



**EFFECTS OF THE DONKEY HIDE TRADE
ON THE LIVELIHOODS OF SMALLHOLDER
FARMERS IN EAST AFRICA**

RESEARCH SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Trade, both legal and illegal, in donkey hides from across Africa to China is on the rise. Donkey hides are used in a form of traditional Chinese medicine called ejiao which is used in food, drink and beauty products. In order to meet this growing demand, donkeys are sold for export and sometimes stolen from the communities owning them. Difficulties in donkey breeding result in depletion of local herds. Serious welfare, health and safety violations have been associated with the trade, transport and slaughter of donkeys for skin trade. Concerns have also been raised that the loss of a donkey may adversely affect some of the poorest communities, particularly in rural areas.

THE EFFECT OF DONKEY HIDE TRADE ON LIVELIHOODS - THE KENYA EXAMPLE

Kenya is one of the countries in the East Africa with the largest donkey population at approximately 1.8 million. The animals work in water provision, agriculture, transport of people and goods as well as other income-generating activities.

In 2018 Brooke East Africa commissioned research to survey smallholder farmers in five counties in Kenya (Kitui, Kirinyaga, Nyandarua, Narok and Bungoma) in order to investigate the effects of the donkey hide trade on livelihoods and on farmers' choice of a livelihoods strategy.

The research shows a significant adverse effect of the trade on local communities. If not curbed, the donkey hide trade could result in increased levels of poverty, vulnerability to shocks, and marginalisation of already deprived populations and disadvantaged groups such as women, children and elderly people.



KEY FINDINGS

- Donkey trade offers short term benefits to farmers (e.g. money to pay school or medical fees), providing an incentive to sell the animals.
- Beyond short term benefits, the loss of a donkey forces farmers to resort to more costly or less efficient alternatives, making them vulnerable to poverty.
- Women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable as a result of donkey loss.

"Donkeys are very important to smallholder farmers (...). As a farmer I use the donkey to cultivate land and during planting time to transport manure to the farm, to transport harvested crops to my house and later to transport the produce to the market".

Kitui County resident



DETAILED RESULTS

645 community members, the majority smallholder farmers, took part in household surveys and focus group discussions as part of this study.

Donkeys play a key part in livelihoods

Farming was reported as the main source of livelihoods. In these communities, donkeys are predominantly used for transporting water for household consumption, firewood and farm produce.

Most farmers were aware of the donkey hide trade. However, many reported a lack of sufficient knowledge of regulation governing the trade, which is usually done through middlemen.

The donkey hide trade is not a sustainable livelihood option

Study participants named donkey sale as the main reason behind the reduction in their herd size. During the focus group discussions, 43% of participants indicated that they would sell their donkeys to pay medical bills and 63% stated they had previously sold their donkeys to cover school fees for their children.

The majority of participants reported a reduced food supply in their households as a result of donkey trade. This was due to loss of income from commercial or farming activities supported by donkeys.

Vulnerable groups are worst hit by donkey hide trade

When asked how the donkey hide trade affected community members with disabilities, 62% of respondents reported having to rely on help from others to undertake daily chores or move around. In consequence, this may reduce the independence and sense of agency of elderly members of the community or people living with disabilities.

It is primarily women, often assisted by children, who use donkeys to transport water, farm produce and goods to and from market. With the loss of an animal, women and children need to perform these tasks themselves, which reduces their income and takes up time otherwise spent on more productive activities such as school attendance or participation in social structures.

"I am really affected when I lose my donkey. This is because I will have to carry water on my back. I will also have to request my children to help me, and sometimes they have to skip school..."

Resident of Mutomo, Kitui County

"The sale/loss of donkeys has greatly affected the transportation of produce from the farm. Transport of farm produce has now been left to motorcycles making it very expensive."

Resident of Olkalau, Nyandarua County



CONCLUSIONS

This piece of research is one of the first attempts to systematically gather evidence on the effect of donkey hide trade on livelihoods. It clearly points out a worrying trend – communities, already very poor, are left worse off financially in the long term after their donkey is sold or stolen. In particular, the negative effect on vulnerable groups such as women, the elderly and the disabled, reveals a pressing need to establish measures that protect communities from the consequences of the trade.

It is our recommendation that the trade should be closely monitored and its effects on livelihoods taken into account in policy making and any legislation that attempts to regulate the trade.

This study acts as a pilot revealing important patterns to be monitored and suggesting areas for further investigation. More research is needed to understand the full range of effects that the trade has on communities, as well as animal welfare and animal health.

Read the full journal paper:

Carder, G., Ingasia, O., Ngenoh, E., Theuri, S., Rono, D. and Langat, P. (2019) The Emerging Trade in Donkey Hide: An Opportunity or a Threat for Communities in Kenya? *Agricultural Sciences*, 10, 1152–1177. <https://doi.org/10.4236/as.2019.109087>

ABOUT BROOKE

Brooke is an animal welfare organisation that uses international development approaches to improve the lives of working livestock and the people who rely on them.



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