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A Methodology to Identify the Role of Local Institutions in Livestock Breed Development — A Case Study from West Africa

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Abstract

Animal breeding activities have an important social dimension and depend to a large extent on institutional and human capacities to coordinate and interact. Despite the highly advanced institutional environment that is known to have considerably contributed to the impressive productivity increases in the North, the social characteristics of local animal breeding systems in the South have rarely received attention in research and development for breed improvement. Effective livestock development and breed improvement strategies for better animal genetic resource management are increasingly required. Methods need to be made available that enable outsiders of diverse professional background to gain better insights into traditional breeding systems and their respective institutions to facilitate the cooperation with livestock owners and other stakeholders.

A methodological approach based on an action-oriented analysis of local institutions was developed for the systematic assessment and evaluation of the institutional and organisational environment in which livestock breeding activities are carried out. Emphasis is put on local level institutions and organisations and the existing local knowledge base. Participatory tools are used that enable the livestock keeping communities to analyse their situation. As part of a larger study, a sub-sample of cattle herd owners from 13 villages in The Gambia described the relative importance of institutions, their functions and the degree of interaction among individuals, the community and the institutions and organisations relevant to their cattle enterprise. The analytical process was assisted through visualization by depicting the institutions, organizations and their linkages in diagrams. Key-informant interviews were additionally held with other stakeholders.

The methodology produced extremely relevant information directing a breed development intervention. The intervention must respond to the considerable demand for certified quality male breeding stock and adverse effects of intense competition among cattle herd owners. Information is usually not shared among herd owners and breeding knowledge only passed on within the larger families. A considerable share of program resources has to be invested in strengthening local institutions and breeders' associations, as few traditional institutions were perceived to function well.

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