

Research Update

Camel Marketing in the Northern Kenya/Southern Ethiopia Borderlands

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Summary

- No camel movements were recorded to major Garissa livestock clients, such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Thika, and Mwingi towns – all go to Moyale, Ethiopia.
- Instead, a vibrant and lucrative camel market in Moyale is on the rise - herders, traders, brokers, and other market actors stand to gain.
- Likely Kenya government is missing out of billions of Shillings in revenue.

Background

Pastoral livestock trading has grown tremendously in recent years as a result of expanding markets and networks. Sales volume of key pastoral livestock species of camels, cattle, sheep, and goats have soared as regional markets have grown to accommodate the rising sales.

While cattle have largely remained commodity for local consumption, camels are being exported to the Middle Eastern countries in large numbers.

This study examines camel marketing in northern Kenya/southern Ethiopia borderlands, which has suddenly become an attractive economic activity in the past few years.

Methodology

The main study site is Moyale, Ethiopia, which is an expanding regional livestock market gaining prominence for export animals to the Middle East. Moyale was chosen because it is the central point where all species of livestock, particularly camels from southern Ethiopia, northern, northeastern, and coastal Kenya, and southern Somalia converge for sale and onward transportation to Nazareth and the Middle East.

The research addresses the following broad issues:

1. Why camel exports to the Middle East?
2. Who are the main actors in this trade and where are they?
3. What forms of innovations are being used in camel trading in the border areas?
4. Is this innovation beneficial to herders, traders, brokers, and other market actors?

5. What are the constraints to these innovations and how can they be overcome?
6. What are the ways in which the Ethiopian and Kenyan policies (as source countries) and camel exporters and Middle East countries (destination countries) support/constrain these innovative practices?

Initial Findings

Camel trading processes in Moyale market

The livestock market has three major divisions, for camels, cattle, and small stock (sheep and goats), but the camel market is the most active.

Camel export to Egypt flows through either the Moyale to Nazareth to Djibout and Egypt route or the Nazareth to Hamara (Ethiopia) and Sudan route.

Sudanese traders prefer the Djibouti route because it is less risky and camel deaths are fewer.

FAC research highlights several reasons that camels from Moyale are preferred to those within Sudan (that also explaining the surge in exports to the Middle East):

- Sudanese traders are searching for cheaper animals elsewhere in the region because camel prices in the Sudan have increased tremendously in recent years, which has made their business tougher.



Loading camels for market

Photograph: Hussein Abdullahi Mahmoud

- The Darfur camel market was closed because of the war and for this reason Middle Eastern countries are seeking camels from Ethiopia to provide for the deficits caused.
- Demand for a cheap source of protein in the Middle East is soaring prompting these massive exports from the Horn of Africa.

Egypt consumes a significant amount of camel meat from Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Sudan, but most of the “Ethiopian camels” is essentially Kenyan and Somali.

The research shows that Ethiopia is the preferred transit country for traders and exporters dealing in Kenyan and Somali camels.

The pricing, sales, and other activities of the camel market in Moyale, Ethiopia are heavily dependent on brokers. Sudanese traders in Moyale praise the role of their brokers for helping them in the market place and reward them with some payment. Brokers are a valuable link between Sudanese exporters and local pastoralists and sometimes act as guarantors for both sides.

Garissa regional market feels impact

In the past few years, more camels are being sold in Moyale market and trucked to feedlots near Addis Ababa for onward shipping to Middle Eastern countries. Pastoralists in the region have responded to this market opportunity by diverting camels from other markets to this new destination. Consequently, the Garissa regional market has been affected by reduced camel sales in the market.

Current research shows no camel movements recorded to major Garissa livestock clients, such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Thika, and Mwingi towns while several thousand cattle and sheep and goats were moved to these and other towns in the past three years.

As more camels are diverted to the Moyale market for export to the Middle East, regional markets, such as Garissa are being deprived of their share of camels. This has serious implications for camel meat consumption in Kenya’s major urban centres.

Looking ahead

This research will include 2-3 case histories of camel traders drawn from: 1) an Ethiopian Somali from Moyale (lowland), 2) an Ethiopian trader from the highlands (principally based in Nazareth, dealing with fattening), and 3) an Arab exporter.

Policy issues are at the core of innovation by camel herders, traders, and exporters. Each of the country that provides and facilitates the camel trade has different policy regimes which need to be examined with respect to the new ideas that are being developed in the trading network.

This Research Update was written by **Hussein Abdullahi Mahmoud** of the Future Agricultures Consortium. The series editor is David Hughes. Further information about this series of Research Updates at: www.future-agricultures.org

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