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Participatory Epidemiology: Approaches, Methods, Experiences in Pastoral Areas in Northern Kenya

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Abstract

Animal keepers and their practical knowledge are a neglected information sources for the much needed analysis of animal disease problems. Therefore, participatory epidemiology (PE) applies a combination of practitioner communication skills and participatory methods to involve of animal keepers in implementation and evaluation of disease control programmes. PE relies on the widely accepted techniques of participatory rural appraisal, ethno-veterinary surveys supported by triangulation of data with conventional veterinary diagnostic methods. This information can be used to design better animal health projects and delivery systems in order to design more successful surveillance and control strategies. PE has particularly proven instrumental in livestock response programmes in Marsabit and Turkana Counties of Kenya where conventional laboratory diagnostic systems failed to reach the target groups. In an ongoing development project the PE approach has been used in livestock disease surveillance to obtain timely responses to livestock disease outbreaks. It also served as an early warning system for droughts based on diminishing livestock body condition reported by the herders.

Methodology: Veterinary technical personnel based at sub-county level were trained on PE to enhance data gathering from livestock keepers. Veterinary personnel thereafter selected community focal persons whom they also trained. Disease surveillance is conducted by engaging a dozen of livestock owners at satellite villages in discussions through PRA methodology to identify and rank diseases based on their understanding and perceptions of important diseases.

Outcome: Disease identification and ranking was based on description of clinical signs and proportional piling by herders. In Laisamis sub-county three main livestock species are kept: camels, sheep and goats. Hemorrhagic septicemia disease was ranked first in camels, in goats and sheep. Peste des Petits Ruminants was ranked as most important in all villages sampled while Contagious Caprine Pleuro Pneumonia was ranked as second most important for goats.

Keywords: Animal health, Food Security, Natural Resource Management, participatory epidemiology, participatory Rural Appraisal, Pastoralism, surveying