

A note on the draft animals used in northern Nigeria

by

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Abstract

In northern Nigeria, work animals include horses, cattle, donkeys and camels. Horses are not used for draft purposes. Donkeys are used to transport farm produce (by pack and cart), crop residues and water but not for plowing. Camels are mainly used for transporting farm produce, water and goods. Cattle are the main source of animal traction for agricultural development in northern Nigeria. Constraints include lack of funds, limited feed resources and poor extension.

Draft animals in Nigeria

Horses were used in olden times for wars, for personal transport, for courier services, for important ceremonies and social events and for transporting harvest products. Horses are still important today as some farmers ride to the market to sell farm produce that is loaded on donkeys or camels.

Donkeys are very widespread in the north of Nigeria, particularly on small farms. They are used for transporting farm produce to markets or to roadsides for collection by trucks. Farmers buy inputs such as planting material and transport them to their farms on donkeys. They also transport manure. Donkeys are used to carry water. Farmers increasingly use donkey carts, but donkeys are not used for plowing, and this is claimed to be because of the shape of their hooves.

Camels are used for plowing in the neighbouring Republic of Niger, but this is seldom seen in Nigeria where they are mainly used for transport. Camel dung is used as a fertilizer.

Cattle are the main source of animal traction for agricultural development in northern Nigeria. Cattle were not used for cultivation

before the colonial era but they were used for transporting farm produce and crop residues. Cultivation with draft cattle started during the colonial days at official agricultural centres, manned by expatriate officers. Farmers were given loans to purchase cattle, repayable within a four-year period. Eventually animal traction enabled the farmers to increase the size of their farms and purchase more cattle for this purpose. Mixed farming is commonly practised on northern sandy soils, as opposed to the southern areas with heavier rainfall and clay soils where the tsetse fly represents the main constraint. Cattle are used for plowing, weeding and transport of farm produce as well as drawing and transporting water.

Animal power enables farmers to produce a variety of farm produce. Animals can be particularly useful for drawing water, transporting water and other transport. Constraints to animal traction include limited finance at farm level, insufficient feed availability due to drought and inadequate extension services.

Résumé

Les animaux de trait du Nord-Nigéria incluent chevaux, bovins, ânes et chameaux. Les chevaux ne servent pas au trait. Les ânes de bât ou attelés transportent les produits agricoles, les résidus de récoltes et l'eau. Ils ne sont pas utilisés pour la préparation des sols. Les chameaux servent principalement au transport. Les bovins représentent la source principale d'énergie animale pour le développement de l'agriculture. Tous ces animaux contribuent à la fertilisation organique des champs. Les contraintes actuelles incluent le manque de capitaux, la sécheresse qui affecte l'alimentation animale, la faiblesse des programmes de vulgarisation et les sols qui ne se prêtent pas à la culture attelée.