

COMMUNITY LIVESTOCK IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES: A CASE OF KATHEKANI, KENYA

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Kathekani is lies in Eastern Kenya with a semiarid climate. The area is only suitable for drought tolerant crop farming, due to erratic and unpredictable rainfall, which frequently causes crop failure. The livestock management systems in this area are historically extensive. Commonly reared types of livestock are cattle, goats, sheep and chickens. The East African goat is the breed traditionally reared by this community, however, other breeds such as the Galla exist. The area is highly tse-tse infested, leading to heavy cattle losses from trypanosomosis. This together with increased human population has compounded the land use problem with more land being opened up by the community for cultivation as farmers look for alternative livelihoods. This has led to development of semi-intensive systems of livestock production.

The grazing land has thus been reduced, creating a major constraint in livestock production despite the use of on farm crop residues for nutritional purposes a practice that is not adequate.

The approach adopted by farmers is communally managed utilisation of locally available goat genetic resources among the resource poor farmers. The Galla goat is an indigenous breed mainly found in the pastoral areas of Kenya. The natural habitat of the Galla is similar to the ecological conditions found in Kathekani. It is well adapted to harsh climatic conditions of the arid and semi-arid lands. Its advantage over the East African is its fast growth rate and it's attainment of a comparatively higher weight at maturity. The East African on the other hand is distributed all over the East African region and it has the ability to survive under harsh climatic conditions. The Galla and the East African goat are used as a local goat gene pool for the arid and semi-arid lands in Kenya, which the local community is exploiting to harness positive traits. In the case of Kathekani this is achieved through a group approach. The breeding programme is communally controlled through formation of groups with a clear goal of improving goats production

To facilitate this initiative, multiplication of the Galla goat locally is essential for distribution to the local breeders. This will reduce the logistical costs required in procurement of the Galla goat. The more informed and economically able farmers have shown an interest in the multiplication.

Technical support is provided by local personnel from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and Community-based animal health workers in areas of buck selection, disease control, feeding and general animal husbandry. ITDG-EA assists the farmers in logistical support in acquisition of Galla bucks on request. Institutional capacity building is done through training and exposure visits of the groups.