

Pastoralist livestock production: A socio-economic treasure of Africa's dryland communities

Joint visit and exchange of experiences between SDC staff from Mali, Ethiopia and Kenya

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Camels taking water at Giriftu water Points, Wajir-Kenya

Did you know that Camels are resilient to dry weather conditions and can survive for 3 weeks without water? Camels love to enjoy quenching their thirst in the company of the owners - when sounds of praise songs for the camels echo around the watering points.

Climate change remains the greatest threat to this sort of socio-economic lifestyle of livestock producers in the different parts of Africa.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

works with Governments, Communities, private sector and research organizations to promote sustainable and climate resilient livestock production. SDC teams have continued to adapt livestock related and food security programs to the realities of the challenges faced by the communities while also tapping into their potentials for advancement of sustainable solutions.

A team from SDC Mali office accompanied by regional government representatives recently made a visit to the horn of Africa to join their counterparts from Kenya and Ethiopia for a learning exchange (never mind the English-French translation hustles). A quick scan by the teams brought to fore a number of common themes and issues affecting dry land communities in producing livestock in these countries. Access to water, feed and fodder, animal health, mobility of livestock across boundaries, markets for livestock and livestock products and a supportive local government regulatory framework are some of the common concerns.

Livestock mortality as a result of drought (reduced forage cover) is a menace that affects livestock producers. A discussion with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), introduced the visiting team from Mali to the concept of *Index Based Livestock Insurance (IBLI)* as one of the innovative livestock asset protection approaches that is starting to gain traction in East Africa. IBLI is a public private partnership model that uses satellite technology to predict forage scarcity which is then factored as insurable risk to protect livestock loses. IBLI has been piloted in Kenya and Ethiopia as a micro level (retail) insurance product and has since attracted governments at national and regional levels to consider it as a mechanism for risk transfer in partnership with the private sector.

While in Nairobi, the team also had opportunities to exchange with a Livestock Market Systems (LMS) program supported by USAID and implemented by Mercycorps and ACDI/VOCA. The push to see livestock as a viable enterprise resonated well with the Mali team in line with SDC's program on commercialization of livestock in different regions of Mali.

Over the past few year's pastoralists have started growing fodder grass to supplement the rangeland feeds. SDC has supported Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC) – a regional economic block to provide technical support to counties, establish livestock policies and develop common disease control frameworks. The visiting group from Mali and Ethiopia had the privilege to visit farmers in Wajir¹ County supported by the County government on *fodder production techniques, storage and marketing*. This sort of activities supported by different development partners elicited questions about access of the fodder to the livestock producers when needed, the volumes of the fodder bales, supply versus demand and sustainability of the initiative. The team has identified this as a systemic constraint that will require further analysis and actions.

As a form of coping mechanism during the dry spells, pastoralists move with their animals in search of pasture and water, often covering long distances. Mobility requires smooth facilitation and existence of necessary support infrastructure such water along the migration routes. Government officials from Mali that accompanied the team explained to their counterparts in Wajir the importance of harmonizing rangeland, disease control and water policies.

The role of regional governments cannot be over emphasized if the livestock sector is to take steps towards realizing its full potential while remaining resilient to climatic shocks. In Kenya the *devolved governance system adopted in 2013* has given agricultural sector support functions to the counties – a similar trend with regional governments of Ethiopia and Mali.

Back to the story of camels, Fatuma Hassan – a camel milk vendor in Wajir County shared her story with the team. Fatuma, processes about *hundred liters of milk per day* despite her struggles with electricity, milk handling and transport costs. She serves her client's different camel milk products such as camel yogurt and fresh milk. A business she has started in 2015 has recently seen her products cross overseas borders to Scotland where for the first time, Glasgow tea rooms serve *camel milk cappuccinos (Camelccinos)* – milk that was transported from Wajir. East Africa is home to about 12.2 million heads of camel, putting it as one of the regions with largest camel population. To the SDC team from Kenya, Ethiopia and Mali, the story of Fatuma mirrors that of many small-scale livestock and livestock products businesses that continue to face numerous operational challenges but with immense potentials to change lives.

In conclusion, the livestock sector remains a very critical food and economic system for millions of people in the drylands. However, with the increased frequency and severity of drought shocks, there is *need for concerted efforts by all the stakeholders to promote innovative and transformative interventions*. SDC teams from Mali, Ethiopia and Kenya will continue to support communities working on the underlying challenges in order to unleash their full potentials.

¹ One of the 47 counties in Kenya. An arid county (Size – 57,000 sq Kilometers) situated in the North eastern side of the country. It borders Somalia to the east and Ethiopia to the North. Home to the third largest livestock population in the country.

