para mejorar los ingresos de los pobres dependientes de la crianza de ganado. Al mismo tiempo, los ganaderos pobres afrontan diversos desafíos: ¿Será po-

sible que los pobres terminen siendo marginados de la competencia para satisfacer la creciente demanda de productos animales más seguros? ¿Si disminuye el apoyo del gobierno a los servicios de salud animal, se verán amenazados los productores a pequeña escala? ¿Podrán los productores pobres cumplir con los estándares de calidad más exigentes requeridos por la agroindustria y los comerciantes minoristas? ¿Será posible que el acceso limitado a la tierra, el agua y la tecnología y las cadenas de comercialización de alto valor agregado se conviertan en un obstáculo infranqueable para mejorar la producción ganadera a pequeña escala? Se necesita una sólida política ganadera para proveer acceso a los recursos naturales, aumentar la producción, la productividad, el valor agregado y el reconocimiento de marca, y mejorar la competitividad del sector ganadero.