

Cultural Conflicts with the Cattle Business in Zambia, Africa

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Highlight

African cattle production and marketing in Zambia is far below its favorable potential. Stubborn cultural impediments are slowly being overcome. The process involves two basic steps: (1) stimulating the economic wants of the cattle-owning people to the point where these wants become compelling; (2) improving production and marketing practices to the point that sales prices of cattle prove satisfying to the potential seller.

Zambia's Chief Animal Husbandry Officer asserted that if the level of production among African farmers could be raised to that already achieved on neighboring ranches managed by Europeans, the national herd of cattle would increase about five-fold. He pointed out that the major need was to increase take-off from African herds, which was estimated at 3%/year as compared to 14% in the White-owned herds (Rhodes, 1964).

Production and marketing factors are favorable for cattle-raising in Zambia. Grass and browse grazing is ample in the summer months (mid-November through mid-May). Most farmers have sufficient farm land on which to raise the supplemental feed needed through the winter season if good farm-

ing methods are practiced. The native cattle make efficient gains on good feed. The meat of a well-fattened native beast compares favorably with that of a beef-breed animal of the same age. Whereas in many developing countries marketing facilities for rural cattle leave much to be desired, in Zambia the marketing facilities are first-rate. Government has established ample sales yards throughout the country, and the sales dates are well advertised in advance. The animals are bought at a fair price by the Cold Storage Board on a grade and weight basis, with experienced Government graders doing the grading. Payment is in cash on-the-spot (Fig. 1).

Thus the important physical factors are conducive to a thriving cattle business. Indeed, the small number of progressive cattle-raiser^s show efficient production and good profits.

Cultural Impediments

The lag in the African cattle-business is due mostly to adverse cultural factors. Zambian farmers do not think of cattle-raising as a business. Speaking of the less-progressive majority of farmers, *cattle are not regarded as a crop*. To their owners the social and cultural values of the cattle exceed their economic worth. The objectives of the average Zambian livestock-raiser are neither towards efficient



FIG. 1. On-the-spot cash payment stimulates selling of animals at Government-sponsored cattle sales.

gains nor towards gaining the best market price. An eminent anthropologist said: "It is obvious that until recent years the Tonga¹ desire for cattle was not conditioned entirely by the practical benefits derived from their possession. Forty years ago, little or nothing was done to turn them into what the European would regard as an economic asset." And again: "I have yet to hear them comment on milk records or beef production as criteria affecting their judgments of particular beasts, though they have begun to appraise them in terms of their market price. By the older Tonga, at least, cattle are valued for quite different reasons. They are important in a social context, and in the ritual that dramatizes social ties" (Colson, 1962). In the same reference Colson then lists various ways in which cattle enter into the social and ritualistic life of the Plateau Tonga as follows:

1. Bridewealth, that is, payment of cattle by the male to the female's father according to the bride-price terms agreed upon between the two families.

2. Feasting on cattle to celebrate the emergence of a girl into the status of a marriageable woman.

3. Feasting on cattle during the mourning for deaths of adults. The number of beasts killed was in ratio to the importance of the deceased in the community.

4. Killing of cattle at religious shrines when the community met to propitiate the spirits believed to be causing them mischief, such as drought or pestilence.

5. Gifts of cattle in recompense for hostile acts such as adultery, theft, bodily injury,

and murder. These cattle gifts bought off revenge.

6. Herding arrangements which bound groups of people together in a common interest.

Similar uses of cattle in the social and ritualistic life of the Mashona tribe in neighboring Rhodesia are reported (Gelfand, 1959). Traditional African culture in Zambia employed a simple financial system, with beads, hoes, shells, or other commonly valued articles as a medium of exchange (Colson, 1960). Thus, it was within the cultural experience readily to adapt to the use of minted currency. On the other hand, savings accounts and interest on investments are new concepts difficult for the traditional farmer to comprehend and believe in. Likewise, a 3 to 4% interest return per year on savings seems much too low to an African farmer, who can buy a young cow, turn her out on free grazing, and get a calf as income in roughly the same period. Bank and post-office savings accounts are thus viewed with disinterest or even distrust. The result of these cultural reactions towards economic considerations is that the traditional farmer tends to sell cattle not when they might fetch the best price, but when he needs money to satisfy urgent immediate wants. Even then he prefers, if he has a choice, to sell crops such as corn, tobacco, or peanuts, which carry less cultural values.

Security is cattle. — Colson (1962) reported that when she asks a Plateau Tonga why he wants to keep cattle he is likely to reply: "They are a good thing to have. They help you if you are in trouble." Historically, this deep common feeling present in most or all cattle-owning tribes goes back to the raiding days before colonial rule. The raids caused economic ruin and untold hardship (Brelsford, 1956). Cattle were one of the chief prizes of war. The victims tried

to retain a nucleus of their herds by scattering the animals in the bush when a raid was imminent. Even today among a protein-hungry rural people there is still what amounts almost to a social taboo against a family killing and eating a cow or an ox except on ceremonial occasions, or when the animal is soon expected to die.

Finally, even when the individual reaches the point where all of the above prejudices against selling cattle lose their grip upon him, he likely will not sell simply from lack of stimulus to do so. Though he is in a culture already undergoing change, his wants are still relatively simple and easily satisfied. He builds his own house, principally out of locally-produced free materials. His farmland was obtained free from his village headman. He does not live in an area where public utilities are offered. Grazing is free. Polygamy supplies adequate family labor for the farm. Basic medical services are free or inexpensive. Taxes are low. A warm climate and a simple standard-of-living reduces family clothing costs to a minimum. His food is furnished from his own farm and from the forest, except for such items as salt, sugar, and tea. He produces his own beer and raises his own tobacco. When he is tempted to sell a beast, many doubts assail him. He reflects that it takes the yearly production of two cows to produce one calf (50% calf crop or less). He also reflects that for every mature animal he has raised another died before maturity from disease or lack of feed (Rhodes, 1964). The animal that he has in mind to sell may be perhaps 10 or more years old, weighs about 800 lb., is in poor condition, and is thus in a low grade. It may fetch a return of no more than \$28. Perhaps he decides he will keep the beast and sell some corn instead. The

¹The Tonga is a large, progressive tribe in southern Zambia. The reference is to the Plateau Tonga; the Valley Tonga had no cattle because of tsetse fly.

extension officer may point out that the farmer could realize a much better price for his cattle if he would follow the animal husbandry officer's advice about night paddocks, internal parasite control, winter feeding, etc., but these practices are all new to the traditional farmer. He may look with disfavor or distrust upon them, or he may simply lack the motivation to break with strong cultural habits and beliefs. His neighbors might even inflict reprisals upon him if he tried to rise above them in wealth. In the rural areas of this part of Africa the individual is expected to conform to the village norm in all things.

Inducing Change in Cultural Factors

Hopeful signs of change for the better are appearing. The Tonga are beginning to think of their cattle as an economic asset rather than a means of acquiring prestige (Colson, 1962). Cattle sales and grade quality in the main cattle areas are steadily climbing (Table 1). With cheap grass and cheap labor and with ample potential for increasing corn yields to provide cattle feed, Zambia could become an important exporter of beef. How can growth of the cattle business be accelerated?

First, *the farmer must be motivated to produce and sell beef*. This is not easy in a situation where the subsistence-economy dominates. Where the few wants which have been developed are easily satisfied, there is more truth than humor in a lament of one frustrated extension officer, "It seems that the greatest felt-need of these people is for leisure time." However, to suppose that the rural people lead an idyllic life because their present wants are easily satisfied is mischievous thinking. Malnutrition and disease are their constant companions. It is humane and right to stimulate in such people felt-needs for more education, better

Table 1. Increase in Cattle Sales in Zambia.

Province and grade	1962-63	63-64	64-65	65-66
EASTERN		Unavail.		
Stand. A	1	94		
Good	110	606		
Fair	313	749		
Compound	440	873		
Inferior	13	13		
Young	174	373		
Total	1051	2708		
BAROTSE				
Total	3229	4003	5712	7500

sanitation, better clothing, better food, and the benefits of medical science. This requires the joint field program efforts of the Ministries of Health, Education, and Agriculture, and the Department of Community Development.

It is only when the farmer says, "But how can I get these desirable things?" that he is ready for the extension officer to tell him how to grow more and better livestock and crops. Cultural outlook and habits cause the rural producer to hold on to his cattle as long as he can satisfy his wants by selling farm crops. Perhaps for this reason priority in promoting production and marketing of cattle should be in the areas where livestock are the main, or possibly the only, market crop, as in Barotse Province.

As a result of a good extension program in Kalomo area of the Southern Province, pre-sale cattle feeding increased from 2% in 1961 to 15% in 1963, with considerable increase in the number of cattle sold (Alder, 1964). In the Central Province 10 farmers participated in a pre-sales feeding result-demonstration. The purpose was to show that cattle in the low grades could profitably be brought into higher grades by supplemental feeding of corn-and-cob meal with added protein. Net profit was \$26.90 head for the 68-day feeding period (Ministry of Agriculture, 1965). In the Eastern Province the animal husbandry officer had good success with a device which cuts cattle away from all cultural considerations. This was a feeding project in which the Ministry of Agriculture procured feeder cattle

and contracted with selected farmers to feed them according to instructions in the Agreement. The officer distributed protein supplement to these farmers and checked on the animals at frequent intervals. He also determined when they were to be sold. This practice is a most effective form of result-demonstration when contract animals are identified and sold at the sales with other cattle, because the former bring a much higher price. A Zambian Information Press Release of March 8, 1965 stated that for the year ending January 31, 1965 the Eastern Province Grazier Scheme (mentioned above) involved 309 head of cattle with a net average profit of \$25.20 over a feeding period of approximately 100 days. Only 59 head were in the Scheme in 1964.

Zambia's Chief Animal Husbandry Officer believes that the contract feeding operations can be considerably increased, with resulting increase in numbers and quality of beasts marketed. The plan might include a Government subsidized price to be paid for young feeder stock in the areas best suited to breeding herd operations, such as Barotse Province. The feeders bought by the Government would be contracted to farmers for fattening in the good corn-producing areas of the Southern and Central Provinces. In this way livestock production and marketing would be stimulated and improved in both the pastureland and the farming areas.

In the Namwala District of the Southern Province, where cattle are the chief cash crop, sales of cattle dropped seriously when the private buyer ceased operations. The farmers had been selling cattle whenever they needed money. A number of local cattlemen were selected to become small-scale cattle buyers and were provided with loans to do so through a Government-operated loan fund. This restoration of the services of the local cattle buyer stimulated sales and was also regarded as a successful pilot project in developing local African cattle buyers (Parry, 1963). As a follow-up, the Ministry of Agriculture in 1964 selected nine cattle buyers and financed them with \$1400 each to buy cattle along the Angola border in Barotse Province, where there are no Government sales yards. This op-

eration was also successful in promoting sales of cattle.

Various other measures have been taken by the Zambian Government to encourage production and marketing of cattle. In the Eastern Province abattoir facilities have been improved so that cattle can be slaughtered locally and the carcasses shipped in refrigerated trucks to market. The savings in transportation costs are passed on to the producer and represent almost a doubling of the price paid for the lower grade animals. The Government has adjusted prices paid for cattle to provide a more attractive price to the seller of lower grade cattle as a sales-inducement to dispose of such animals. Large State cattle ranches are being set up in several provinces, partly to overcome the present under-production of beef, but also to train Zambians in proper methods of livestock husbandry.

Much dependence must be placed upon the agricultural extension service to help boost cattle production and sales. It must be enlarged, but skilled personnel and even high-school graduates are scarce. Therefore eighth-grade graduates are screened and the best of these put through a combination of on-the-job training and in-service short-courses. The trainees become extension "demonstrators", assistants to the field extension officers. Such "demonstrators" provided to extension work in animal husbandry have

proved their worth. A sometimes overlooked requirement in extension work in less-developed countries is that the farmers must be frequently visited until newly taught farming skills and methods become habitual. One of the chief values of the demonstrator is performing this visiting function. Without this service the cattle feeding projects among Zambian farmers might be hazardous.

Summary

Zambia, which has a most favorable cattle production potential, finds it difficult to make progress towards becoming a beef-exporting country. The principal reason for this is that the traditional farmers do not regard cattle as a crop. That is, social and cultural values of cattle exceed economic values with the majority of owners. However, this attitude is breaking down as the rural people develop more wants in the cash-crop economy. As these wants increase, the extension service moves in with a program of teaching better cattle production and marketing methods. Government at the same time is taking a number of steps to increase the profits realized in the cattle business. Results are encouraging. Perhaps the most promising

technique to emerge thus far is the Government cattle-fattening contract with the traditional farmers. By this means the Government retains ownership of the feeder cattle and thus avoids all the cultural difficulties encountered where individually owned animals are involved.

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