Intensifying crop-tree-livestock systems while adapting to climate change

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Livestock research in West Africa has made good progress in the past years. With the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, I collaborated extensively with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture, and other key partners (farmers, national agricultural research organizations, non-governmental organizations, and extension services) in Mali, Niger and Nigeria on the intensification of integrated crop-livestock systems in the Sudano-Sahelian zone of West Africa.

This work generated a lot of useful information aiming at improving these systems in terms of increased crop and livestock productivity and increased incomes for smallholder farmers in a sustainable manner. ILRI has provided expertise and funding for this work. Technologies for animal fattening and milk production in the Sahel for increased income, particularly for women farmers, and for food security were also great achievements in the past years on the collaborative work under the leadership of ILRI.
I believe the emphasis should continue to be put on how to better integrate and intensify these mixed crop-tree-livestock systems while conserving the natural resource base in the face of the threats of climate change. ILRI could provide leadership and expertise to develop and disseminate more efficient feeding strategies to enhance land and livestock productivity and increase income.

Some challenges will arise in the future and need to be tackled. Among others, the utilization of improved and more productive crop varieties, livestock breeds and agronomic practices in resource poor farmers’ mixed systems; linking these farmers and herders to markets and finally modeling these complex mixed farming systems involving crops, trees, livestock and people should take place in order to better understand all components.

On 9 and 10 November 2011, the ILRI Board of Trustees hosted a 2-day ‘liveSTOCK Exchange’ to discuss and reflect on livestock research for development.

Contributed by Ramadjita Tabo, Deputy Executive Director, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA).