

# Increasing Youth Participation in Livestock Production in Kenya

Agriculture is a primary source of employment in Kenya. Most employment takes the form of smallholder crop and livestock farming, either as a main or supplementary livelihood activity. In recent years, youth have been found to prefer employment in non-farm livelihood activities to farming, in part due to lack of markets, market information, affordable credit facilities, and land, and a preference for jobs that offer financial security, prestige, comforts of urban life and which avoid the drudgery associated with farming. In order to encourage young people back into livestock production, programmes led by the Ministry of Agriculture and partners need to avoid entrenching existing gender inequalities. Focus also needs to be placed on how the adoption of an agri-business model of smallholder livestock farming could improve profitability and attract young people into this type of employment.

## Livelihoods and employment trajectories

Livestock production is a common livelihood strategy for smallholder farmers living in arid and semi-arid areas in Kenya. Not only do livestock provide food in the form of meat, milk, eggs and animal fat, but they also serve as a source of income, stores of wealth, social status and a means of conducting rituals such as cleansing ceremonies. In 2014, the agriculture sector in Kenya employed three in every four workers and Kenya generated 4 per cent of its gross domestic product from the livestock industry, mainly from the beef and milk sector.

In terms of employment, research on the politics of participation in livestock production in Baringo County showed differences in trajectories taken by youth and older people. Youth drew their livelihoods from self-employment and waged or salaried employment. Older persons were more engaged in crop and livestock farming. The key difference in the livelihood activities preferred by youth is that they provide more regular income than crop and livestock farming. The change in choice of main livelihood activity suggests that employment expectations of youth evolve and adapt as they grow older in relation to existing employment opportunities. The research also shows that individuals do not rely on one livelihood activity but rather combine a number of activities to increase financial security.

## Politics of livestock sourcing

Entry into livestock farming assumes that an individual has livestock, which include cattle,

sheep and goats. The methods through which the aforementioned livestock are acquired include purchasing, reproduction, gifting, inheritance and loaning. Of these methods, purchasing and reproduction are the main methods through which livestock are acquired. Ability to purchase livestock is partially determined by availability of income. Purchases can be made from farm gate or in livestock markets. Gifting is influenced by an owner's willingness to redistribute their livestock or compelled by culture, for example in the case of bride price payment. Only sons are allowed to inherit properties from their parents.

## Politics of livestock ownership and marketing

Although both men and women can own livestock mainly for subsistence and not commercial use, there are social norms that dictate the dimensions of claims that an individual can make. These claims include the ability to: make decisions on strategic care of livestock; grant or deny access to livestock and derived products; make decisions to sell, loan or lease; and determine the use of the income gained from trade. The research shows that except for accessing livestock (cattle, sheep and goats) and derived products, all the other claims rest with men except in female-headed households.

These norms also determine the livestock species and products that men and women can own. The research shows that cattle, sheep and goats were considered male products while chicken, milk and eggs, when produced in non-commercialised systems, were assumed to be female products.

Despite the delineation, women still own the male products albeit in smaller quantities, although their claims on such animals are limited and asset security is not guaranteed. This reflects a desire to engage in livestock production in a greater capacity; beyond accessing food items and providing labour. While this norm does not exclude women completely, it certainly constrains their participation in large-animal livestock activities. This constraint is probably even greater for young women.

*Men consider chicken, eggs, milk as something small. Women are then ones concerned about them and when they are sold, nobody will question.*  
(Female research participant, Kipcherere 4)

*There are those women who can buy cattle, but when it reaches home it does not belong to the woman because the home is the husband's, there is no home belonging to a woman. The home belongs*

*to the man. So everything in the home belongs to the man. The children and the woman are his. Everything in that house is his.*  
(Male research participant, Litein 1)

Traditionally, marketing of cattle, sheep and goats is predominantly a male responsibility while chicken, milk and eggs are traded by women. Market information on the large animals is therefore by extension held by men most of the time. Due to the social norms dictating preferred livelihood activities for men and women, women's engagement in regular transaction of live large animals is limited. Therefore it is still not considered a potential source of employment, especially among female youth. Most of the regular livestock traders came from outside the study area. By increasing their mobility, the women were able to circumvent the cultural inhibitions that would be greater felt if they transacted in their home areas.

## Policy recommendations

1. Programmes led by the Ministry of Agriculture and allied institutions should be designed to improve inclusion of young people in livestock production, and in order to do so they must recognise the needs of different groups of young people and by gender. Conscious efforts should be made to provide solutions that do not entrench disparities between different youth categories.
2. Adoption of an agri-business (market-oriented) model by smallholder livestock production should be promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and partner institutions. Currently, smallholder livestock production is intended for subsistence rather than commercial use. As a result, at household level there is limited motivation to improve productivity. Low productivity and returns inhibit the capacity of a farmer to gainfully participate in trade. Overall this makes livestock production unattractive to young persons who, based on the need to develop themselves, require regular income.



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## Further reading

Mutua *et al.* (2017, forthcoming) 'Youth Participation in Smallholder Livestock Production and Marketing', *IDS Bulletin* 48.3

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## Credits

This *IDS Policy Briefing* was written by **Edna Mutua** and edited by **Hannah Corbett**. It was produced as part of the Matasa Fellows Network, funded by The MasterCard Foundation.

This research was carried out within a larger three-year study on early warning systems for improved human health and resilience to climate-sensitive vector borne diseases in Kenya through a grant by WHO/TDR/IDRC Project ID B20278.

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ISSN 1479-974X