Livestock, Disease, Trade and Markets

Policy Choices for the Livestock Sector in Africa

Based on assumptions about low productivity, backward management, lack of market orientation and limited growth potential, the African livestock industry was for many years regarded as a poor investment for development. Recently, however, it has returned to the development agenda, being seen as a potential route out of poverty. This paper examines some of the underlying debates, assumptions and trade-offs.

Concentrating on the three interlocking themes of (1) markets, trade and standards; (2) service delivery and organisation arrangements; and (3) science and technology priorities, the analysis reveals tensions within the various development strategies being proposed. In particular, it is argued, the current primary focus on trade and export comes at the expense of simpler initiatives to support productivity, breeding, and disease management, and may not be best placed to achieve the required pro-poor benefits.

Two narratives inform African livestock issues within the pro-poor development agenda. One derives from an awareness that livestock serves a variety of functions within complex social, political and religious contexts, and focuses on livelihoods and local production. The other focuses on gearing the livestock sector for export, seeing this as a huge source of untapped wealth. While these two narratives are not mutually exclusive, they do not sit entirely easily together within the broad agenda-setting strategy. Each requires a different set of investments relating to infrastructure, veterinary services, regulatory regimes, and so on, and therefore different policy choices. Within these two broad narratives, moreover, the three areas of markets, service delivery and scientific priorities also involve complex and often competing policy trade-offs and choices.

Looking at markets, trade and standards, for example, reveals that a concentration on export depends heavily on expensive and sophisticated disease eradication to meet increasingly stringent health standards. The enormous perceived benefits of this approach have attracted considerable international favour and donor funds, but it tends to overlook the many-faceted contexts within which existing livestock trade exists and which may not readily accommodate simple technical interventions. Emphasis on livestock for export may not in reality, therefore, benefit local producers, or even the national economy.

Similarly, the challenge for service delivery and organisational arrangements is how to divide up the responsibilities of decentralised and central veterinary services in an effective manner that caters for both the simpler and immediate treatments as well as large-scale disease control and surveillance, and how to

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devise sustainable funding mechanisms for both approaches. It is also imperative to incorporate traditional knowledge and practices into modern scientific models of livestock management. A highly plural mix of service provision must reflect the realities on the ground rather than a perhaps mythical notion of either a subsidised, entirely state-run system or by contrast a fully privatised, cost-recovery system.

Scientific and technological priorities feed into this mix of service provision and are also subject to numerous policy trade-offs. There is a tendency for the scientific model to prevail, setting disease eradication as the ultimate goal, to be achieved through the application of biotechnology. But is this necessarily going to generate the projected benefits for both the industry and the poor? Difficult choices need to be made relating to how limited funds are spent on research and development, to how appropriate particular disease control technologies are to local realities, and to the effectiveness of those technologies. Attention also needs to be paid to the possibly distorting influence of vested interests and historical connections on choice of disease control mechanism, and to the social and political tensions that can be created by such mechanisms. The economics of delivery also shape the choice and regulation of veterinary products. And collaboration with the private sector in order to finance the development of new animal disease control and healthcare products, usually on an international scale, may not prove to be the win-win solution it appears to be.

**Key research findings**

- The African livestock industry has recently returned to the development agenda
- Livestock is being recognised as a means of reducing poverty
- Current policy focuses on livestock for export but this is based on assumptions that may not take sufficient account of local and complex contexts and may not therefore deliver the expected pro-poor benefits
- No neat win-win solutions apply to livestock development issues so there are always trade-offs and choices to be made in setting priorities and making policy
- Policy decisions must be guided by a rigorous framework for examining what intervention is likely to have a wide, sustained impact on poverty reduction

The components of a ‘pro-poor’ disease control and animal health policy will always be heavily context-dependent, and will have to tackle head-on inherent trade-offs and policy choices. Decisions must be based on a wide-ranging, open-minded consideration of these trade-offs and choices, and must avoid hiding or ignoring assumptions and failing to test options against local realities.

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