



Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development
State Department for Crop Development
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Emergency Locust Response Program
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Sustainable Agricultural Livelihood Restoration, Rehabilitation and Resilience in Kenya

Training Manual

2.4.8 SUB-MODULE 8: DONKEY MANAGEMENT

The domestic donkeys are members of the equine family which also comprises of horses, zebras and mules. Donkeys are important animals in the livelihoods of communities particularly those living in ASAL regions. In the developing world, over 500 million people depend on donkeys. The donkey population in Kenya is estimated to be close to two million. Donkeys are often portrayed to creating a pathway out of poverty and facilitating income generation for owners. They are tolerant to desiccation, rehydrate rapidly, and extract necessary nutrients from limited supplies of low-quality sparse forage. They can utilize tree roots, bark, and other dry fibrous matter. Often it is the animal to depend on and last die in times of crisis such as droughts.



A donkey

Extreme disasters such as droughts are becoming commonplace in Arid and semi-arid lands (ASALS). Because of the increase in the drought incidences, some communities in East Africa are diversifying their livestock to include more drought-resistant species, of which donkeys are paramount. This is because other livestock species may be greatly affected by drought and are more demanding unlike donkeys. The role of the donkey in mitigating such disasters cannot therefore be overemphasized.

The role of the donkey

Donkeys play diverse roles in the communities.

Household maintenance activities



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- Delivery of household essentials including medicines, firewood and feed for other livestock
- Collection and transport of water from sources to point of use
- Transport of farm produce (for humans) especially during harvesting and marketing
- Ploughing
- General household transportation

Livelihood strategies

- On and off farm income generation activities
- Rental- can be rented e.g. in construction undertakings to ferry sand, stones and other building materials
- Herding and livestock production
- Value chain development through transport
- Socio-cultural use –donkey is used for dowry payment in some communities



Source of meat-donkey meat has been legalized for human consumption



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Tourism- is a popular tourism utility especially in the coastal region, rural racing/sports and entertainment.



Source of milk-donkey milk has medicinal value

Wider community benefits

- Water delivery - to communities
- Waste removal
- Overcoming poor infrastructure



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Other roles

- Role of transport in and out of affected areas – in drought and heavy rainfall situations – donkeys can play a critical role where vehicles cannot
- Key in mountainous areas – they can traverse harsh environments where vehicles cannot and are easy to maintain unlike other modes of transport
- In soil conservation during rehabilitation initiatives – they can carry materials to sites where infrastructure such as gabions are being constructed
- They can also transport materials for the re-building of roads, homes damaged during disasters
- Social context – when one has lost other animals – a donkey is a sense of emotional or psychological support
- Strong, healthy young adult donkeys are able to carry out the most livelihood and economic enhancing tasks (e.g., ploughing, weeding and transporting goods for sale)
- Donkeys as a source of income – the owners are paid to ferry goods
 - Traveling between rural and urban centers
 - Income generated by donkey owners/users – is usually spent or saved for family or household needs such as buying food stuffs from the market, purchasing additional livestock, or equines, buying school materials for children, repairing or building homes, and participating in the weekly or monthly community based saving schemes
- Role of the donkey in Gender dynamics –
 - Donkeys are critical for the transportation of children to school or for women's participation in the market economy.
 - Women suffer most in absence of donkeys – they have closer relationships with donkeys
 - Women are freed to do other chores (as the donkey assists in carrying out the tasks that are otherwise done by or predestined to women)

1.1 Donkey use, management and welfare

It is possible to use donkeys in a variety of ways. However, they need to be properly handled and cared for in order to be able to fulfil their owners' needs. Important considerations include:

- Adequate feed: Just like most domestic herbivores donkeys are predominantly reared on free grazing. They can be supplemented as other domestic livestock with feed resources such as bran, maize jam, sunflower cake, cotton seed, hay, molasses and mineral/salt licks.
- Adequate housing, regular deworming, routine husbandry practices e.g. vaccination and drenching programs
- Health management: Routine vaccination and treatment to control diseases



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- The need to understand their diseases and medication
- Parasites management (both endo- and ecto- parasites)
- Need for treatment and donkey clinics - it increases their productivity
- Padding materials to prevent wounds and injury\Awareness creation and training of both professionals and donkey owners on donkey related technologies, basic management, health care and welfare problems of donkeys. Veterinarians working on frontlines in times of crisis need to be cognizant of this

Donkey use in conflict zones

The donkey can be an important animal during crises such as insecurity. They can be used in: -

- Delivery of medicines, used as ‘ambulances’ in rural parts where they transport the sick, aged and injured to hospital. Donkeys move faster in such incidences compared to other domestic animals
- Navigating insecurity - donkeys can be used along alternative routes to safer places
- Used to carry belongings, children, and the elderly to temporary shelters and other places of safety.

Further reading

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