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## Production Objectives, Trait and Breed Preferences of Cattle Keepers in Southern Mali

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### Abstract

In southern Mali, cattle play an important role to the livelihoods of many rural households. There, the endemic taurine N'Dama breed, the Sudanese Fulani Zebu breed as well as their crosses are raised. The present study characterises the specific functions these breed groups fulfil, as well as cattle keepers' trait and breed preferences.

A survey with 160 households keeping cattle in southern Mali was carried out between November and December 2012. The respondents were asked to rank reasons for keeping cattle based on a list of 9 predetermined production objectives; then to state the 3 most important traits they considered when selecting their breeding animal, to give the major weakness of each breed and to name their preferred breed with stated reason. Rank-means were calculated for the production objectives. Differences between production objectives were analysed based on a conditional logit model (SAS software PHREG procedure). To assess overall rank of traits, an index was calculated and frequencies were used to investigate breed preferences and weaknesses.

Draught power and savings were the most important functions of cattle. Large body size was reported as the most preferred trait followed by high fertility and traction ability. The major weaknesses were no tolerance to disease and feed shortage for Zebu and crossbred cattle, and difficulty to herd, small size and low selling price for N'Dama. Regarding overall breed preferences 35.0 %, 34.4 % and 30.6 % of cattle keepers preferred N'Dama, Zebu and crossbred, respectively. The main reported reasons for the stated breed preferences were disease resistance, low raising cost and tolerance to feed shortage for N'Dama cattle, high market price, high milk yield and large size for Zebu cattle and high market price, resistance to disease and large size for crossbred cattle.

The distribution of breed preferences indicates that all breeds have characteristic attributes which are appreciated by cattle keepers. In the context of climate change and poor development the comparative advantages of the endemic N'Dama breed are especially relevant for the prospects of its conservation and promotion.

**Keywords:** Breed preferences, Mali, N'Dama, production objectives, trait preferences, Zebu