

Rural livestock markets and contemporary changes in the value of cattle in Namwala District - Zambia

Shepande Chaabila Kalapula

skalapula@ru.edu.zm or kshepande@yahoo.com

Abstract

A study involving ninety-eighty traditional cattle keepers was conducted in Namwala District areas with the objective of assessing changes in the value of cattle. The hypotheses were that different categories of cattle keepers within rural agro-pastoral communities are likely to respond differently to opportunities and constraints from cattle markets and that successful cattle keepers are likely to expand their production opportunities by ploughing capital obtained from proceeds of cattle sales while less successful ones withhold animals from the market unless there is an urgent need in order to realise a longer goal of stock accumulation. The results showed that financial security was ranked the first by 35.7 percent of the sample as the most important primary objective for keeping cattle. This is due to the changing economic environment resulting in an increase in the demand of money in the rural economy with available markets. In addition, following the establishment of commercial cattle buyers such as Zambeef and Starbeef, the socio-economic situation among the traditional cattle keepers has changed from mere accumulation of cattle for prestige and social standing in society to entering into the

market economy. Increased cattle marketing has encouraged transformation in production goals for keeping cattle to acquiring universally accepted and prestigious items such as solar panels, television sets, vehicles, dip tanks, houses, fencing, retail shops etc. However, livestock production remains below its potential due to the effect of recurrent cattle diseases and climatic variability in which government and other stakeholders have come on board to help sustain livestock production.

Keywords: Production goals, rural livestock markets, socio-economic transformation, traditional cattle keepers

1.0 Introduction

Cattle have been kept for a long time by most tribes in Zambia's Southern, Western and Eastern provinces and those living in the extreme northeast near the Tanzanian border (Beerling, 1986). Livestock play an important role in the livelihoods of many people particularly in poorer communities of Zambia in which their role is even more critical [Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ), 2000]. There are more cattle in the

hands of traditional herders than commercial farmers in Zambia. This marked difference in numbers arises from the value that the traditional herders place on the quantity and not quality of their livestock (Rootselaar and Bwalya, 1990). However, in spite of the efforts of government to increase production of beef, the response from traditional herders remained conservative. It is estimated that the traditional cattle keepers sell three percent of their animals whereas commercial farmers sell about fifteen percent of theirs [Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2005].

Namwala is located in the southern part of Zambia and cattle have traditionally been an object of accumulation rather than economic gain among the Ila people, who equate the accumulation of cattle in traditional Ila and Tonga society with accumulation of capital investment in capitalist societies (HODI, 2009). This is because cattle contribute more significantly to the rural livelihoods as a source of draft power and fresh milk and used in various social roles such as payment of *lobola* or bride price, initiation ceremonies, funeral rites and religious rituals and in meeting financial and other obligations (Jaspan, 1953). In addition, Fielder (1973) reported that a corollary of the concept of cattle complex of 'target selling income' has been used to contend that because of their cultural attachment to cattle, traditional cattle keepers

are unwilling to sell their animals unless there are specific income targets to be met. Since people in Namwala are traditionally cattle keepers from time immemorial, accumulation has led to the proportion of households owning livestock higher compared to other places in the province and the country at large (Smith and Dale, 1920). The District has the highest number of traditionally owned cattle in Zambia with more than 120, 000 heads with improved breeds. The prosperity of the cattle economy in Namwala is based on the cycle of flooding on the Kafue Flood Plain (CSO, 2007). For this reason, Mapani (2008) pointed out that cattle rearing in the area rather than crop farming have taken a centre stage. However, livestock production remains below its potential due to the effect of recurrent cattle diseases and climatic variability as in many other African cattle keeping areas (Scoones, 1995).

Until the early 1990s, prices of all agricultural inputs and products, including their marketing were determined by the state. However, with the change in the macro-economic policy in 1991, there has been a shift towards moving the economy to private sector-driven initiatives and free market policies (Yambayamba, 2006). With recurrent cattle diseases and ban in livestock movements, this scenario led to the establishment of commercial livestock buyers such as Zambeef and Starbeef in 2005 and 2008 respectively. These have provided readily

available rural markets in Namwala as opposed to selling to traders who used to take cattle to Lusaka (Capital City) and the Copperbelt (leading copper producing region) to fetch for higher prices. With respect to cattle markets, Zambia could raise about US \$1.5 billion per annum if it matches Kenya cattle production by exporting its products to neighbouring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Angola which are huge potential markets (Sinha, 2010). At the moment, world beef and dairy trade are worth about US \$50 billion, a share which Zambia could be part of if all is put in place.

2.0 Problem Statement

Cattle in Namwala District have traditionally been an object of accumulation rather than consumption among the Ila people, who equate the accumulation of cattle in traditional Ila and Tonga society with accumulation of capital investment in capitalist societies. This is because cattle contribute more significantly to the rural livelihoods as a source of draught power and fresh milk and are used in various social roles such as payment of *lobola* or bride price, ceremonies, funeral rites and religious rituals and in meeting financial and other obligations. Hence, the effects of recurrent cattle diseases and climatic variability have resulted in reduced cattle numbers. However, Namwala has in the recent past experienced a

gradual increase in the livestock industry partly due to the establishment of commercial livestock buyers. The assumption was that the coming of commercial cattle buyers may have contributed to the transformation of the socio-economic situation among the cattle keepers from accumulation of cattle for prestige and social standing in society to entering into the money market and improved cattle management practices. It was therefore necessary to conduct a study to investigate the responses of these agro-pastoral communities to cattle losses and availability of rural livestock markets.

3.0 Methodology

Collection of data was done through the use of secondary and primary sources. Secondary data was collected through literature review, while primary data through Interview Schedules and unstructured interview schedules from local cattle keeper respondents and key informants respectively. A total number of 98 out of the targeted 100 respondents were sampled through cluster and simple random sampling techniques. The former sampling technique allowed a wider coverage of the study area whilst the latter gave probability for each subgroup element in the population to be incorporated in the sample (including female headed households). Two questionnaires were discarded due to errors that could have distorted the results.

Primary information was obtained from the local respondents in the area and officials in various institutions through Interview Schedules and Observations. The questionnaires focused on the contemporary production goals among the traditional cattle keepers, impact of regularised markets, shifts in cattle accumulation, recent forms of cattle acquisition, herd management practices and the amount of beef exported from Namwala. The District Veterinary Officer (DVO), Chiefs/Headmen, Abattoir Managers and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were targeted as key informants. The key informants were purposively drawn and interviewed using unstructured interview schedules.

Both closed and open ended questions were used in order to maximise the amount of information collected. Observations were based on capital projects that have been undertaken in the last five years. Assets focused on during field work among other things included the following: Solar panels, houses, vehicles bought, dip tanks, business enterprises, hummer-mills, boreholes, fencing etc.

Data was analysed qualitatively as well as quantitatively through the computer's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Minitab software. Veterinary data on cattle

censuses and marketing records helped in computing and comparing cattle numbers and off-take rates, past and present trends using tables and figures. Marketing records and cattle populations for the period 2005 to 2009 were complemented by the interpretation of a number of case studies to compare the marketing behaviour of a few selected households before and after 2005, while noting changes in production goals, coping strategies and value of cattle. Case studies provided a deeper insight about how rationales and priorities are enacted at household level decision making process. The methodological assumption is that an examination of a number of case studies can be used to derive broader inferences which apply to the general population in the district.

4.0 Results and discussion

Financial security was ranked the first and most important primary objective with 35.71 percent of the sample due to an increase in the use of money. Social status represented 22.45 percent of the total farmers. Provision of draught power accounted for 16.33 percent of the total respondents and this remains an important objective for keeping cattle. The use of manure represented 14.29 percent of the sampled cattle keepers who cited it as an increasingly vital primary objective for keeping cattle due to high cost of fertiliser. Other secondary objectives

that were cited were the need to slaughter cattle during funerals, marriages, traditional and initiation ceremonies and this accounted only 5.10 percent among farmers. Milk and meat production were also cited as other (5.10 percent) reasons for keeping cattle for both home consumption and sale as a source of 'small' income. This is because unlike selling the entire *ing'ombe* (cow), milk (*mukupa*) or sour milk (*mabishi*) can easily be sold and thus, constitute a fast and ready source of income in a rural setting.

With established abattoirs for cattle in Namwala, there is an increased opportunity to engage in rural livestock markets especially successful cattle keepers. Rural markets are vital for opening up an area for business and other commercial activities. In recent years, there has been a significant decline in 'briefcase' livestock traders who used to buy cattle from traditional cattle keepers at cheaper prices to re-sale at higher prices in urban centres such as Choma, Mazabuka, Lusaka and the Copperbelt. There are three slaughter days in a week; Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Zambeef slaughters 100 cattle but has the capacity of slaughtering 120 animals with 30 local people employed and 63.26 percent farmer preference whereas Starbeef slaughters 80 with 25 local people employed and 29.59 percent farmer preference. Most cattle keepers expressed gratitude that the coming of Starbeef

raised the amount per kilogram to at least K11 (about \$1 per kilogram). This price fluctuates depending on supply and demand. The price is also said to less than \$1 per kilogram between December and March owing to many people taking their animals for slaughter. This leads to a glut on the market since most farmers by this time have diminished their maize stock.

About 540 animals are slaughtered per week, 2,160 per month and over 25,920 per year. This shows an increase in traditional off-take of 1,800 in 2000, 1,920 in 2001, 2,030 in 2002, 2,210 in 2003 and 2,642 in 2004. The establishment of Zambeef saw the number rise sharply to 14,400 in 2005, 14,605 in 2006 and 14,905 in 2007 and almost doubled to 26,125 and 26,330 in 2008 and 2009 respectively following the coming of Starbeef in the district. This is far more than 1991 commercial sales of 1,700 outside the district and 205 within the district. In addition Zambeef has also opened a Supermarket where it sells a wide range of beef products. However, for some people, they have taken advantage of this ready market to rustle cattle but Namwala Police is ensuring strict inspection of animals before slaughter, hence three slaughter days in a week to ensure close supervision and checking of documents.

For successful cattle keepers, cattle accumulation has opened unprecedented opportunities to facilitate their participation in

regularised rural market transactions in the district. The study established that due to the expansion of market opportunities, richer cattle keepers have redefined their production goals and orientations to take advantage of the opportunity to convert their stock wealth into monetary value, and to transform this value into other forms of economic and social investments. This is the reason why most of the cattle keepers today, in the contexts of recurrent cattle diseases and droughts, have tended to sell surplus animals to abattoirs. This has enabled them to acquire assets such as radios, solar panels, vehicles, construction of houses and dip tanks for dipping their animals.

Out of the total 98 households, 62.24 percent have bought radios, 58.16 percent have solar panels whereas 36.73 percent have television sets from proceeds of cattle sales. Those that have bought vehicles constituted 29.59 percent and 25.51 percent constructed dip tanks. Most farmers have bought utility vehicles such as pick-ups and canters. These are believed to be dependable to use on the rough plain and sandy plateau. Increasingly, many people who have sizeable herds have bought motorbikes before purchasing a vehicle since their fuel consumption is minimal. The demand and need to build houses has equally spread to rural towns like Namwala with 12.24 percent of the respondents having built houses, those fencing accounted for 11.22 percent and those with

shops/guesthouses/restaurant constituted 9.18 percent. Other projects such as hammer-mills and bore-holes were accounted for by 6.12 percent of the farmers.

A few wealthy individuals (9.18 percent) have opened up retail shops and have access to Digital Satellite Television in their homes. Those that have built shops lamented that shops help them meet 'small' financial needs as opposed to selling the whole cow. For richer households, cattle are now increasingly seen as commodities, avenues of investment, and this reconceptualisation has led to a gradual shift in production goals, to a reworking of production relationships between different households, and to a redefinition of economic ideologies and cultural beliefs. Apart from direct conversion of livestock wealth into commercial assets, proceeds from cattle sales also help to prop up the commercial sector by bringing large amounts of cash into circulation. Hence, the strategic importance of the traditional livestock sector and marketing to the overall development of the District cannot be over-emphasised.

When cattle assume a high market value, traditional networks of animal redistribution such as *kushisha* (giving stock to another person, usually a relative or close friend, to look after them) and stock gifts tend to decline. New forms of reciprocity which do not involve

the transfer of live animals become more important. Among cattle keepers who have bigger herds, *kushisha ing'ombe* (giving out cattle) is a lesser practice hence farmers take full advantage of markets themselves. Small herd owners tend to have more *ing'ombe shakushishiwa* in their kraal than rich owners. This phenomenon has also been observed in a wide diversity of other African cattle keeping societies such as the Fulani of Nigeria (Sutter, 1987), the Masai of Kenya (Hedlund, 1971; Grandin, 1988), and the Somali of central Somalia (Abdullahi, 1990). Closer to home, Solway (1986) and Behnke (1987) demonstrated this in the case of Botswana among the Tswana that the use of live animals for *kushisha* tends to decrease with the level of increased market opportunities. 'Bigger' herd owners here refer to those who own more than 1,000 herds of cattle and these constituted 16.3 percent; 'big' herd owners represented 22.5 percent with more than 200 but less than 1,000 animals and; 'small' were those with less than 200 animals and these constituted 61.2 percent of the sample.

The other aspect of cattle management which has changed with increased commercialisation and market prospects is the degree to which herd owners tend to invest into the herd. Richer herd owners tend to buy more veterinary drugs than poor herd owners. In addition, very rich herd owners stated that they sell more than 50

beasts annually for vaccines and dip chemicals. Such rich cattle owners manage to minimise the impact of the flood and drought by using several hired herders who trek their animals over long distances in search of grazing pastures. Such farmers make substantial investments into the herd in form of drugs and in most cases, sink bore-holes and fence their paddocks. In addition, they provide supplementary feed to their pure bulls bought outside the district. Poor cattle keepers cannot make such investments.

Similar situations presented above have also been observed in other cattle-keeping societies in Africa that men dominate animal sales when markets rise while women are more involved in milk and dairy products. Related studies are from Sutter (1987) among the Fulani in Nigeria, Grandin (1988) among the Masai and Galole Orma in Kenya. While within Zambia in Western Province among the Lozi people, Sikana (1997) observed that men and women control and dominate different spheres of pastoral production, creating an in-built conflict between women's goal of maximising milk production and men's goal of diverting potential milk production towards calf growth thereby maximising returns from the sale of live animals.

5.0 Conclusion

The central premises reached in this study is that cattle keepers are rational economic actors, whose production goals and strategies are determined not only by cultural and ideological considerations, but by constraints and opportunities imposed by the wider socio-economic environment. The results demonstrate the importance of well-established rural livestock markets in stimulating off-take rates from the traditional sector. Increased cattle marketing has encouraged change in objectives for keeping cattle from accumulating for prestige to embarking on acquiring universally accepted and prestigious items such as radios, solar panels, television sets, vehicles, dip tanks, houses, fencing, retail shops etc. Hence, transformation has occurred among traditional cattle keepers in Namwala. They are selling their cattle, accumulating both money and assets and have responded positively to the introduced cattle markets by selling their surplus herds.

6.0 Acknowledgements

The author thanks Dr Liberty Mweemba of the University of Zambia for his positive supervision and valuable contribution to this study. My sincere gratitude also goes to the staff in the Department of Geography and Environmental Science in the School of Science and Technology at Rusangu University. I also wish to thank all the informants, cattle keepers, Chiefs Mukobela,

Muchila, Nalubamba and Mungaila, the village headmen, all government officials and the people of Namwala who furnished me with the information used in this report.

References

- [1] Abdullahi, A.M., (1990) "Pastoral Production Systems in Africa: A study of Nomadic Household Economy and Livestock Marketing in Central Somalia" in Farming Systems and Resource Economics in the Tropics, vol no. 8. Kiel, Germany.
- [2] Beerling, M.E.J., (1986) Acquisition and Alienation of Cattle in Western Province, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Department of Veterinary and Tsetse Control, Lusaka, Zambia.
- [3] Behnke, R., (1987) "Cattle accumulation and commercialisation of traditional livestock industry in Botswana" in Agriculture Systems, 24:1-29.
- [4] Central Statistical Office [CSO] (2005) Agricultural and Pastoral Production: 2003/04 Post Harvest Report for Small-scale Agricultural Holdings, CSO, Lusaka.
- [5] CSO, (2007) Economic Census on Agriculture Production in Zambia: A Survey on the Performance of the Sector, CSO, Lusaka.
- [6] Fielder, R.J., (1973) "The Role of Cattle in the Ila Economy: A Conflict of Views on the uses of Cattle by the Ila of Namwala" in African Social Research, No. 15, pp 327-361.
- [7] Government of the Republic of Zambia [GRZ], (2000) Livestock Development Plan 2000-2004, Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and

Fisheries Development, Volume 1: Background and Justification, Mulungushi House, Lusaka.

[8] Grandin, B.E., (1988) Wealth and Pastoral Dairy Production: A case study of Masailand, Nairobi Institute of Development Studies, Nairobi.

[9] Hedlund, H., (1971) The impact of Group Ranches on Pastoral Society, Nairobi Institute for Development Studies, Nairobi.

[10] HODI, (2009) Traditional Livestock Keeping in Namwala: Changes in Traditional Management of cattle, Diseases and Cattle Marketing, Hodi Reports, Lusaka.

[11] Jaspán, M.A., (1953) The Ila-Tonga Peoples of Northern Rhodesia, International African Institute, London.

[12] Mapani, W., (2008) "The Shimunenga Cattle drive of the Ila People in Namwala District: Changes in traditional importance attached to Cattle" in the Zambia Daily Mail 14/10/2008, pp.5-7.

[13] Rootselaar, G.H.V. and Bwalya, G.M., (1990) "Cattle Development Programmes for Small-Scale Farmers" in Woods, A.P, Keane, S.A, Milimo, J.T and Warren, D.M [eds] (1990) The Dynamics of Agricultural Policy and Reform in Zambia, Iowa University Press, Ames, pp. 493-513.

[14] Scoones, I., [ed] (1995) Living with Uncertainty: New Directions in Pastoral Development in Africa, London: Institute for Environment and Development.

[15] Sikana, P.M., (1997) Agro-Pastoral and Trade Liberalisation: Transformation of Production Goals and Rationales among Traditional Cattle Keepers of the Bulozhi Flood Plains, The Study Fund, MFNP, Lusaka.

[16] Sinha, S., (2010) "What would it take for Zambia's cattle industry to achieve its potential: The role of cattle industry to the economy of Zambia" in The Post, World Bank Consultant- 25-05-2010, p.V. Business Post.

[17] Smith, E.W. and Dale, A.M., (1920) The Ila-Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia, McMillan, 2 vol, London.

[18] Solway, J., (1986) Commercialisation and Social Differentiation in a Kalahari Village in Botswana, PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, Toronto.

[19] Sutter, N.S., (1987) Cattle accumulation, Marketing and Commercialisation of Traditional Livestock Sector in Nigeria, International Institute of Social Sciences, Lagos.

[20] Yambayamba, E.S.K., (2006) "A Survey of Prevailing Traditional Ownership of Livestock by Smallholders in four Provinces of Zambia," in Zambia Journal of Agricultural Science, Volume 8(2): pp 6-12.