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## West African Dwarf Goat Production under Village Conditions: 1. Characterisation and the Establishment of Breed Standards

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### Abstract

The role of small ruminants in poverty alleviation and their contribution to sustainable livelihoods especially in rural areas have been demonstrated by several R&D programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Proposals have been made for the evolution of purebreeding schemes for the conservation of the genetic pool which the WAD goat represents. A crucial starting point however, is the characterisation and the establishment of breed standards for WAD goats under village conditions. So far, there has been little progress in this regard on account of the difficulties in establishing on-farm data recording schemes. Also, comprehensive studies relating to the within breed diversity among WAD goats are rare. Such studies will show details about performance and morphometric characteristics of WAD goats in their native environment. All these represent vital information needed for breed characterisation and the establishment of breed standards. A conceptual framework for the attainment of these objectives is presented, with illustrations drawn from an ongoing R&D project involving WAD goats. The framework is hinged on on-farm livestock performance recording systems. Project inception embraced awareness campaigns and sensitisation of farmer groups, where the scope and rationale for the studies are discussed. Pilot villages are randomly selected from different ecozones where WAD goats are raised in Southwestern Nigeria. Research methodology involved structured household interviews combined with fortnightly visits and the establishment of on-farm recording schemes. Data on performance, morphometric and qualitative traits at all ages are recorded. Direct observations and documentation of all aspects of the rural setting relating to the raising of WAD goats — farming systems and feed resources - are documented. With data accumulation, computer databases are created for data management, analysis, interpretation/information retrieval. Analysis of data helps to derive productivity indices under village conditions. The framework involves some feedback mechanism to provide farmers with innovative techniques in goat management and simple selection schemes within each village. Overall, the framework will facilitate the design of appropriate genetic improvement measures geared towards boosting the productivity of WAD goats under smallholder units.

**Keywords:** Breed standards, characterisation, livelihood, on-farm, west African Dwarf goat