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Dairy Cattle for Poverty Alleviation in Southern Tanzania

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Abstract

In the past half-century, various ways of increasing dairy production have been tried in Tanzania, with the “Heifer in Trust” (HIT) scheme being the most successful. A group of farmers receives a small number of exotic dairy heifers (mostly Holstein-Friesian crosses) and distributes the animals to individual families. Farmers are obliged to keep the cows indoors, are advised to make compost with the manure, and have to repay two calves per heifer received: one to the group to be passed on to another group member and one to the project to cover expenses. A recent study in the southern highlands of Tanzania examined the effectiveness of this approach in alleviating poverty.

In the highlands, high-grade dairy animals can produce 5000 l of milk/lactation or more if they receive adequate amounts of concentrates; at lower elevations with higher disease pressure, lower-grade animals fare better. Income from milk sales helped the smallholder families to acquire additional land, improve their houses (and cattle sheds), finance small-scale businesses, send children to secondary school, and expand the dairy business. Manure helped double the maize yield and improve yields of cash crops (tomatoes, bananas). Keeping dairy cattle stimulated farmers to drill shallow wells. Partnership between spouses has reportedly improved through the loan agreement. Families that barely managed to survive six years ago are now considered wealthy. Milk marketing is presently not a problem, although it may need attention in future.

However, only 2–3 % of households in any village are reached by the HIT scheme and its success depends on good functioning of the farmers’ groups. Whereas some groups could increase dairy cattle keeping from initially 5 to 25 households within six years, other groups stagnated or failed. It was also found that the project has reached mostly the moderately poor and able-bodied people and that dairy production is most successful in peri-urban areas.

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