Enhancement of the local milk sector in collaboration with dairy farmers from the South

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Vétérinaires Sans Frontières International (VSF International) is a network of 11 non-governmental associations. Its members are the individual national VSF associations of Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Canada and Czech Republic. VSF International members implement altogether more than 100 projects in over 40 countries in the field of livestock production, access to animal health services and agriculture.

Common issues despite diverse geographical contexts

Nearly 150 million households, or 750 million people, practice milk production in the world; the majority of them are small scale farmers in developing countries. Using a holistic approach, integrating human and animal health and the environment, VSF International supports people whose livelihood depends on the health and milk production of their animals; the mission of our network is to contribute to improved living conditions of these small scale farmers, reduce poverty and increase food sovereignty.

Based on our experiences and those of our partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America, we want to demonstrate the importance of networks of small scale farmers who constitute the „peri-urban dairy belt“; these actors, whose potential is not yet fully exploited, are already contributing to feed both rural and urban populations.

According to FAO1, rising incomes, population growth, urbanization and changing dietary habits will increase the consumption of dairy products in developing countries up to 25% by the year 2025.

In different geographical contexts, constraints to the development of a local milk sector are often similar: lack of infrastructure and means for transporting this perishable product (bad roads, lack of rural electrification, cold chain and milk bulking facilities are practically non-existent). Besides that, small scale producers face lack of technical assistance and support in animal health and have limited access to animal feed and veterinary inputs. They lack also packaging and marketing skills; their production is often only seasonal, designated for direct consumption and processing and moreover, they have to compete with milk powder imports.

Lessons learned

Due to lower production costs (work force of family members; intensive land use; low investments) the small scale dairy sector is competitive with large scale dairy farms in peri-urban areas. An obstacle is that smallholder farmers can often only organize farmers involved in the process of milk collection, to facilitate access to veterinary care and other inputs, including feeding of livestock during the dry season, for example);

- improving animal husbandry techniques through production and storage of high quality fodder for the dry season; introducing (cow)-sheds (or semi-sheds) for a better control of reproduction and production; reasonable upgrading of breeds in milk yields (improvement of endemic races or progressive crossbreeding with adapted imported breeds - photo of crossbreeds of Nordic Montbéliard).

- the creation of sustainable jobs and regular cash income for farmers, collectors and processors, sometimes well above the local minimum wage;

- the improvement of food security: availability of milk from local producers even during the dry season, availability of pasteurized milk and derivative products for urban consumers;

- the creation of added value in rural areas;

- the reduction of imports of milk powder in Southern countries.

However, such a change must be based on a minimum of conditions:

- appropriate linkages/networks resulted in generating tangible economic impacts and an improvement in living standards of farmers, including:

- an increase in milk production;

- positive impacts such as an improvement in animal health and milk production of their animals; the mission of our network is to contribute to improved living conditions of these small scale farmers, reduce poverty and increase food sovereignty.

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- the reduction of imports of milk powder in Southern countries.

Finally, VSF International and its partners advocate for greater support to local milk value chain-related initiatives through inclusive and responsive policies: the encouragement of private sector investment and cooperative networks, inclusion of local milk processing initiatives into technical supervision and extension services, their connection to agricultural and agribusiness sectors (better utilization of crop residues and agro-industrial by-products), improved dissemination of techniques for forage and agroforestry, promotion of domestic consumption of fresh milk and protection of the national dairy sector.


Crossbreeds Ndama x Abondance, Velingara, Casamance

My parents were traditional livestock keepers; it was only for family consumption. Today, I really notice the importance of livestock breeding brings me a real income and with 3 crossbred cows, I produce more milk than my whole herd before", Sadia Mbacke. Breeder and chairman of the Dairy Cooperative Larogal, in Vélingara, Casamance2

Sadia Mbacke, Breeder and Chairman of the Langal Dairy, Velingala Casamance

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