A sketch of the smallholder livestock producer in central Botswana: results of a snapshot survey

In December 2012, a snapshot survey was conducted in two villages (Taupye and Thabala) and one semi-urban area (Serowe) in Botswana’s Central District. The aim was to characterize, using rapid appraisal techniques, value chain actors’ knowledge, practices, structure and performance.

The survey included focus group discussions and individual interviews with farmers, butchers, supermarkets and consumers and discussion of the results with stakeholders in February 2013.

Interviews revealed a number of characteristics that have remained largely un-documented to date.

Costs of operation vary substantially with the number of animals run, but notably so to the composition of costs. Household labour and age patterns, and the marketing strategy pursued also affect such costs. Further analysis is necessary to identify key factors affecting competitiveness amongst smallholder livestock keepers, and their ability to sustain livelihoods and enable economic development in rural areas.

Age and education
Producers’ ages ranged from 35 to 77 years, with the mean of 49. The majority of farmers were below age 45 (38%) and older than 60 (33%), leaving about 30% between the ages of 45 and 60.

94% of farmers interviewed had acquired some level of education. Almost two thirds (65%) had attained primary school level, and 16% had high school qualification certificates. A further 16% had higher (tertiary) level educational diplomas and certificates.

Costs
Total cost per household, subdivided by number of animals held (Total Livestock Units).
Farming systems
90% of the livestock farmers interviewed use open communal grazing lands. The remaining 10% have access to fenced land.

50% of farmers interviewed reported owning cattle and goats, while just 31% of the farmers owned only cattle. Overall, cattle constitute the majority of the animal population in the study area (76% of livestock units reported), followed by goats (22%).

Most producers interviewed raise local and cross-bred livestock, with only about 2% using pure-bred exotic animals. Local breeds were often favored due to their perceived better adaptation to the local climate.

Cattle are the main livestock bred and marketed for sale (46% of farmers selling as compared to 13% for goats). However, purchase of goats was twice as common (13% of farmers) as it was for cattle.

Labour and wage levels
A typical household has about 7 full-time workers, 4 of whom work in livestock-related farming activities and 3 in non-livestock activities. Overall, females contribute 17% of all full-time labor for farm activities and 20% of full-time labor for non-farm activities.

Households employed about 5 people as part-time laborers for both livestock and non-livestock activities, of which just 4% are female.

The average monthly wage was reported as 489 Pula, but this does not include payments in kind (food, housing, animals) which is reported as a common practice.

Access to information and inputs
Buyers formed the main source of price information, including via BMC’s text messaging. Traders and input suppliers also were listed as price information sources, but so were neutral sources such as dedicated radio and television programs.

The Livestock Advisory Centre (LAC) network is the main source of livestock technology, inputs and input-related information for Botswana’s livestock producers. In some remote areas, the network extends to mobile outlets, although these were reported to be few in the Central District.