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Livelihoods, and equity in neglected livestock species production: Evidence from Ogun and Oyo states, Nigeria

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Abstract

Food systems in sub-Saharan Africa face pressure from rapid population growth, and conventional livestock systems are increasingly unable to meet rising demand for animal-sourced protein in alignment with Sustainable Development principles. Despite this, locally utilised, adapted and nutritionally valuable livestock species by rural communities - termed "neglected livestock species (NLS)" remain marginalised by policy and research. These species may offer important but underutilised alternatives, and while widely produced across the region, operate within fragmented and underexplored informal value chains. Applying value chain analysis with a One Health framework, the study examined producer profiles, husbandry practices and value chain dynamics for selected NLS species – rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), Helmeted guinea fowl (*Numida meleagris*), and grasscutter (*Thryonomys swinderianus*) in Ogun and Oyo States, Southwest Nigeria. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining household surveys (n=134), focus group discussions including resource mapping and matrix scoring (n=63), and stakeholder interviews (n=4).

Findings show that production was predominantly small-scale, with women representing majority (55 %) of producers and Guinea fowl was the most common species (54 %) produced. Activities concentrated at the production stage, with limited value addition and strong reliance on informal processing and marketing. Feed was sourced from wild and local markets, and animal husbandry, including disease management, was largely self-directed. Processing was minimal, as producers preferred selling live animals. Marketing relied on social media, personal networks and community markets. Further, we noted that majority of producers engaged with these livestock species owing to a range of advantageous characteristics, such as their ability to adapt to varying conditions, and minimal input demands. Producers cited income generation and improvement of household meat and egg consumption as primary production motivations. Key production constraints included limited financial support, feed scarcity and pest infestation, while land, water and local market access were generally perceived as adequate.

In conclusion and despite the constraints, the production of NLS in southwest Nigeria demonstrates meaningful livelihood and food security potential to advance nutrition-sensitive

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food systems and rural income equity in Nigeria. Improving these systems through targeted research, policy support and value chain development could enhance their role in sustainable, resilient and fair food systems.

Keywords: Food security, neglected livestock species, rural livelihoods, smallholder livestock systems, southwest Nigeria, value chain