Working Together to Improve Livelihoods of Pastoralists in Zimbabwe

Agro-pastoralists in Zimbabwe face a host of challenges, including low-yielding fodder crops, degraded land and volatile markets. Furthermore, due to the prevalence of sector-specific technologies, they lack access to solutions that can improve their integrated production systems. But, with the right training and support, food insecurity can become a thing of the past.

Key messages

- Poor quality feed and lack of market linkages hold back agro-pastoralists
- Integrated solutions offer opportunities for more efficient production
- Potential of new practices demonstrated by spontaneous adoption by non-participating farmers
Outcome Story: Working Together to Improve Livelihoods of Pastoralists in Zimbabwe

Sector-specific technologies hold back agro-pastoralists in Zimbabwe

Millions of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa experience seasonal food insecurity. Pastoralists’ production is especially challenged by poor quality and quantity of livestock feed, particularly during the drier months. Lack of consistent markets and volatile prices also make it difficult for farmers to eke out a living.

In Zimbabwe, technologies and extension services to improve productivity are often packaged in silos, specific to either crop or animal production. This leaves agro-pastoralists in a bind, without access to solutions that are fitting for their production systems, which are inherently integrated.

Holistically designed technologies and practices, made for integrated crop–livestock systems, could generate numerous benefits and support agro-pastoralists to increase their productivity and food security.

Cross-sector collaboration provide new opportunities

Scientists have been working with smallholders in Zimbabwe to introduce conservation agriculture as well as improved fodder production practices that fit an integrated farming system. They have identified ideal technologies and practices as well as conducted trials and demonstrations on representative farm sites.

In addition, because researchers hypothesized that creating a demand for products would be critical for technology uptake, they established collaborations across sectors, especially with private sector entities such as abattoirs. Innovation platforms, mechanisms that bring together a wide range of stakeholders to discuss challenges and solutions, were launched particularly to strengthen the value chain and farmers’ linkages with markets.
Farmers benefit from conservation agriculture, fodder production

One major challenge for farmers in Zimbabwe is the high cost of feed. In many cases, feed costs can account for up to 70 percent of dairy production costs, making dairy production unappealing or unprofitable.

Theresa Gandazha, a smallholder dairy farmer in Goromonzi Ward 11 in Mashonaland East Province, was one of nine households which researchers selected for fodder production trials, using improved legume varieties. Before joining the feed trial, Gandazha’s first cow produced about 12 liters of milk from 6 kilogram of dairy meal fed each day. She spent US$75.60 a month on feed, and earning US$0.42/liter of milk sold, her monthly gross margin was US$75.60.

But, adopting a homegrown legume-based diet for her dairy cow has boosted her income due to significantly reduced feed costs. The cow responded well to the feed, increasing milk yield to 16 liters per day. Now, her gross margin has increased by more than 50 percent, to US$129.60 per month.

Other trials led to farmers adopting conservation agriculture practices and thereby improving soil quality; farmers trading hay and forage seeds for profit; farmers increasing the quality grade of their livestock through use of improved feed; and farmers gaining negotiation skills and bargaining power, fetching higher prices for their animals.

Integrated solutions boost production and livelihoods

Reaching more than 5,000 farmers, these efforts resulted in farmers improving their livelihoods significantly. Farmers increased their gross margins by up to 70 percent and the contribution of livestock to livelihoods rose from 29 to 42 percent.

Overall, the results indicate that sustainable intensification of integrated cereal–legume–livestock systems, coupled with livestock market development, have the potential to increase the market share value of smallholder farmers. It was demonstrated that overall farming efficiency can increase when solutions are tailored to fit integrated systems.

Farmers from other districts, Mutoko and Uzumba, in Mashonaland East province have adopted some technologies after seeing the benefits experienced by participating farmers in Goromonzi and Murehwa districts.
Acknowledgement
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References
- Dube et al. (2014) Baseline and situation analysis report.

Outcome Story Coordinates

Country: Zimbabwe
Region: Southern Africa
Agricultural livelihood system: Pastoral and agropastoral
Cross-cutting theme: Capacity building
CGIAR SLO: Reduced poverty (~1.4 Productivity increased)
SDG: SDG 1: No Poverty

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