



People, Land and Livestock

*Proceedings of a Workshop on the
Socio-Economic Dimensions
of Livestock Production in the
Communal Lands of Zimbabwe*

Edited by
Ben Cousins

PEOPLE, LAND AND LIVESTOCK

**Proceedings of a Workshop on the Socio-economic
Dimensions of Livestock Production in the Communal Lands of
Zimbabwe, held at Great Zimbabwe, Masvingo, 12th to 14th
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Edited by Ben Cousins

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A. Maclaurin and Dr C. Jackson acted as rapporteurs and did a fine job of reporting in detail the wide-ranging discussions which took place.

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**THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION'S
CATTLE REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

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1. COMMUNAL LAND PROFILE

As a form of introduction I will give some very crude statistics relating to the Communal Lands in order to highlight salient features of the geographical and socio-economic environment of our target groups.

The communal farmers comprise approximately 800 000 households and own 3,5 million cattle and 2 million goats and a smaller number of sheep. Each household consists of 6-7 members.

The total land surface area occupied by the communal farmers is some 16,3 million hectares, and constitutes nearly half the agricultural land of Zimbabwe. Theoretically this works out at 20,3 ha per household but the population densities vary widely between, for example, parts of Mashonaland and parts of Matabeleland.

The land is held on a communal basis, which means that any "bone fide" member of the community has "usufruct rights" for cropping and grazing his animals. With the possible exception of cultivable land, there is no strict limitation on an individual's utilisation of the available resources and the individual is not accountable for their management as it becomes a collective responsibility through the VIDCO and WADCO structures.

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Only a small percentage of the Communal Lands lies in good rainfall areas above region III while over 75 percent of the land in this category lies in agro-ecological Regions IV and V. These areas are characterised by infertile, sand-veld soils with low and erratic rainfall. The harsh climatic conditions and poor soils, coupled with too high a population pressure on the land result in insufficiency in food production and in the drier areas there is a net import of basic food items.

Cattle are the main means of subsistence but here too a problem lies in the fact that there is an unfavourable balance between animal and the human population. The cattle holding per individual family is generally below subsistence requirements.

2. FUNCTIONS OF CATTLE IN PEASANT COMMUNITIES

Cattle are considered a most valued possession and are the main means of subsistence for even communal inhabitants. A J Hughes placed their roles into three main categories, the "socio-spiritual", the "crypto-economic" and the "economic".

2.1 Socio-spiritual roles

The socio-spiritual roles have often been highlighted and at times given undue prominence by social scientists and early administrators. Cattle were used in the payment of the "bride price" and fines and in ceremonies to appease the ancestral spirits. While these functions had great significance in the lives of the people at the turn of the century, they have since diminished in importance and have undergone modifications due to a change in the lifestyles and living conditions of the people.

2.2 Crypto-economic roles

The consensus of opinion is that the crypto-economic functions are today most important. Cattle are an important means of production and under settled occupation they are required to provide manure, milk and draught power. However, the average cattle holding per family is inadequate to meet these requirements.

The cost of mechanical tillage on 4 ha, which is the average land holding per family, is estimated at \$250,00. On the other hand, a pair of oxen can adequately provide labour for 6 ha during the year, including ploughing, cultivation and transportation of the produce to the village storage or local grain collection point.

The average cattle holding per household is 3 Livestock Units (LUs) - but to supply enough organic manure for 4 ha of arable land, 24 LUs are required:

It has been shown that the cost of production for food crops such as maize exceeds the value of crops grown in Regions IV and V if mechanical powered implements are used. In short, tractor costs are high and the yields are not high enough to recover the costs.

In view of the lack of spare parts for tractors and regular breakdowns, cattle become the most dependable source of draught power for the Communal Lands.

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3. ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS

The cattle population in the communal areas is about 3 million and the offtake is of the order of 1-2 percent. This is contrasted with an offtake of 15-20 percent from the commercial areas.

It is often asserted that the tribesman is "reluctant" to sell his cattle as he is more interested in "numbers" than in the monetary value of his animal: what is often lost sight of is the fact that in a simple arithmetical calculation each household owns an average 3 LUs, say two oxen, one cow and a calf. This is probably the minimum herd per household to meet subsistence needs and there is no excess to sell.

In parts of the country such as in Gwanda and Beitbridge the average cattle population is generally higher and there is a consequent higher offtake of 14 percent from these communal areas. One concludes from this that there is little "reluctance" to sell once subsistence needs have been met.

On the contrary, cattle fattening schemes have become quite popular in some communal areas in order to maximise returns from animals in excess of subsistence requirements, using cull animals which are past their productive life.

4. LWF PROGRAMMES IN ZIMBABWE

Before describing specific cattle projects being undertaken by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) some historical background is necessary. The LWF was invited into Zimbabwe in 1980 to assist with the repatriation exercise. After this had been

completed, it continued to assist the country in its rehabilitation of displaced persons and in development work.

In 1982-84 the country experienced a very severe drought, especially in the south and south east regions of the country, and the organisation became involved in a food relief exercise. In addition, a well digging programme was initiated which eventually spread from Matabeleland to Masvingo and Manicaland Provinces.

Due to the unprecedented cattle mortalities in the drier areas, the organisation was requested by church members in Matabeleland and the Midlands to assist the people to acquire cattle so as to re-establish their herds. In a sense therefore the cattle rehabilitation programme for the communal areas was initiated as an adjunct to the drought relief programme.

A crude response to the request would have been to raise donor funds to purchase enough cattle from the commercial farms and distribute them to those groups who had requested assistance.

However, having been hired by LWF to work on this programme, it was my conviction that the issue needed to be discussed so that the root causes of these losses could be analysed together with the communities and appropriate measures developed which would address the problem on a more ~~medium~~ and long term basis.

It is evident that cattle losses in these semi-arid areas are an annual phenomenon.

What had in fact alarmed the people in this case was the extent of the losses due to the rather protracted period of drought.

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We needed to develop a strategy aimed at correcting past malpractices in veld and stock management and the stockowners needed to receive training in the appropriate aspects of veld and stock management. We therefore went ahead and employed qualified agricultural officers for each of our target areas to train and enter into dialogue with the farmers to assist them in implementing this strategy.

5. BREED TYPE

Under the environmental conditions prevailing in the Communal Lands, the indigenous breeds of cattle perform better than the exotic animals or their cross-breeds.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the colonial administrators introduced exotic bulls in indigenous herds in the belief that there would result a larger framed beef animal. This policy not only threatened the continued existence of our indigenous breeds - which are well adapted to their environment - it resulted in an animal which was more susceptible to local diseases.

Our livestock projects attempt to correct this retrogressive step by encouraging communities to use indigenous bulls. We have recommended the Tuli and the Nkone for the south and south east and south west regions of the country and the Shona for the communal areas in the high rainfall areas. Phenotypically, indigenous type females are selected for breeding.

6. ANIMAL NUTRITION

The reverse side of the coin to breed selection is improving nutrition through improved veld management techniques.

Cattle population crashes in the communal areas occur because the land is overstocked, and a new definition for the correct stocking rate in this environment could well be the number of animals that can survive through the winter.

Our assistance for cattle schemes is linked to grazing and sets the following conditions:

- a) that the community establishes a livestock committee through a process of elections.
- b) that the community accepts a Land Use Plan for the grazing area as prepared by Agritex.
- c) that the community enters into a contractual agreement between the District Administrator and itself, making an undertaking that it will abide by the stocking rate for the area, or work towards achieving the same rate for the area.
- d) that the community accepts technical advice from the agricultural officer and implements his recommendations.

7. RESEARCH, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As part of project implementation, we have endeavoured to compile demographic and socio-economic data pertaining to our target groups so that we can analyse problems and with the

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community suggest ways of improving production and the overall living conditions of the people.

8. SUMMARY AND GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

One of the main objectives of our cattle improvement schemes is to inculcate a spirit of self-reliance among our target groups.

It is my considered view that the most important role cattle play in the communal areas today is an economic one. The importance of cattle as a means of livelihood is more marked in the arid and semi-arid Regions IV and V as is borne out by the offtake and sales through official channels.

In the higher rainfall areas, i.e. Regions II and III, the human population density in the communal areas is often so high that little land is available for grazing. In these areas crop production is predominant and cattle are secondary and supportive of the cropping activities.

9. SPECIFIC PROJECTS BEING IMPLEMENTED

I now wish to simply enumerate specific livestock and grazing management projects in which the LWF has participated.

9.1 Beitbridge (Dendele and Siyoke Communal Lands)

Shobi Ranch to the immediate south of Dendele Communal Land is some 8 000 ha in extent, and is being leased from Government for use as a stock holding and breeding farm. In due course it will serve as a farmer training centre.

9.2 Mataga and Ngungumbane Grazing Schemes in Mberengwa Communal Land

We have supported these schemes on a "dollar for dollar" basis.

9.3 Matiza Grazing Scheme in Marange Communal Land

The community has in addition constructed a dip tank within the grazing scheme.

9.4 Chiweshe Grazing Scheme in the South East Region of Buhera Communal Land

This project is being implemented in collaboration with ARDA and, as always, Agritex.

9.5 Lower Guruve in the Zambezi Valley

The rearing of cattle in this area is not possible due to the presence of tsetse-transmitted diseases, and is in fact prohibited by law while the tsetse eradication programme is being implemented. We have introduced tractor ploughing in the interim and cattle will be introduced once the fly has been eradicated.

9.6 Denhere Katsvamutima Grazing Scheme in Zvinba Communal Land

This project, which lies in region IIB, acts as a control and presents a different set of environmental problems affecting development.

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