

CATTLE ECONOMICS: INCOME FROM LIVESTOCK IMPROVING LIVES

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Country: South Sudan

Sector: Agriculture (Livestock)

"Now I am able to send my children to school, because I can pay the costs of school from the income I get from selling animals. Before, we were keeping livestock only for our prestige and for wedding dowries." **Nakwam**, Secretary of Riwoto Cooperative Society, Eastern Equatoria.

CHALLENGE

Livestock production is key for the pastoralist Toposa people living in South Sudan's Eastern Equatoria state. Their animals, especially cattle, are an important source of wealth and social prestige, and represent the main means to pay the wedding dowry young men must pay before they marry.

That, however, is a problem. The natural attachment of the Toposa to their cattle and goats makes them unwilling to sell them – locking up the potentially valuable income that could help improve their lives. It greatly reduces their ability to meet even basic needs such as food, health and education, and in a land often hit by poor rains and drought, increases their dependency on food aid.

CLIENTS

Action

However, in the region's Kapoeta North County, changes are being made. NAKWAM is not only a Toposa community leader in the small rural town of Riwoto, the county capital, but is also a member of a woman's cooperative that was set up to increase animal sales. The group -- the Riwoto Cooperative Society -- was established in 2008 with the purpose of supporting the local community to improve the marketing of livestock, as well the sale of animal products such as milk.

Although originally established with the support of Land O' Lakes, an American NGO, SNV increased its support and backing of the fledgling cooperative after the NGO was forced to end its role due to funding constraints. The young society showed great potential in helping change the attitudes concerning the economic value of livestock not simply for its members, but also for the wider community.



Nakwam talking to SNV in Kapoeta market

METHOD / SNV INTERVENTION

SNV's role increased with a series of activities aimed to help strengthen the cooperative's capability, and ensure it continued to grow in size and effectiveness.

Activities

Community meetings and debates were organized in villages across the county, which brought livestock producers from a wide area together. This allowed a clear explanation of the key messages: the potential value of the people's animals, and the benefits that emerge from organizing into cooperatives.

Following the discussions, the meetings encouraged those who had gathered to form cooperatives on a voluntary basis, with some members contributing cattle and goats as a start-up capital. Cooperative leaders were also elected - with Nakwam chosen as a secretary – who then received management training on how best to run the group.

SNV worked closely with Greater Kapoeta Cooperative Development Agency (GKCDA), a local organization established to support the formation of cooperatives and promotion of livestock marketing in the area. This group was responsible for the work at community level.

Importantly, SNV helped to link the cooperative to even far away markets, connecting the group to livestock traders and transporters in the urban centre of Kapoeta, as well as the rapidly growing southern Sudanese capital Juba. In addition training was provided on specific issues such as livestock marketing, as well as animal production and health.

The groups were also supported to develop a constitution and cooperative by-laws, as well as being provided assistance for the organization's registration. SNV ensured that the cooperatives took part in farmers' day meetings organized by the local authorities, which were aimed to showcase best practices and produce.

OUTCOME

The above interventions have helped shift the opinions of many members of the local community in Riwoto, who now accept that their animals are also a source of wealth and income. They have now begun bringing animals to market for sale.

A notable change in attitudes was seen during recent drought. In the past, many in the community choose to die with their animals rather than to sell their livestock and so to buy the supplies that the community lacked. Yet when drought struck in the early months of 2010, the community managed to survive by selling animals to buy food and other commodities.

IMPACT

It is a change in attitude that has especially impacted women, with many now participating in livestock marketing - once a role traditionally taken only by men.

Rising income

Income from livestock sales (known as commercial off take) has grown, with the number of animals sold in the regional market in Kapoeta increasing every year.

The number of animals sold has increased by more than 200% from 2009. At household level, off take rates leapt from 0.5% in 2008 to 2.5% in 2009/10, with change in attitude credited for this result.

On average 60-70 cattle and some 50-60 goats are taken to Juba market every day. These are animals are drawn from both the cooperative and other community members who are not members of the cooperative.



Livestock being loaded in Kapoeta Market

Increase in off take means a direct increase in the income from livestock sales. For Nakwan, who sold 15 goats this year, that has brought in for her family an 1,500 SDG income. On average, each household is getting 4,000 SDG from livestock sales per month/year. This has increased the households' ability to pay school related costs, as well as health services and other household expenses. For Nakwan, that extra income means she has managed to send 2 of her children to school - and is able to cover all schooling costs this year from the sale of livestock.

SUSTAINABILITY

As with many pastoralist communities, cattle raiding are still common. That's a stumbling block for attempts to improve livestock sales at community level, because the animals can be easily stolen when they are being taken to market.

However, the combined support of the cooperatives such as that in Riwoto is helping reduce this risk. Once pastoralists sell the animal to the cooperative, the group can then ensure the animals remain safe on their journey to market.

In addition, the cooperative has established a small daily livestock market in Riwoto, which is intended to encourage greater trade to increase livestock sales per year. This market however still needs improvement of its facilities and veterinary services.

Potential for growth

Livestock production and marketing holds the key for future prosperity of the Toposa community, especially for women like Nakwam. The growing demand for livestock and livestock products in rapidly expanding large towns like Juba is creating a vibrant livestock market for this pastoralist community.

At the moment the demand for livestock and livestock products in Juba is not satisfied by current rates of local supplies. Despite the potential of home grown Sudanese livestock sources, large volumes of livestock and livestock products are imported from neighbouring Uganda to meet the demand in Juba.

However there is a great potential to produce value added livestock products locally in Sudan and even in Riwoto. These present exciting opportunities to expand the market for the cooperative and its members, with potential to increase incomes and support other livelihood activities.

There is now growing attention from the government and international development actors on livestock production and marketing from pastoralist areas. Large donors including The European Commission and the Multi-Donor Trust Fund are channelling fund to support the livestock sector development Riwoto and other similar communities. SNV continues to attract partners such as FARM Africa and European Community to invest in the livestock sector.

In the future, these initiatives should enable more women like Nakwam to have a story to tell how livestock marketing has changed their lives for good.