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## Livelihoods of Smallholders in South Kivu Depend on Small Livestock: The Case of the “cobaye”

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### Abstract

An assessment of livestock production in the South Kivu province of DR Congo, employing a rapid diagnostic survey (in June 2009 and February 2010) and a participatory rural appraisal (PRA; in March 2010), revealed that more participants held non-ruminant (monogastric) animals than ruminants. The survey and PRA included overall about 300 participants from eight so-called “groupements”, comprising 24 villages. Two thirds of interviewees held chicken, while more than half of them had “cobaye” and/or swine. As the frequency of cobaye (i.e. guinea pig) was rather unexpected, the importance of this species for the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the region has been emphasised when analysing the data gathered. A thorough literature review on cobaye as a domestic animal was also performed.

Usually, cobayes are kept in the kitchen. Herd numbers held by roughly one third each of respondents was 1–4 animals, 5–10, and 11 to >20. Animals are fed on kitchen wastes and collected forages. The latter include grasses and herbs like *Galinsoga parviflora* and *Bidens pilosa*. Cobayes are predominantly raised by children and women, both of which are also responsible to gather their forage at field- or roadsides.

When assessing wealth classes during the PRA in two groupements, cobayes were associated with poverty, regardless of the gender group. Possessing cobayes was not a criterion of asset ownership regarding animal wealth classification. When in large number, about 25, cobayes were said to be exchanged at the market for other animals, basically swine and chickens.

Typical rural households comprise 8–10 members. Meat will only be consumed once or twice a month. Cobayes are used for meat supply for the family, but also for paying the children’s school fees. A cobaye may fetch about 1–2 US\$ in the market, while fees are about 2–3 US\$/month/child for primary and 5–10 US\$ for secondary school.

A considerable number of advantages for raising cobaye by smallholders in South Kivu has been identified; among them are its rapid reproduction cycle, its lack of competition for human food and, in case of looting, its potential to either be hidden or recover its population fairly quickly.

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