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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Competitive Smallholder Livestock in Botswana: Results of a Livestock Value Chain Survey in Central District

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Abstract

Livestock production in Botswana is usually subdivided into commercial (fenced grazing areas) and traditional (communally grazed areas focused on borehole-centred cattle posts) farming. More than 80% of all cattle reared in Botswana (about 2.1 million heads) are bred in the traditional system. Although the smallholder or traditional farming system primarily involves cattle, it is likely that an even greater share of the country's small stock (sheep and goats) is also run in the traditional system.

Despite the aforementioned advantage, the smallholder livestock sector faces a big challenge in exploiting the growing national and regional demand for meat, as well as preferential access to the EU market. The incentives for value addition in pursuit of these markets appear to be limited. There is also limited evidence of innovation in the value chain, particularly for small stock. An observed result is that imported small stock meat is frequently seen on retail shelves around the country.

To identify, understand and utilise the potential benefit for value addition and poverty reduction in Botswana's livestock sector, the study explores the existing value chains in which livestock products are produced and traded. Producers, butchers, retailers, input suppliers and consumers from Central District were brought together for a workshop and individuals surveyed to assess the country's markets and interaction of value chain actors, the roles of key players, and the critical constraints that limit the growth and competitiveness of smallholder livestock production system. The survey results, among others, are:

- Producers' demographic makeup in the Central District is presented as: predominantly male and with little education; some two thirds under the age of 60; and some 90% are operating on unfenced land.
- Producers' market channel choices are influenced by lack of information and dysfunctional implementation of Livestock Identifications (LITS).
- Marketing is little guided by quality and consumer demand, with even retailers being poorly informed about consumer demand.
- Profitability of smallholder production is markedly different across scales of smallholder operation. However, this is not a simple relationship and is likely to be related to intensification as well as size.

Keywords: Botswana, competitiveness, livestock, smallholder, value chain