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Driving Factors for Animal Husbandry in Communal Areas of Namibia and South Africa — First Empirical Results

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Abstract

In an environment where cropping is restricted by low and erratic rainfall, animal husbandry can contribute to food security. Animal functions utilized in traditional pastoral systems are generally storage of wealth, regular output and status display. A well-managed mobile system does not harm the environment. In southern Africa, abrupt and ongoing changes in political, social and economic frame conditions limit the opportunities for continuous adaptation, and, as a consequence, non-controlled livestock systems are more likely to threaten the environment. Little is known about the characteristics, functions and impact of recent stationary animal production systems in communal areas of Namibia and South Africa. Embedded within the Biodiversity Monitoring Transect Analysis in Africa (BIOTA project), this study aims at contributing insights into livestock systems relevant to the analysis of the environmental gradient. Three communities were selected along a transect reaching from the Okavango River to Cape Town and household surveys were conducted. The communal use of the range started in all cases relatively recently because of land allocations in the last 3 to 30 years. The ecological conditions, the historical development, the prevalent ethnic group, and the rights and agreements for use and access differed. Several livelihood combinations of crops with small or large stock have evolved, as well as varying dependency on income from livestock. Trade with animals ranged from reluctance to sales, even when forage was scarce, to a commercially oriented way of stock keeping. Off-farm incomes, generated via absenteeism and governmental transfer payments, were crucial for the living of several households. First results of the importance of explanatory variables for the differences in husbandry characteristics will be presented in the full paper.

Keywords: Communal land use, household survey, livestock systems, Namibia