

Camel Husbandry in the IGAD Region: Use of Indigenous Knowledge, Practices and Local Innovations

Introduction

Pastoralism is an important means of livelihood in the eight countries comprising the IGAD region, 70% of which are Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL). Pastoralists are dependent on keeping a wide variety of livestock species as their main source of food security and livelihood. Although this system is touted as the most appropriate land use system in these areas, climate change is increasingly posing a serious threat to it. The diversity of livestock species and

breed has always ensured the resilience of pastoralists against shocks that may threaten their livelihoods.

The one-humped dromedary camel is one of the animals reared by many of the pastoralist communities who live in the IGAD region. It plays a vital role in providing milk, meat, medicines, wealth, and other products. Camels, because of their unique physiological and morphological characteristics, have



Figure 1. A "Hor" type of Somali camel with round mark of Degodia Somali Clan on the skin under the jaw.

been more resilient to climate change induced shocks. The animal thrives in harsh conditions and can easily acclimate when agroecological zones shift. Thus, previous cattle herder communities of Samburu, Maasai and Pokot in Kenya, Karamojong region in Uganda and the communities along the Kenyan border are increasingly adopting camel keeping.

The region accounts for over 50% of the world’s camel population (Table 1) and 66% of camel milk produced globally.

Rich indigenous knowledge (IK) related to camel husbandry exists among traditional camel keepers of the region such as Somali, Gabra, Turkana Afar, among others. This knowledge includes selection and breeding, animal health care (identification and treatment of important camel diseases), feeding, animal welfare as well as traditional preservation, processing and marketing of camel products.

Table1. Camel Population in IGAD Countries (millions)

Djibouti	Eritrea	Ethiopia	Kenya	Somalia	Sudan	Uganda	Total
0.07	0.32	7.0	4.6	7.5	5.0	0.04	24.5

Source: State Department of Livestock of respective countries and FAO statistics



Figure 2: Herding camels in Uunsi town of Somalia

This policy brief draws out of a regional assessment report to highlight challenges and suggest policy recommendations for the IGAD Region.

Key Challenges/Constraints

- There is very little documentation and understanding on camel husbandry, indigenous knowledge and innovation in the region. Traditional camel herder communities have rich indigenous knowledge and practices passed on from generation to generation. However, only limited camel indigenous knowledge exists among communities in the new frontier, where the camel has been recently introduced. In the new frontier communities, newly camel adopting areas, the lack of both formal husbandry and health services, and limited indigenous knowledge pose several challenges on the camel productivity and health.

- Camel herders have well-established indigenous way of handling, preserving, processing and marketing of their camel products, which have served them for centuries. For example, they extend camel milk shelf life by fermenting it into sour milk, fumigating milk vessels with herbs, and coagulating it by mixing it with cow or goat milk. Breeding and husbandry practised by both traditional and new frontier camel herders aims at not only high milk yield, but also the resilience and hardiness of the animal. However, the scanty camel promotion programmes prioritize milk production and focus less on the other aspects.
- Traditional camel keepers are known to develop a strong attachment to the animal by ensuring that the animal is comfortable, loved and free from stress. However, the trend towards peri-urban semi-intensive



camel farms may lead to the loss of the indigenous management practices.

- Camel production and marketing in the IGAD region faces numerous challenges such as diseases, welfare, limited product hygiene, and limited

product processing and marketing infrastructure. Most importantly, it lacks policy frameworks that recognize and support the role of camel herders and their indigenous knowledge on husbandry and health care. There is also lack of clear policy that secures access to grazing and browsing areas for indigenous camel herders.

Key Policy Recommendations

1. Build policies and programmes based on indigenous knowledge to support camel husbandry.
2. Enhance resource allocation for camel research on indigenous knowledge, best practices and innovations to improve camel husbandry so as to support producers with new knowledge.
3. Undertake comparative assessment on the growing semi-intensive and
4. Conduct awareness-raising among herders about harmful camel husbandry practices such as blocking the camel calf from consuming colostrum, hot iron branding, and allowing the breeding bull to breed with its close relatives etc.
5. Provide support to new frontier camel keepers through knowledge exchange with the traditional camel herders.
6. Design and implement long and short-term trainings to fill human resource gaps in camel husbandry and health care.

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