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Socio-Political Relations of Urban Livestock Farmers: Potentials and Controversies

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Abstract

In Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, cattle breeding in backyards and on city fringes has become a promising income-generating activity for families with little socio-economic capital as well as for the educated urban classes, both potentially contributing to food security and sovereignty. Urban livestock production offers unique opportunities for producers to gain income. Simultaneously, structural constraints underlie urban and peri-urban animal husbandry and also induce social controversies. The particular opportunities provided for livestock raising in the urban area include access to feed produced in urban industrial zones, to information on technological practices through socio-political contacts, to expert institutions concentrated in the city and to labour markets. Ethnic and socio-cultural groups commonly associated with livestock production, as well as ‘new actors’ (e.g. civil servants), are active in cattle breeding. ‘New actors’ have considerable adaptive capabilities due to their socio-professional and financial standing. Other social groups also have knowledge of new technological practices, but are confronted with structural constraints, such as limited access to land, that prevent them from enacting these practices. Various livestock organisations have been created that are incorporated into unions in an attempt to create synergies, to channel interests and to disseminate knowledge. However, the farmers’ different socio-professional backgrounds make cooperation among them difficult. This raises the question of the nature of relationships between the heterogeneous producers who may have a shared economic interest, but do not organise around a common identity. Especially for daily natural grazing, urban farmers hire rural Fulani herdsmen. Formerly tending to family herds, Fulani herdsmen now enter into market transactions where they sell their labour power. Farm owners commonly provide hired workers with food and clothing. However, extremely low wages prevent them from building their own capital and thus becoming independent herd owners themselves. These complex interactions of power and cooperation shape the long term quality of herd surveillance. Social structures thus interact to produce new forms of social stratification that shape urban food security and sovereignty.

Keywords: Cattle, labour, Ouagadougou, socio-professional groups, technology