

Challenges and opportunities associated with the current livestock marketing trends in Zimbabwe's marginalized rural communities, with particular reference to one of the country's most impoverished districts of Binga in Matabeleland North Region

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Abstract

The study sought to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with the current livestock marketing trends in Zimbabwe's marginalized rural communities, with particular reference to one of the country's most impoverished districts of Binga in Matabeleland North Region. Central to the study was to assess the potential of livestock in unlocking Zimbabwe's rural economies by means of promoting sustainable livestock productivity through improved management practices and availing of reliable and viable markets for the communal smallholder livestock producers. To achieve this, a sample of 60, inclusive of participants drawn from local farmers, officers from departments such as Agritex agriculture research and extension services and L.P.D. (Livestock Production Department) alongside those from NGOs Non-Governmental organizations operating in the area was randomly drawn from the population of the two villages; Pashu and Tinde comprising 600 inhabitants. Self-administered questionnaires and face to face personal interviews were used to generate data for the study. Data obtained were subjected to descriptive statistics where frequency counts and means were used for purposes of presenting findings. A gross margin analysis was also adopted to evaluate the profitability of livestock production in such arid regions and establish the comparative advantage of the venture in environments compounded with numerous challenges. The irrefutable findings of the study revealed that lack of proper livestock management and marketing skills, economically viable herd and flock sizes and poor access to rewarding markets are a major setback constraining livestock productivity in Zimbabwe's marginalized rural communities. The study, therefore, recommended that government and other stakeholders should provide adequate technical and institutional support to effect robust positive developments on the country's smallholder livestock industry, for the business to recover and reclaim the lost pride and be counted as one of the country's most lucrative undertaking.

Keywords: Challenges and opportunities, livestock marketing trends, marginalized rural communities, impoverished districts, rural economies, sustainable livestock productivity and small holder farming sector

1. Introduction

The Fast Track Land Reform FTLR in Zimbabwe ushered in a new dimension on the role and perceived significance of livestock farming in the country's rural communities. Livestock particularly cattle, sheep and goats which were pivotal in augmenting cash incomes from other ventures and enhance food security, thus, serving as an important component in household's livelihood strategies, particularly in drought-prone areas became a neglected facet of agriculture. Although many small holder farmers are now realizing the potential of livestock in generating household incomes attempts to access viable markets remains the major stumbling block. As such organized state commissioned markets are no longer in existence. The only marketing channel to be exploited by the rural farmer has become so under developed, with dilapidated infrastructure and a marketing system which is so chaotic with distorted market information meant to expose farmers to prejudice by unscrupulous buyers. As farmers have no other better options to dispose their livestock they have always been found on the losing end hence failed to register meaningful advancement in transforming their livelihood.

While Zimbabwe boasts of making remarkable strides on equitable land redistribution to the peasantry majority, many people however continue to live in abject poverty as the

existing policy framework on the marketing of agricultural produce has totally striped off farmers of their bargaining powers hence exposing them to exploitive market environments where buyers dictate selling and purchase prices of the produce. Agitating the farmers' plight was the abolishment of the Zimbabwe's Agricultural Marketing Authority AMA, which is now more of a shadow organisation with no mandate to mediate as before and negotiate on behalf of producers. This has resulted in farmers' lake of confidence in available markets. High transaction costs on the part of both farmers and buyers, furthermore lead to a general decline in the price of livestock, particularly cattle and their products narrowing the profit margin for the farmer. It is therefore opined that improved market environments will incentivize and boost the morale of the country's livestock producers hence incite them to invest intensively in the enterprise. Market development is thus a single facet which has to be viewed as the sole important step in further developing the livestock industry in Zimbabwe.

2. Background to the study

Livestock predominantly cattle, goats and sheep play a vital role in the livelihood of small holder farmers in Africa's developing nations. They contribute to food security and alleviate seasonal food variability directly through milk and

meat production and indirectly through cash earned from sales of their products. Livestock in most African societies are one of the most effective poverty alleviation and food security mitigation strategies. According to Homann and van Rooyne, (2008) ^[4], a number of rural households in Southern Africa, mainly in countries such as Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa keep livestock for varied reasons. They are constantly traded or bartered in the informal sector, contributing significantly to household incomes and constitute significantly as the sole backbone to the rural populace's livelihoods.

Livestock particularly cattle and goats play a significant socio-cultural role, traditionally under the African custom the two are used for the payment of the bride price "lobola" and appeasement of the ancestral spirits when an abomination such as adultery and murder is committed. Promoting livestock production is central to the cushioning of the catastrophic effects of drought and food deficits which has become a common phenomenon in arid regions of Zimbabwe. Livestock farming as cited by Sibanda, (1992) ^[9] facilitates the empowerment of the vulnerable groups in society such as women, breaking the jinks or the stereotypical ideology that women have always been regarded as minors who could not own assets as it was a preserve for their male counterparts in the context of an African perspective. Breaking of the barrier has seen such deprived groups of people in communities inclusive of widows, people living with HIV/AIDS and orphans venturing into livestock production mainly the small livestock to eke a living.

Livestock farming has inversely become an integral part of small holder farming operations. And as alluded to by Sibanda, (1992) ^[9] animals such as cattle, sheep and goats have managed to contribute significantly to the supply of animal protein in the form of meat and milk to the impoverished populace of the country living in marginalized areas. The production of livestock has therefore always been the back-bone of rural family sustenance and livelihood development. The sustenance was always in line with the country's ZIMASET blueprint's cluster for food and nutrition whose thrust is provision of adequate nutritive food items to the impoverished vulnerable groups in the society through a steady supply of meat and milk products. Furthermore advancing the standard of living in rural communities through artisanal manufacturing where various products such as leather and organic fertilizers are produced from animal byproducts. The selling of such products has fuelled a boost in the generation of incomes for the rural population.

The efficacy of livestock to rural communities therefore justifies the need for thorough investigations into opportunities that can be explored to maximize farmers' beneficitation from the industry. It is therefore against this background that the study which sought to examine the potential of livestock in unlocking Zimbabwe's rural economies through sustainable livestock production and availing of viable markets was conducted. Realization of the rationale that the success in livestock production cannot be possible without the empowerment and participation of rural farmers motivated the study.

The current marketing structures in Zimbabwe's communal and resettlement areas is mainly characterized by informal markets, where the majority of sales are conducted within villages. Private abattoirs and middlemen constitute the main external buyers and mostly prefer live animals which they

purchase, slaughtering and sell the meat in urban centers and mining communities where they fetch lucrative prices. For rural communities such markets are however highly unorganized and unreliable and as Kusina and Kusinsa, (2001) ^[6] cited, efforts to advance living standards in rural communities should be directed to the shifting of the majority of small holder farmers from low input to more competitive market oriented livestock production systems. It is opined that if markets are aligned to service the rural populace better market linkages should be established to enable smallholder farmers invest intensively in improved technologies to boost livestock productivity, improve animal quality and consequently increase market related off-take incentives. Expectations being that this will yield immediate income growth, food security as well the long term attainment of sustainable livelihoods in marginalized communities.

Sarupinda and Tavesure (2006) cited that during drought periods majority of farmers in Zimbabwe's rural communities market their livestock traditionally at farm-gate getting meager prices averaging US\$25 and US\$200 for goats and cattle respectively. This concurs well with what was observed during the fieldwork as statistics on the ground revealed that although farmers own relatively large numbers of livestock they still cannot generate enough to meet their daily basics and afford better health facilities hence continue to live in abject poverty. Though the significance of livestock is irrefutable, their production and productivity in the smallholder sector is compounded with numerous challenges which call for intervention of the government and other stakeholders in to restore confidence in major players as alluded to by (Homann, van Rooyen and Moyo, 2007) ^[5].

2.1 Problem statement

Households in Pashu and Tinde areas of Binga particularly livestock producers have never viewed their animals as of much economic significance. Copious challenges associated with the venture have made farmers to perceive livestock production as undertaking only suitable for subsistence purposes. The notion has led farmers to attach less value on their livestock hence prefer to sell animals at farm-gate or barter them for a 'song' to middlemen who deliberately, fanged ignorance on actual prices, thus depriving the poor farmers of any meaningful benefits from the animals. Middlemen profiteer and enjoy super profits by under-paying producers and exploit lucrative urban markets where they charge and fetch exorbitant prices. Unavailability of information on sound animal husbandry from government departments and distorted marketing systems has rendered livestock production a futile venture not worth venturing into in the entire district. Owing to numerous huddles facing the industry farmers are left with no other option but to accept what the existing environment has to offer hence accept whatever prices the buyers proffer. Apparently this has led to pathetic standards of living for most rural livestock farmers consequently subjecting them to `souring levels poverty. It is therefore against such a pathetic background that the study sought to examine the potential of livestock in unlocking Zimbabwe's rural economies through sustainable livestock production through availing of viable markets. The realization of the rationale that the success in livestock production cannot be possible without the empowerment and participation of rural farmers motivated the study.

2.2 Research objectives

Central to the study was to examine the potential of livestock in unlocking Zimbabwe’s rural economies by means of promoting sustainable livestock production through improved management practices and the availing of viable markets for rural animal producers.

However the specific objectives were;

- Establish main types of animals raised by farmers in rural communities and assess the role they play in advancing people’s livelihoods
- Explore farmers’ perceptions on the existing rural livestock marketing structures
- Profile challenges and opportunities in Zimbabwe’s rural livestock production and productivity

3. Research Methodology

The study was carried out in one of Zimbabwe’s most marginalized districts; Binga which lies along the hot and arid southern Zambezi Escarpment, in the territory of the tsetse fly, which transmits human sleeping sickness and animal trypanosomiasis. It was confined to Pashu and Tinde villages in Binga South, a zone only suitable for wildlife and extensive livestock production focusing on examining the potential of livestock in unlocking Zimbabwe’s rural economies by means of promoting sustainable livestock production through improved husbandry practices and availing viable markets for the rural producers. Participants in the study comprised local farmers, officers from government departments such as Agritex Agriculture research and extension services and L.P.D. (Livestock Production Department) alongside officials from NGOs Non-Governmental organizations operating in the area. A sample of 60 inclusive of all participants was randomly drawn from a population of 600 for the two villages. Self-administered questionnaires and face to face personal interviews were employed to generate the much needed data for the study. Data obtained were subjected to descriptive statistics where frequency counts, means and percentages were used for purposes of presenting findings. Agross margin analysis was also adopted to evaluate the profitability of livestock production in such arid regions and establish the comparative advantage of the venture in environments compounded with numerous challenges.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Main types of animals raised by farmers in rural areas and their purposes

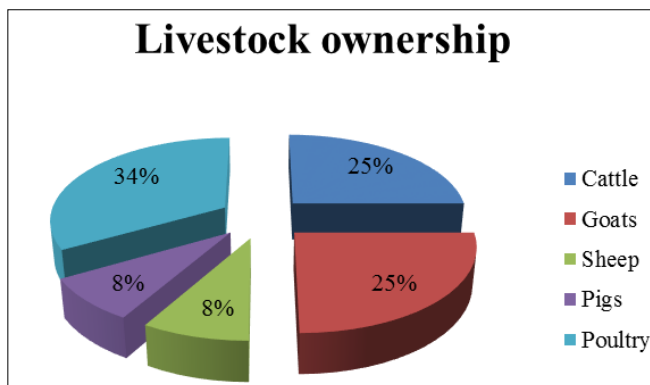


Fig 4.1: shows the different livestock types kept by farmers in Pashu and Tinde villages.

Table 4.1: Response rate on livestock ownership

Livestock type	Respondents rate	Percentage%
cattle	15	25%
goats	15	25%
sheep	5	8%
pigs	5	8%
poultry	20	34%

It was observed that preference by most farmers was given to cattle and goats. Though chickens constituted the highest percentage, little value was attached to them as it was generalised that they are a women’s venture meant to provide cheaper household protein in the form of eggs and white meat. Bigger animal species such as cattle sheep and goats are a source of income. The majority of farmers interviewed identified cash as the key function provided by such animals. The participants indicated that cattle and goats signify bundles of wealth and serve as a buffer against catastrophic effects of drought which has become a common phenomenon in Zimbabwe due to climate change. Cash generated from such livestock is primarily spent on the basics such as food, clothing, health care and funding of farming activities.

4.2 Challenges facing livestock production in Binga district

Table 4.2 (a): Farmers’ responses on the challenges facing in livestock production in the study area

Challenges	Pashu village	Tinde village
Response rate/Participants	30	30
Infrastructural development		
Poor Roads/ road network	10	8
Poor communication network	4	3
Inadequate Dams/ livestock watering points	5	9
Inadequate Holding pens/ cattle crutches	8	6
Lack of fencing/paddocks	3	4
Total	30	30
		60
	Pashu village	Tinde village
Management		
Cattle feed shortage	12	11
Inadequate veterinary services& dipping	6	7
Lack of communal grazing management	5	3
Cattle theft	3	4
Inadequate stock inspectors	4	5
Total	30	30
		60

Table 4.2 (b): Response rates on why farmers are not willing to sell livestock at formal markets in the study area

Villages	Pashu	Tinde	Sum of sample
Sample size	30	30	60
Cited Reasons	Response%	Response%	Response%
Low prices at local markets	12	14	26
Lack of trust on local buyers	8	9	17
Multipurpose functions of livestock	4	5	9
Low numbers of livestock	8	7	15
Poor livestock condition due to poor nutrition	7	6	13
High morbidity and mortality rates	5	4	9
Low calving/birth rates for replacement stock	6	5	11
Summations of response%	50	50	100

The findings from the two study sites demonstrated that feed shortages especially in winter periods, decreased state support on veterinary facilities and services towards communal livestock husbandry, lack of dams and adequate watering points for the animals and lack of fencing for improved management of the natural pastures are the major challenges that affected livestock production and productivity in both communities and the whole of Binga as a district. Feeding in particular becomes a severe challenge in winter when grazing is subjected to depletion and the little available hay and stover become nutritionally degraded to sustain condition of the animals to the onset of the rains when pastures rejuvenate growth.

The absence of fencing for paddocks and feedlots was also ascribed to poor nutritional deficiencies leading to mediocre animal condition and body conformations resulting in inferior carcass grades at slaughter. Farmers from the study area also cited that livestock rustling was becoming rampant and attributed this to unavailability of organized community based security structures such as the neighborhood watch committees which in some areas liaise with state security; the ZRP Zimbabwe Republic Police in apprehending perpetrators of such crimes and help curb stock theft in their localities.

5. Conclusions

Positive issues that emerged during the study included the general perception that since most of the farmers in the study area were livestock producers and derived their livelihood from the enterprise, lack of knowledge on sound animal husbandry and access to organized formal markets was a big drawback for the livestock industry in the area. Farmers opined that the government had to establish sales pens and formalize the marketing of livestock as it was the only stable source of income for the rural households. Elsewhere sales pens have registered great success in improving people's livelihoods as they have managed to attract buyers from far afield to converge at a central point thereby allowing producers to bargain and get competitive prices in the process as they could speak with one voice. Hence enabling farmers to realize huge profit margins hard to come by under private and farm gate sales. Profits realized have allowed producers to improve their standards of living, characterized by improved diets, farmers' ability to access better health facilities, better accommodation and afford descent education for their children.

The new marketing system was hailed by most farmers in the two villages as a way of curbing the rampant stock theft as marketing is done in an open system at one designated point in the presence of all concerned parties; producers with their stock registers, local leadership, the local responsible authorities and law enforcing agents/police. Such marketing system would provide a platform where farmers share knowledge and make them realize rewards associated with sound livestock production hence promote the spirit of togetherness in lobbying for better trading conditions.

6. Recommendations

- A significant number of respondents proposed that localizing auction sales in their respective areas and formation of marketing co-operatives will help them to access better priced markets. It is therefore imperative that government resuscitates infrastructure and provide

suitable structures to support auctioning of beef cattle in marginalized rural communities.

- Responsible local authorities need to work on modalities of reducing the long cycles between livestock auction sales dates as this exposes farmers to unscrupulous speculative buyers who always maintain ties with disadvantaged communities where they access animals cheaply.
- Government needs to put in place subsidies for livestock inputs such as feed and veterinary chemicals as former commercial farmers used to receive high levels of such support from former governments and also benefited from generous import and export agreements with the European Union's (EU) lucrative markets as alluded to by Chisango and Ndlovu P, (2015) ^[1].
- Research and specialist services/extension should disseminate information to farmers through organized shows & field days to enhance farmers' expertise on livestock management and existing marketing linkages through government's department of Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA).
- Constant engagement of all stakeholders and other relevant players in the small livestock value-chain is crucial for solving challenges which may prohibit continuity and sustainability in the use of the sales pens and negatively affect the formal marketing systems, thereby denying producers a chance to derive maximum benefits from their livestock.

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