

Camels and Commerce: Trends in Ethiopia

Yacob Aklilu

Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, Addis Ababa



Background

Camel production and marketing is an under-researched aspect of livestock development in Ethiopia. This study was aimed to examine changing attitudes, ownership and uses of camels in Ethiopia, and track camel trade routes across regional states, and to Sudan.

Methodology

The study was conducted over five weeks by following camel movements and trade routes over 8,000km, from Mieso to Humera. Seventeen out of 24 markets serving this route were accessed during the study. Interviews were conducted with 104 informants including pastoralists, farmers, itinerant traders, value adders, middlemen, drovers, exporters and relevant agricultural, finance and customs staff.

Key findings

Camels are becoming the pack animal of choice instead of donkeys and mules, for mid-altitude farmers between Minjar, and Shiraro and Humera for various reasons:

- Camels are drought tolerant; they do not compete with grazing animals and thrive well on available browses such as cacti and *Euphorbia tirucalli* in mid-altitude areas.
- The motives for acquiring camels are to augment income from rental services (about US\$45-90/month/camel) in the interim and to finally sell them for profit after value adding.
- Camels are also used for ploughing in Shiraro and Humera, and for cultivation and harrowing in Kobo and Alamata.



- Camel prices have increased by over 100% in 2010, due to the export demand in Sudan - 15,020 camels were exported to Sudan between July 2009 and June 2010 through Humera, worth over US\$ 6 million.
- Up to 100,000 camels may exist in the mid-altitude regions between Minjar and Shiraro at any given time.
- The economic significance of camels in general, and in the mid-altitude regions in particular, seems to be largely unrecognized by policy makers.

Recommendations

- A need to recognize the economic significance of camels in poverty alleviation both in pastoral areas and in farming communities of mid-altitude regions to provide appropriate support services
- The construction of a bridge at the crossing point on the Takaze River to reduce the drowning of camels when crossing into Sudan
- As a cross-border trade, the current export process is carried out without any certification and this arrangement should continue in as long as this is acceptable by the importing side; a certification system may not make the business profitable given additional costs to be incurred by exporters and the lack of processed feed at the exit point



References

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