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“Development on the margin”

Assessing the Importance of Livestock for the Livelihoods of Rural People in South Kivu, DR Congo

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Abstract

Agriculture in the South Kivu province of DR Congo has traditionally been characterised by mixed crop-livestock production systems. Since time immemorial, the Kivu highlands have been covered by grasslands that have been maintained by repeated burning. These areas provided feed for cattle in transhumance systems. However, the population of large livestock has dramatically decreased since the wars in the mid 1990s. A recent study revealed that, on average, livestock farmers own 3.8 cattle, 8.0 poultry, 2.7 swine, 7.1 cavies and/or 3.8 rabbits as livestock assets, being raised on a small piece of pasture land of about 0.06 ha.

To assess agricultural activities emphasising livestock production, a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) has been conducted in two locations. Miti is located 25 km North of Bukavu at 1700 m asl., whereas Tubimbi is at 77 km Southwest of Bukavu, at 1100 m asl. Focus group meetings were held with overall 85 in Miti and 80 participants in Tubimbi. Villages were mapped, resource flow was depicted, seasonal calendars were developed, daily gender activities were recorded and a wealth classification was performed to identify the importance of livestock. In Miti, 70 % of participants and 95 % in Tubimbi stated to hold any kind of livestock. While large livestock like cattle have lost importance, obviously small ruminants and monogastrics have filled the gap. In Tubimbi, aquaculture was also important, and people rely on gold mining to sustain their livelihoods.

Most problems of livestock husbandry reported were related to diseases and robbery, while the need for improved forages was less in the villagers' minds. When ranking general wealth classes, livestock played an important role in both locations. However, only owning large animals like cattle (together with land) and, to some extent, goats was regarded as an asset, whereas small livestock species like rabbits and cavies were clearly associated with poor and very poor population groups. Livestock sales are used to cover necessary expenses such as medicine or school fees. Resource flows are more intense in Miti and its vicinity than in Tubimbi due to lack of infrastructure and insecurity. However, current livestock production cannot satisfy the demand.

Keywords: Food security, livelihood, livestock, monogastric, tropical forages