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Endogenous Development of Pastoral and Livestock Communities in Nigeria: Role of Research

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Abstract

Extensive pastoral production occurs in some 65 % of Africa's drylands. It provides 10 % of the world's meat production and supports some 200 million pastoral households keeping nearly a billion head of ruminants. Smallholder livestock remains critical to millions of people living in poverty. In West Africa, some 30 million pastoralists apply a variety of production strategies, including husbandry and health practices, feeding and marketing strategies. In many parts of Africa pastoralists have maintained indigenous animal breeds of varying gene pool that are well adapted to harsh environments. Their production systems are still widely informed by indigenous knowledge and practices, which span several generations. However, pastoralism is increasingly under pressure due to increasing and varied demand for livestock products. The need to expand and adapt has, therefore, become imperative. Following scientific verification of some common pastoral production practices and techniques through applied research, viable aspects of traditional practices could be incorporated into modern scientific techniques and systems for improved production. Applied research aims at providing good understanding of the nature and dynamism of production systems from which appropriate policy and institutional changes required to positively influence livestock production would emerge. This research orientation is a departure from the usual research activities that are often geared towards the production of peer-reviewed publications that are often required for professional mobility of research officers. Applied research cum community-led development initiatives, rather than injection of values and ideas alien to the community, stands better chance of impacting positively on the livelihoods of producers, as producers exercise greater control over their destiny with minimal external input. The paper draws on results of recent applied research in pastoral communities in Nigeria. It documents and classifies various livestock health delivery and production systems with practical relevance to improved production in pastoral communities. The research results have had positive influence on government policy of integrating traditional practices and technologies into scientific procedures of animal health and production.

Keywords: African pastoralist, applied research, endogenous livestock development, production systems