Livestock in Niger: an important asset for growth and poverty reduction

In 2011, the National Institute of Statistics in Niger (INS) conducted a survey on living standards and agriculture (LSMS) with 4000 households. This survey, which deals with all the aspects related to living standards, is unprecedented in Niger. An important section is devoted to agriculture and livestock production, which until now were largely ignored by household surveys, despite the fact that they represent the main means of subsistence for households in Niger.

Most households, particularly the poorest, have livestock

In rural areas, 4 out of 5 households own or keep animals. Most households own few animals, on average 2.8 tropical livestock units (TLU). On a national scale, in terms of numbers, herds are predominantly made up of cattle (55% of the TLU) and small ruminants (sheep and goats represent 33% of the TLU). On a household scale, on average, there are more small ruminants in the herds (62% of TLU compared to 27% for cattle).

Data from the LSMS provide not just national averages, they also make it possible to identify the differences between regions and households.

In agricultural and agro-pastoral zones, households have much the same number of animals (2.6 and 2.9 TLU). The average number per household is the highest in pastoral zones, with about 4.2 TLU.

Households in pastoral zones have significantly more sheep compared to households in agro-pastoral zones (6.8 compared to 5). They own significantly more goats (8 compared to 5.7 in agro-pastoral zones). They own significantly more camels (4.8 compared to 1.8 in agricultural and agro-pastoral zones).

The number of poultry owned by households in the different agro-climatic zones is similar (numbers vary from 10.1 to 11.6).

Although more poor households have livestock, the poorest 20% of households own fewer animals than the richest 20% of households: 2.4 TLU per household compared to 3.4 TLU. These figures mask a greater disparity that exists between the owners of large and small herds. The richest 20% of households actually own 63% of the total number of animals, compared to the less well-off households, which barely own 2%.

Livestock provide income and numerous services for households

Households usually own or keep animals to generate income. Livestock generate about 10% of the income for rural households and up to 43% of household income in pastoral zones. There are many sources of livestock-related income. Rural households with livestock sell a relatively large proportion of their animals throughout the year: on average 11% of cattle and 20% of small ruminants. Over half of these households produce hides and skins, some 30% produce milk and 18% produce eggs.
Why do households keep livestock?

Livestock also provide a diverse range of other services, such as manure for fertilizing agricultural land and draught power for transport and tillage. These services can be used directly by the households with livestock or they can be offered to other households in exchange for payment.

Lastly, livestock compensate for lower agricultural incomes. They provide animal protein for direct household consumption.

Women are disadvantaged compared to men

Women are disadvantaged in comparison to men when it comes to owning and managing resources linked to livestock, as is the case in many other domains. The LSMS includes specific information on gender. Consequently, the roles of gender in livestock management can be examined in much greater detail than was the case in previous national household surveys.

The gender of the main members of livestock owning households

In fact, in most cases, a man generally owns the animals and controls the income that they generate. Analyses have shown that shared ownership and management of animals is very rare (less than 10% of all cases) in comparison to cases where either men or women exclusively own and manage livestock.

Nonetheless, the distribution of ownership and control of income is more balanced in the case of small ruminants and poultry than for cattle.

Female-headed households are also less well off than male-headed households: 1.3 TLU compared to 2.9 TLU per household.

The Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Livestock conduct the LSMS with technical and financial support from the World Bank via the LSMS-ISA project. The LSMS data is accessible to the public and provides a reliable source of national data for analysts and researchers interested in investigating these and other issues. The INS will conduct the next round of LSMS in 2014.

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