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## Assessing Sheep Traders' Preferences in Kenya: a Best-Worst Experiment from Kajiado County

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### Abstract

This study investigates the purchase behavior of sheep traders in Kajiado County in Kenya. This is, to the best of our knowledge, the first investigation on sheep traders by the use of Best-Worst technique. A face-to-face questionnaire was undertaken in three livestock markets (Kiserian, Bissil and Mile 46) involving 108 traders. The results indicated that sheep traders are also involved in other types of animal trading, essentially cattle and goats. Income from sheep trading represents slightly less of the half of total incomes, with some differences between livestock traders' groups (markets). Traders are generally involved in other business activities among the value chain essentially such as livestock production, fattening and slaughtering. Four attributes with different levels have been utilized to describe the Best-Worst experiment: sheep age, sex, breed and price. All sheep traders assign higher importance to the sheep breed. This is essentially the case of Dorper pure breed and Dorper x Red Maasai cross breed. Price attribute was the second most important factor for sheep traders with higher preferences for the two extreme price levels. Sheep age and sex were found of least importance for traders. Providing sheep smallholders with the appropriate animal breed characteristics will enable them match market demand and increase their incomes. This is one of tasks of ILRI Kapiti experimental farm

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### 1. Introduction

In the last three decades, various studies have been undertaken at the producers' level regarding small ruminants'

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production in developing countries, including Kenya. Red Maasai sheep production has also been widely studied in past decades, especially to evaluate the breed and aspects of its use in crossbreeding (Bekure et al., 1991; Iyangala et al., 1992; Nguti et al., 2003). Studies of red meat preferences and consumption have also proliferated during the last decades (Grunert, 1997; Glitsch, 2000; Verbeke et al., 2010; Zaibet and Mtimet, 2010; Mtimet et al., 2013; and for a compendium of studies see Jabbar et al., 2010), in both developed and developing countries but with greater application to developed countries.

In between these two ends of the value chain, there are other players with vital roles in the information transmission and value addition along the value chain. Unintentionally or otherwise, traders have been neglected by researchers†. The resulting paucity of studies of traders is probably due in part to traders' mobility, lack of formal business identities, and possibly their preference for avoiding disclosure of business details. However, traders represent the first source of market information for producers, and hence are the conduit for the incentives for producers' production and investment decisions. Understanding traders' needs and preferences is then an important step in the design and implementation of market-responsive interventions by, and supportive policies for, producers in value chains activated by traders.

Identification of the influential variables in sheep price formation has been studied to some extent in other countries (e.g. Gutu et al., 2011; Terfa et al., 2013). Kenyan sheep value chains have not featured in such studies, nor has there been a systematic regional study of traders' preferences for live sheep attributes that allows comparisons across and within trader samples from selected locations. The current study accompanies a baseline household survey of pastoralist Maasai livestock producers in Kenya's Kajiado County. Sheep production is such households' main income-earning activity, and in recent times has experienced a boom due to growing urban demand. Trader actions mediate such demand due to Kajiado County's remoteness from urban centres, and the need to assemble sheep for market and transport them. Anecdotal evidence suggests problems for Maasai sheep producers as they adapt to market oriented production and adjust their on-farm activities and investment to access and benefit from markets. The study aims to identify trader preferences for animal attributes over which producers have some management control. It particularly focuses on sheep breed, which represents a long term management decision by the producers and a national resource management issue for the Kenyan government in protecting the unique genotypic and phenotypic characteristics of the contribution locally-adapted Red Maasai sheep.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Study area*

The study area was selected for local and regional prominence of pastoralist sheep production, and historical presence of Red Maasai sheep. It is part of a larger study involving a baseline household survey of Maasai pastoralists conducted in Iloodo-ariak sub-location and Enkaroni location of Kajiado County.

A pilot study conducted before the start of the survey, in the same area, was used to refine the sampling approach and the choice of study locations. The livestock markets nearest to Iloodo-ariak sub-location are Kiserian and Mile 46, which are weekly markets. The closest livestock markets to Enkaroni location are Bissil, Piliwa, Sajiloni, Mile 46 and Kajiado markets. Taking into account the importance of each market in terms of the species and numbers of animal traded, the frequency of the market (daily or weekly), three livestock markets were chosen: Kiserian, Mile 46, and Bissil. Market selection was also discussed amongst project partners, specifically with locally-experienced NGO NIA (Neighbours' Initiative Alliance).

### *2.2. Data collection*

Data was collected using face-to-face interviews. The interview questionnaire featured questions about traders' identity, business activities, main livestock markets used, number and type of animals bought and sold during the past year, and specific aspects of sheep trading. At the end of the questionnaire respondents were presented with a set of 12 cards, as a choice experiment. Each card described a sheep for sale, by "levels" of 4 attributes: sex, age, breed and price (Table 1),

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