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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

The Influence of Rearing of Ruminant Animals on Livelihood Security in Witima Village, Kenya

MARGOT ROUX¹, NORMAN MARTIN CASAS², PETER WORM³, LAERKE ISABEL NORUP NIELSEN³,
NEGAR LATIFI³

¹*Agris Mundus, Sustainable Agriculture, Denmark*

²*University of Copenhagen, Agricultural Development, Denmark*

³*Roskilde University, Denmark*

Abstract

This study seeks to contribute to the unclear role that ruminant rearing plays in rural smallholder livelihood security. It is based on data collected during a two-week fieldwork in Witima village, Nyeri South district, in the Central Highlands of Kenya.

It is becoming increasingly important to examine the role that ruminants play in livelihood security in this setup, as the main economic activity, coffee, has suffered from years of poor performance, making farmers venturing into other farm enterprises such as dairy. The study uses the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which helps to provide an understanding of important assets and access modifiers relevant to the rearing of ruminants as part of smallholders' livelihood strategies.

This study finds that decreasing land sizes are limiting the possibilities of rearing large quantities of animals, however it also impels farmers to keep ruminants as the manure is needed for other farm enterprises kept alongside the animals. Furthermore, ruminants are kept as storage of wealth, which can then provide financial protection in times of crises. The study also finds that ruminant production is constrained by a lack of knowledge and the limited access to financial capital. This, together with a lack of farmers groups, limits the productivity of the ruminants kept, which consequently lowers the livelihood security gained. Therefore this report concludes that ruminants play an important role in the livelihood security of villagers, but there is a need to improve management and collective action to benefit from the animals full potential.

Some suggestions of development of this sector in Witima village were discussed with local producers. The formation of farmer groups is an option that the producers decided to implement. Other options are considered, such as improving the feeding rations of the ruminant animals, using better feeding techniques, along with improved facilities and hygiene.

Overall, this study identifies that knowledge sharing amongst the ruminant producers in Witima village, where natural resources are limited, is a potential development strategy.

Keywords: Central Highlands, Kenya, livelihood security, Ruminant rearing, Smallholder