



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2013, Stuttgart-Hohenheim  
“Agricultural development within the rural-urban continuum”

## Pastoralists’ Perceptions on Local Innovations

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### Abstract

In the past decades, many top-down approaches aimed at introducing innovations into pastoral systems have failed due to the lack of sensitivity towards context-specific pastoral production where changes in production must fit a combination of particular and specific environmental, socio-cultural and economic conditions. Local innovations, on the other hand, respond to specific problematic situations experienced by the respective innovators. Spreading such local innovations through pastoralist-to-pastoralist exchange sessions offers an opportunity to study how other pastoralists view these innovations with regard to their problem solving capacity, applicability within the respective production system and particular characteristics which may or may not render them beneficial.

The objective of this study was to gain a better understanding of pastoralists’ perceptions of applicability and usefulness towards local innovations. Pastoralist-to-pastoralist knowledge exchange sessions were conducted as the main source of data, namely the innovators’ presentations and participants’ questions. Eleven exchange sessions for five different local innovations (three technical innovations and two organisational innovations) were conducted and recorded. From the pool of participants, 33 individual follow-up interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires. All recordings were transcribed resulting in 198 pages of primary data. These transcriptions were then used to identify trait carriers and traits with subsequent “levels” of observation made by the pastoralists when evaluating the innovations. In addition, positive and negative aspects for the respective innovations were also identified.

When judging the applicability and usefulness of the technical innovations, pastoralists considered characteristics of innovations within the local context, such as availability of materials and ease and efficiency of their use. Comparisons were made between the innovators and their environments in relation to the participants’ along with cost/benefit assessments in relation to durability, accessibility, and labour required. For organisational innovations, characteristics considered were the roles that members must play within the group, the benefits they receive and how members’ duties are regulated. Cost/benefit assessments were made between contexts and the perception of possible member distrust against the innovations’ benefits.

**Keywords:** Agricultural knowledge and innovation systems, local innovations, local knowledge, pastoralism