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Sustaining pastoral linkages to high-value livestock Markets through collective action and public-private partnerships : a case study from southern Ethiopia

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Introduction Livestock production is a major livelihood in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia . Traditionally , pastoralists in Africa have not been heavily involved in commercial livestock trade . Pastoralists have mainly sold a few animals during dry periods when they needed cash to buy non-pastoral foods to offset seasonal declines in milk production . Many social , economic , and ecological factors have limited sustained market involvements by pastoralists . In recent times , however , pastoralists such as the Boran have come under added pressure to enter market chains due to population stress and drought (Desta and Coppock , 2002) . Essentially , the traditional production system can no longer provide all of the subsistence needs for the human population . Here we report on recent public-private partnerships created to build new livestock marketing chains in Ethiopia to assist in the process of diversifying pastoral livelihoods and mitigating high rates of poverty .

Materials and methods The Pastoral Risk Management (PARIMA) project of the Global Livestock Collaborative Research Program (GL-CRSP of USAID) has undertaken participatory approaches to tackle problems in the East African rangelands . One approach has been to forge partnerships among pastoral communities , development organizations , and private livestock exporters in Ethiopia to develop marketing chains . Use of extensive community investments over six years has led to the creation of 59 well-trained collective-action groups in southern Ethiopia . These groups have over 2 000 members and are largely led by women . Groups have been trained in literacy , micro-finance , small-business management , and livestock marketing (Desta et al . , 2006) . There has been substantial growth in the private livestock sector in Ethiopia over the past decade . This has coincided with increased export demand for livestock and livestock products to neighboring Gulf States . This scenario has offered an opportunity for well-organized pastoralists to supply the emerging market . Starting in 2003 the PARIMA team helped coordinate pastoral groups , policy makers , and livestock export firms in a series of exchange tours , workshops , and seminars (Desta et . al . , 2006) . These interactions helped pastoralists learn about product requirements for the export market for small ruminants , in particular , and become aware of major players in the value chain . Policy makers and leaders of export firms also learned about the production potential of the rangelands . Gradually pastoralists and buyers have developed close business relations .

Results Initial purchase agreements were created between 11 of the pastoral collective-action groups and two exporting firms . More groups and firms have become involved over time . Nearly 60 000 sheep and goats and 3 500 cattle have been traded by the 11 groups between 2003 and 2007 . The groups made profits exceeding a total of US \$ 30 000 . It has been estimated that over 600 000 sheep and goats have been traded from the southern Ethiopian rangelands since 2003 overall . Some of the major buyers have also extended working capital and cash awards to groups that have performed well . The OARI , in close collaboration with exporters and other partners , has recently embarked on applied research to identify animal health and nutrition factors that constrain animal quality and quantity for market .

Conclusions Results so far have been encouraging . The process has demonstrated that well-trained collective action groups can respond to emerging marketing opportunities and improve incomes . The success has also revealed the importance of forging public-private partnerships . Sustaining the market linkages is challenging because of volatility in export markets and negative effects of drought and epidemic disease on animal supply .

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