

Challenges to Improving the Quality of Cattle Hides

By Michael Kibue¹

The Challenges

Thirty percent of the loss in leather quality occurs when cutting away the hide from the carcass. To overcome knife damage UNIDO developed a simple machine for pulling off the hide: the SFF machine. The machine is simple in design, manually operated and ideal in even the most rural situation. It is affordable and can be constructed in local workshops. It was hoped that local abattoirs would use the equipment to produce quality hides and skin. Surprisingly despite great benefits, local communities have not adopted the innovation.



The SFF hide drawing machine

LISSA experience

In Lissa, we maintain a positive attitude to new ideas that add value. We installed the SFF machine in our abattoir in Limuru. We provided space and staff to test it out in real working situations. We gained the following experiences:

- The SFF machine is easy to install and use under local conditions.
- Over 80% of leather production defects are reduced.
- The quality of meat products are enhanced due to minimum contact between the meat and dirty hides.
- Hide removal need not slow production process if operations are well organized.

Why Poor Adoption of SFF machine?

We have learnt that improving farmers practice is more than just technological advancement. It is an integrated process occurring in a particular social, cultural and economic context. In the case of our leather industry we identified the following contextual problems.

- Massive ignorance among farmers about leather quality, production procedures and preservation. All these years our communities and livestock farmers have been kept in the darkness about the real value and potential of this valuable resource.
- There is no incentive for good quality leather. Importers pay the same price for all grades of leather. This is a most retrogressive aspect of the leather trade which has hindered efforts to produce quality leather and given opportunity to the exploitive trade practices by importers who are happy to buy a most valuable hide at a very low price.
- We lack clear policy and commitment on the part of government to safeguard leather quality and production practices.

Calling for Joint Efforts

To ensure good quality in leather production and to get back the lost incomes for livestock farmers; LISSA would like to explore with others interested the following:

1. Partnerships and linkages for communication and information exchange for improved leather production. Possible partnerships between farmers groups, leather associations, tanneries, importers, government and development agencies (NGOs, UNIDO etc)
2. Coordinated stakeholder education and training to utilize the low cost SFF machine to improve leather quality. Already interest has been expressed by the leather Associations in Tanzania and Sudan.
3. Lobbying and advocacy for better policies and employment of producers to better manage leather resources.

A better organized leather industry has the potential to rescue many African livestock producers from poverty. This will only happen if the full potential of this valuable resource is realized. The impressive SFF machine developed by UNIDO is available but not used because of social ignorance and exploitive trade practices. This is a serious gap that cannot be addressed by present extension services alone. Partnerships are needed with all key players in the livestock market chain. We would like to use our lesson learning initiative to explore how we can make it happen!

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¹ Story based on presentation of Michael Kibue, LISSA and edited by Anne Dennig, April 2007