

The Role of Churches in the Sustainability of Livestock Production in the Northern Region of Ghana

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Abstract

The study was carried out to determine the extent to which churches are involved in the sustainability of the livestock industry in the Northern Region. The study was carried out between the periods of January to July, 2004, with Tamale as the study area. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to church leaders and project coordinators of the organizations set up by the churches to be in charge of social work. Three out of the eighteen churches interviewed supported the livestock industry in diverse ways. These churches were Assemblies of God, Roman Catholic and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The areas supported by these churches were training of farmers in good husbandry practices, assisting farmers with medication, provision of breeding stock, assisting farmers with feed supplement during the dry season and training of farmers in the area of bullock traction. The species of animals supported by these churches were sheep, goat, swine, cattle and poultry. The involvement of the churches in the livestock sector has led to the restoration of a relative peace among the Konkombas and Nanumbas in the Northern Region. Bullock traction has now become a substitute for tractor since most of the beneficiary communities are comfortable with it.

Introduction

The livestock sub-sector contributes greatly to agriculture and the economy in general. It contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), food security, import reduction, employment, poverty reduction and transport. The contribution of the livestock sub-sector to the agriculture GDP is very low as compared to the crop sub-sector. The country allocates substantial part of its revenue to import large volumes of livestock products.

The production of livestock particularly sheep, goats and cattle are predominant in the three northern regions of Ghana. The northern sector

accounts for about 67% of the livestock and the coastal plains have about 30% with the rest distributed over the other parts of the country (Biotech-Ghana, 2001). In spite of the potential of livestock production in northern Ghana the industry is typically a smallholder farmer activity attracting minimum investment in housing, feeding and health. This attitude of livestock farmers in the northern Ghana is mostly due to lack of education and financial support.

Support to the livestock sector has been through the annual national budgets, particularly, activities designed as part of the Medium Term Agriculture Development Programme (MTADP), 1991-2000 and the Accelerated Agriculture Development and Growth Strategy (AADGS), 2001-2007.

A few non-governmental organizations have also mounted projects since the late 1990s to support rural livelihoods through livestock keeping. The Church in northern Ghana has done a lot for the attainment of sustainable livestock industry.

The living condition of people within the Northern Region is relatively low. Livestock was therefore chosen to help augment the living condition of the people. This is achieved by encouraging farmers to intensify the production of livestock since it is a good source of protein.

Livestock keeping also serve as a form of savings against periods of shortage (Hassen and Autreve, 1998) hence its use for improving the living condition of the people.

Livestock is also used by the churches to enhance the food security of the people within the region as it helps to extend the risk reduction strategy of farmers (Reijntjes *et al*, 1992). Livestock also help in the intensification of farming and poverty reduction, especially among the rural poor (MoFA/ DFID, 2002) hence its use to enhance food security.

The Assemblies of God Relief and Development Service (AGREDS) in the restoration of peace among the people of Konkomba and Nanumba ethnic groups extensively used livestock to restore

peace among the people. This has resulted in the relative peace existing between the two ethnic groups within the region.

This study therefore seeks to find out the extent to which churches are involved in livestock production in Ghana's quest for a sustainable livestock industry.

Methodology

The study was carried out between January to July, 2004 in the Tamale Municipality.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used in the collection of information on the operational activities of churches, type of animal supported, achievements of the church and challenges faced by churches supporting the livestock industry. Church leaders and church project coordinators were the respondents. Due to financial limitations the study did not conduct an interview for the beneficiaries. Besides the questionnaire further information was obtained from the annual reports of the churches.

Results and discussion

Background information of churches

Eighteen churches were interviewed and grouped into Orthodox, Pentecostal and others. Eight (44.4%) belonged to the Pentecostal, seven (38.8%) were Orthodox and three (16.6%) belonged to the others. The years of operation of these churches ranged from 1-10, and 10 years and above. From the years of operation of the churches it was observed that the churches that have been in operation for a long time (10 years and above) provided more social services to the communities and the nation at large. The longer the period of operation the more social services provided and the need for a special organisations to be set up for the purpose. All the churches interviewed generated funds from the weekly offertory and periodic fundraising activities. Ten out of the eighteen churches interviewed had special organisations set up to source funding

Table 1: List of churches in livestock production and their reasons for the support

Church	Name of church organization	Reason
Catholic	Tamale Arch-Diocese Agricultural Programme (TAAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve upon the living condition of the people. Food Security
Presbyterian Church of Ghana	Presby Farmers Training Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve upon the living conditions of the people. Food Security
Assemblies of God	Assemblies of God Relief and Development Service (AGREDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To re-stock livestock that were lost during the 1994 conflict between the people of Konkomba and Nanumba in the Northern Region To help facilitate peace talks after the conflict. Food security.

by presenting proposals to donor agencies. Funds raised were used in executing livestock projects thereby reducing the burden on the offertories. Out of the 18 churches interviewed six (33%) support the agric sector and 3 (16.6%) out of the 6 have livestock included in their agric project.

A greater number of the churches do not support the livestock industry in any way. Funding was a major reason why most churches would not support the sector. The funds generated from offertory and fund raising are already overstretched. Donors are also specific on what exactly the funds they provide should be used for, which normally has just a little going into livestock.

The study revealed that churches supporting the livestock industry supported programmes like farmer training in the area of good husbandry practices, provision of livestock medication, supply of breeding stock and feedstuff supplementation. An important factor that enhances agriculture is the extent to which farmers have access to training (Overholt *et al*, 1985). The churches in view of this provide training for farmers

to improve upon their production.

The churches also assisted farmers with medication to help reduce the cases of diseases which is a major problem militating against the growth of the livestock sector (Shiitu *et al*, 2002). Having an improved breeding stock is very essential in the sustainable development of the livestock industry; this is why all the three churches support the farmers with improved stocks. The AGREDS for example, supplied the inhabitants of Konkomba and Nanumba tribes with improved breeds of cattle to re-stock the lost cattle during the conflict.

Achievements of churches in the livestock sector

Assemblies of God Relief and Development Service (AGREDS)

The people of Konkomba and Nanumba lost a large population of livestock during the conflict in 1994. The church therefore decided to re-

stock the lost animals as a way of restoring peace in the two areas. The church supplied the Konkomba tribe with a number of improved breed of cattle which they were to breed. After weaning the first calf the cow is sent to the Nanumba people by the Konkomba to also breed and wean after which it is returned to a Konkomba in that order. This continuous interaction, in addition to other peace talks in the area, have resulted in the relative peace existing in these areas. The livestock project of this organisation, however, came to an end after this achievement.

Presby Farmers Training Programme

Two hundred and twenty farmers in four communities within the Tamale Municipality have undergone training in the areas of animal health and husbandry practices. As a result agro by-products such as pigeon pea waste and groundnut haulms are being used for supplementary feeding in the dry-season. In the area of health, some poultry were also vaccinated against new castle, fowl pox and gumboro diseases in these communities. The use of bullocks for traction is gaining significant increase among the beneficiary communities. Most of the beneficiaries prefer ploughing their field with bullock to using tractors.

Tamale Arch Diocese Agricultural Programme (TAAP)

The objective of this programme was to increase small ruminant and pig production. The church therefore supports farmers with improved breeding stock and train them in improved husbandry practices. The training has significantly enhanced the knowledge of farmers in the utilization of crop residue especially groundnut haulms for dry season ground feed supplementation (fig.1). Farmers in the target communities of this project have received training in the construction of simple animal structures using local materials (fig. 2). They also received training in the area of crop-livestock integration in order to improve crop yield. Veterinary drugs and salt licks were made available to farmers at affordable prices. The use of bullock for traction is gaining more significance among the beneficiary communities as a result of the training provided by the church (fig.3). Women who were naturally afraid to get closer to bullocks can now use them for ploughing. Some farmers in the communities received improved exotic breeds of rams and

pigs to cross with the local ones. Farmers also received financial support to construct pens and also carry out other farming activities.



Fig. 1: Farmers practising dry season feeding using crop residue

The churches involved have gained some form of popularity as a result of their intervention. None of the churches however supported the sector with the primary objective of attracting members to their churches.



Fig. 2: Simple structure for animals using local materials

Conclusion

The results from the study infer that when churches are given the necessary assistance they would help improve the livestock industry. With the little resources at their disposal, they have been providing training for livestock farmers on improved husbandry practices, assisting farmers with medication, improved breeding stock, and feedstuff during the dry-season. They also provide training in bullock traction. As a result of the support provided by these three churches there has been an increase in the use of bullock for ploughing, improved living conditions and increased incomes in the areas of operation of these churches.

The Assemblies of God one of the three churches supporting the livestock sector, is no more providing the support because it had achieved its aim which was to restore peace and also restore lost

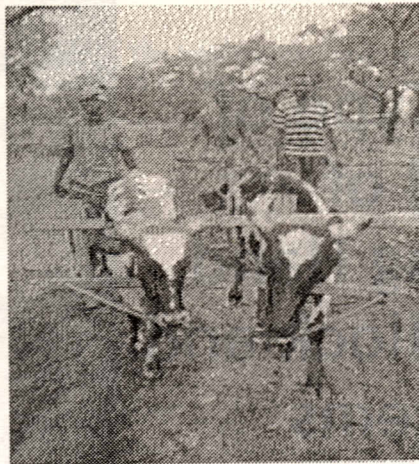


Fig. 3: Farmers including women receiving training in bullock traction

cattle during the conflict. The two other churches are still providing the support. This is because they want more communities to benefit from the livestock programme in order to reduce poverty and increase food security.

Recommendations

Churches that are not into the support of livestock should consider going into it since it is one area that can help improve upon the living condition of the poor.

Churches should also encourage livestock farmers to form co-operatives since this can help them access loans from financial institutions.

Government and other donor agencies should increase their budgetary allocations to the churches supporting the livestock sector so that their intervention can benefit more people in the rural communities.

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