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“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

“the colour of money” – analysis of the innovation process of the sahiwal breed among maasai pastoralists in Kenya

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Abstract

The Sahiwal breed, an improved dual-purpose Zebu cattle breed (*bos indicus*), was introduced to Kenya from Pakistan first in 1936. However, only in the past 30 years the breed has experienced rapid adoption especially among the Maasai communities (Narok and Kajiado counties). This study investigates the development and dissemination process of the breed from an innovation process perspective focussing particularly on co-innovation processes between technical, social and institutional change in interaction with environmental factors. Mixed participatory research methods were used with selected key informants such as farmers, service providers, researchers and development agents. Discussions were conducted individually and in groups, using visual aids such as timelines, trendlines and maps. The findings suggest that the breed has indeed become highly popular and widely disseminated among the Maasai being an cultural identification and status symbol because of its reddish colour (“colour of money”), large body frame and benefits it has created for the community. Its relative high milk yield has led to emergence of commercial dairy value chains and women-owned cooperatives (Kajiado) driven by cultural gender roles. The success of the breed can be explained by it covering a niche emerging from transition of the traditional migratory pastoralism into sedentarisation and land subdivision. Culturally Maasai adopted the “money economy” and younger “age groups” were more entrepreneurial and educated. At the same time, veterinary and breeding infrastructure had to be established driven by few church and donor initiatives. However, the innovation process did come with challenges and trade-offs. Multiplication of breeding bulls, avoidance of inbreeding, genetical improvement and introductions of breeding technologies have been partly unsuccessful. The inability to migrate long distances, vulnerability to diseases and high feed intake have further undermined traditional adaptation measures and locked farmers into a perhaps too risk intensive production system. The future of the “Sahiwal niche” is hence threatened by climate change in arid areas on the one hand and transition into other land uses in highly populated areas.

Keywords: Innovation, pastoralism, process documentation

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