

Abstract

Camel production is a major source of livelihood for the pastoralists in the drier parts of Kenya. The majority of these camels are raised under traditional management systems that are not well understood by both researchers and policy makers. This paper looks at the ecological, management and socio-economic aspects of camel production among the Somali community of Moyale District, northern Kenya. Besides a thorough literature search, a survey was conducted to collect data on these aspects. The results show that the Somali pastoralists have evolved rational strategies for adapting to the prevailing production conditions of fluctuating forage amounts, and inadequate water and mineral salts. Some of the strategies include herd splitting, watering intervals and salt supplementation.

Several aspects of the production system indicate the pastoralists' inability to relate their management practices to certain phenomena. A few of these are restriction of initial colostrum milk supply to calves and calf mortality, irregular supply of mineral salts, and breeding practices that tend to cause inbreeding. Inadequate veterinary services due to lack of access to drugs and veterinarians constitute major constraints to camel production. The results indicate the need to educate the pastoralists on management practices that would improve camel productivity, as there is potential for improvement using simple techniques.