



## Fair trade for Maasai pastoralists

With contributions from Michael Kibue. *January 2008*

<http://www.new-ag.info/08/01/develop/dev2.php>



Kenya's livestock industry is disorganised and suffers from poor quality standards

*credit: WRENmedia*

An hour's drive to the south of Nairobi is an area where the Maasai traditionally herd their cattle. But their lifestyle is changing. Kenya's disorganised livestock industry with its subsistence approach, poor quality standards and unfair trade practices means the pastoralists are becoming poorer, whilst consumers are paying increasingly high prices. The grazing area for the Maasai's cattle is also falling and these livestock keepers are realising that they must adapt to survive.

To improve livelihoods and financial returns, there is urgent need for the pastoralists to commercialise their herds. However, improved stock alone is unlikely to bring the desired economic benefits unless marketing of the livestock and their products is improved. With a vision to upgrade and organise the livestock trade and meat industry in Kenya, a group of pastoralists, livestock farmers, traders, meat processors and butchers have set up a non-profit association called the Livestock Stakeholder Self-Help Association (LISSA).

### Transforming unfair trade

The traditional marketing process starts with small traders buying cattle from the pastoralist community at a low price and selling them on in small lots at local markets at a profit. Buyers then take them to markets where the larger traders buy and transport them directly to markets and slaughterhouses in urban areas, such as Nairobi.

The net effect is minimal returns to livestock farmers: on average, farmers receive only 40 per cent of the final value of their cattle. In addition, this system exposes livestock farmers to untrustworthy traders and, due to a lack of organised marketing, many pastoralists are unable to redeem the value of their livestock when adversely affected by drought.



Livestock markets can expose Kenyan pastoralists to unscrupulous traders

*credit: linkinglearners.net*

To ensure fair trade practices for all, LISSA members have organised a transparent market chain starting with the pastoralists, through traders to the Bahati abattoir in Limuru, and on to wholesale meat sellers, retail butchers, and finally consumers. Pastoralists in Kajaiido and Narok in the Rift Valley are benefiting from the system because now they can sell their livestock for cash paid on delivery. This 'price discovery system' (prices dependent upon market conditions affecting supply and demand) has also reduced the costs within the market chain.

## Learning by doing

The LISSA vision has been almost ten years in development and has been realised through a process of 'learning by doing' that members committed themselves to during a Linked Local Learning workshop in Nyeri in 1998. As well as choosing to address the issues of disorganised livestock marketing and unfair trade practices that marginalise the Maasai, members were keen to tackle challenges of poor meat quality, unhygienic meat production, and environmental issues including disposal of the waste produced by the slaughterhouses.



The Bahati abattoir has been praised for its standards of hygiene and environmentally-sound practices  
*credit: linkinglearners.net*

The Bahati abattoir is owned and managed by some of the LISSA members and it is here, in a classroom set up for the purpose, that a process of reflection and learning has taken place. Governed by a guiding set of principles, the members have taken time and patience to develop their vision, to try out new ways of working together, to connect with others including service providers, officials and politicians. They also strive to motivate each other to learn, reflect and carry out the necessary actions for change. Training is carried out in the classroom, particularly on hygiene, aspects of meat production and environmental issues.

The challenge of hygienic processing has also been addressed through the establishment of a biogas plant at the abattoir to convert waste into gas used for lighting, and to heat water for cleaning. Sludge from the biogas plant is then composted and sold to local farmers. Wastewater is treated through a set of ponds to ensure that a nearby lake is not contaminated, and trees have been planted around the area to prevent soil erosion and encourage birdlife.

## A centre of excellence

The result of these efforts is that the Bahati abattoir is now well recognised for its hygienic and environmentally sound practices. Management has improved, business is increasing, and Bahati has become an example of better practice for other abattoirs and stakeholders within the livestock industry.

As a result of exchange visits with other abattoirs from Kajajido and Kiambu districts, LISSA has evolved into a larger association, called Kikasha Livestock Association. The aim of Kikasha is to mainstream and scale up the original shared vision for an improved meat industry and to adopt innovations for the benefit of all those involved in the livestock marketing chain.

Challenges undoubtedly remain in reforming the livestock and meat industry in Kenya but, by learning and working together, LISSA has been able to push for increased livestock trade volume, higher-value products and greater leverage on government policies concerning regulation of the livestock industry.

For poor livestock keepers, nothing can make life more promising than a guaranteed market and price for their livestock.