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Farming Crops to Increase Cattle Herd Sizes in a Sedentary System of Southwestern Uganda

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Abstract

This study investigates whether or not crop cultivation in semi-arid areas provides insurance for pastoral households to increase cattle herd sizes and hang on being pastoralists in a sedentary system. Several studies of pastoral livelihoods across Africa have reported diversification as a strategy sedentary pastoralists use to supplement households' income. Some of these studies have addressed the contribution of crops to pastoralist household food security. However, until now data remains scanty on how dry land cultivation and sales of crop surplus in particular might leverage pastoral cattle stocking. This study also provides the first evidence on diversification trends and contribution to incomes and livelihoods of sedentary pastoralists in southwestern Uganda, compared with diversification trends in other pastoralist societies and African rural settings in general. Data was collected from 366 pastoral households in southwestern Uganda, and analysed for variables such as crop types, household food situation and cattle herds owned in the past five years. Results show that crop farming makes pastoralist households more food secure and significantly reduce reliance on cattle stock off-take for petty cash. Besides cultivating crops, pastoralists also undertake other non-farm income activities to insure themselves against losses associated with livestock production. Diseases, low milk production and market failure for livestock products such as milk were perceived as major threats to obtaining income from livestock production. Furthermore, soaring food prices were also cited as a motivating factor for crop cultivation. Wealthy pastoralists (>100 cattle) cultivate crops largely for food to avoid stock-off-take in order to maintain stable large herd sizes. In contrast, poor pastoralists (<50 cattle) cultivate crops for both food and financial income in order to make a living, and as a pathway to rebuilding herd sizes. To achieve sustainable livelihoods of pastoralists in a sedentary system, our study recommends further research to investigate range resource efficiency and possible trade-offs where rangelands are used for both cattle grazing and crop cultivation.

Keywords: Adaptation, livelihoods diversification, rangelands, sedentarisation