



Tropentag, October 11-13, 2006, Bonn

“Prosperity and Poverty in a Globalised World—
Challenges for Agricultural Research”

Farmers’ Preferences of Phenotypic Traits in Cattle Production and Marketing: A Case Study in Central Ethiopia

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Abstract

Production and marketing decisions in the semi-subsistence cattle keeping systems of Ethiopia are principally influenced by farmers’ preferences of cattle phenotypic traits. Eliciting the preferences and quantifying the economic worth of these characteristics would reinforce efforts in the production, marketing, and sustainable conservation and use of animal genetic resources (AnGR). This study focused at understanding what farmers and farmer-buyers’ preferences are regarding the cattle they want to buy and/or keep or sell. The research was conducted in and around Dano district of Central Ethiopia both on farm and in the cattle markets. Farmers, as cattle keepers, identified age, origin, and suitability for ploughing for oxen/bulls and age, fertility, origin of the animal, and calf strength for cows/heifers as the most important traits. As cattle buyers, farmers selected age, suitability for ploughing, origin of the animal, and calf strength for oxen/bulls and age, origin, milk yield and calf strength for cows/heifers as the crucial traits in their buying decisions. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients showed that covariations of farmer rankings are strong and mainly occur along the upward slant. The research verified the fact that farmers have age-old mechanisms of identifying and ranking their trait preferences in a consistent and meaningful manner. The identification of these trait preferences implies that decisions for genetic improvement and conservation of indigenous cattle in these production systems should be based on comprehensive understanding not only of the relative importance attached to each phenotypic trait but also of the ways in which cattle keepers and consumers measure these traits.

Keywords: Cattle buyers, Cattle keepers, Covariation, Dano, Trait preferences