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Namibian livestock owners embrace new land management and marketing techniques

The economy of Namibia depends heavily on its livestock sector. Goats, sheep and cattle easily outnumber people in a nation nearly twice the size of California. Livestock owners in the Northern Communal Areas (NCAs) support about 70 percent of the country's population.

Troubled by fears of foot and mouth disease (an infectious and potentially fatal virus that affects cloven-hoofed animals) and other animal-borne epidemics, the Government of Namibia maintains a fence that separates much of northern Namibia—from areas in the south that have been certified to be free of foot and mouth disease.



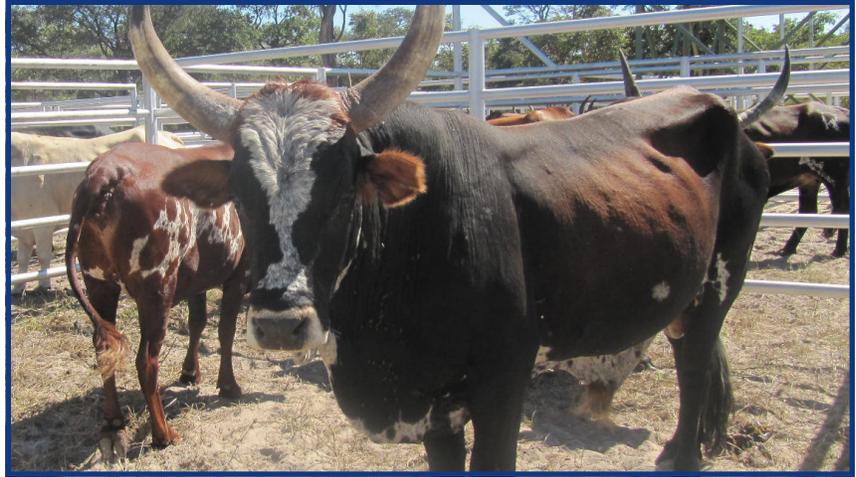
Farmers of Oushake in the Ohangwena Region attend the livestock auction

The fence leads to inequitable trade and a weakened national livestock herd. Livestock raised in the northern zone have lower carcass value than those raised in the south, and they must undergo a series of long and costly steps to receive certification for large international markets like South Africa and Europe. Also, a poorly functioning communal land tenure system has led to degradation of grazing land and poor livestock nutrition and productivity. The majority of livestock owners in the north primarily raise animals for subsistence and have little incentive to adopt modern technology or management methods.

Managing for the Long-term

Unlocking the economic potential of this region was one of Namibia's main priorities when it signed a \$304.5 million compact with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in 2008. By working in

partnership with MCC to bring new veterinary centers, a traceability system and improved land management techniques to the region, Namibia hopes to improve productivity and eventually unite the northern and southern livestock sectors. The compact's Agriculture Project, which includes livestock, land and indigenous natural product activities, is expected to benefit nearly 750,000 Namibians in the NCAs over the next 20 years.



Because all land in the north is communal and livestock owners have had less incentive to manage it productively, northern lands often suffer damage from overgrazing. By combining their herds and using a strategic grazing plan, livestock owners are working towards improving the health of their forage lands and their own livelihood. MCA-Namibia (MCA-N), the government entity implementing Namibia's MCC compact, has encouraged exchange visits between rural communities to generate support for improving the condition of grazing areas.

Building Better Markets

MCA-Namibia has worked with farmer associations and other entities to expand opportunities for herd owners to sell their livestock on the open market.

The Ohangwena region lies in northern Namibia, along the border with Angola. For years, the local farmer association had difficulty raising funds to support its activities. But when the Government of Namibia constructed a state-of-the-art livestock auction facility in the region, the association agreed to organize an auction and received assistance from MCA-N toward this effort.

Previous auctions in the area had generated little interest, with perhaps one buyer in attendance and no scales to weigh cattle. The Ohangwena farmer association and MCA-N, however, were surprised and very encouraged by the turnout at this auction. Almost 100 cattle were gathered for auction, while farmers also brought chickens, crops, vegetables, and other items to sell—turning a simple livestock auction into a farmers' market.

At the auction, eight buyers purchased cattle for more than \$30,000, a hefty sum for the people of the Ohangwena region. The farmer association earned nearly \$600—important revenue that, for the first time in years, will allow the organization to advocate for greater opportunity for the area's livestock owners and farmers.

These benefits are substantial. As the new land management and marketing techniques spread, the projected outcome is a stronger economic future for Namibian livestock owners—and a better life for their families and communities.