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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

## Forces Driving Change in Ethiopian Smallholder Livestock Production: Implications for Policy and Practice

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### Abstract

Livestock production is an integral part of mixed-farming systems throughout northwestern Ethiopia. Yet, it has received little research and development attention. Thus, describing the changes in livestock production and the driving forces are important steps for diagnosing the status and trends of the systems, and thus to develop interventions that will result in positive changes. This study was conducted at Wujraba, Godinge and Mezega watersheds in northwestern Ethiopia. The research approaches include use of secondary and primary data and the data was collected for a time frame of 10 years. The primary data was collected; including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, workshops, and field observation. Qualitative data analysis was done by using ATLAS-ti version 7. The results reveal the most important changes as follows: farmers kept diversity of livestock species which are an indication of the different functions played by each livestock species; reducing the number of livestock herd or flock size; shift in livestock species composition and purpose, such as focusing on sheep in Wujraba, using horses and mules for different purposes in Godinge and Mezega, and using horses for transport in Wujraba; abandoning livestock species such as goats in all watersheds, donkeys in Godinge and Mezega, and mules in Wujraba; the productivity of livestock has decreased; however, some farmers have attempted to improve the livestock husbandry. These changes are attributed by various driving forces working alone and or in synergy with other driving forces. The findings show that technical support, farmers' awareness, access to transport, access to credit, and climate variability are impacting driving forces. While, animal health services, feed technology, and improved livestock breeds are influenced driving forces. On the other hand, land use change, demand for livestock products, watershed development, and government emphasis for livestock development are critical driving forces. Therefore, interventions to be made by concerned stakeholders (farmers, development practitioners, researchers, policy makers, etc.) to improve smallholder livestock production system in northwestern Ethiopia need to focus on addressing these factors.

**Keywords:** Changes, driving forces, interventions, livestock herd or flock size