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Short Communication

Short Communication on Economics of Livestock in Sudan After the War

Mohamed Alhadi Adam |

*Corresponding Author: Mohamed Alhadi Adam, Livestock Economist and Marketer, University of Khartoum, Sudan.

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Beef Production as a Model

Livestock has long been one of the cornerstones of the Sudanese economy. With a national herd estimated at over one hundred million head of cattle, sheep, goats, and camels, the sector represents not only a vital source of food security but also a key contributor to exports and foreign exchange. Within this wealth of resources, beef production holds particular significance as the primary supplier of red meat for domestic consumption and for regional markets, especially in the Gulf and North Africa.

Historical Context and Comparative Advantage

Before the war, Sudan enjoyed a unique comparative advantage in livestock production, stemming from its vast natural pastures, diverse ecological zones, and traditional knowledge of animal husbandry. States such as Kordofan, Darfur, and Gezira were major production hubs, supplying cattle for fattening, slaughter, and export. These areas benefited from a combination of extensive grazing lands, riverine systems for water supply, and locally adapted breeds capable of withstanding harsh climatic conditions.

The sector was structured along well-established value chains, extending from pastoralists and smallholder farmers to feedlots, abattoirs, and export terminals. Livestock marketing was facilitated by active local and regional markets, supported by veterinary and extension services that helped maintain herd health and productivity. The sector not only generated thousands of direct jobs but also supported numerous ancillary industries, including feed production, transportation, meat processing, and trade logistics.

Impact of War on the Livestock Sector

The outbreak of war, however, profoundly disrupted this system. Key production areas experienced widespread displacement of pastoral communities, leading to a significant reduction in herd sizes in conflict-affected zones. Veterinary services collapsed, and extension support became largely unavailable, resulting in increased mortality and reduced productivity. Transport networks and marketing channels were severely interrupted, and the supply of critical inputs, such as feed, medications, and water infrastructure, declined sharply.

These shocks translated into several critical challenges

- Increased Production Costs: Scarcity of feed, water, and veterinary support raised the cost of maintaining and fattening livestock.
- Rising Domestic Prices: Beef prices for local consumers escalated, affecting food security, particularly in urban areas.
- Reduced Export Capacity: Sudan's ability to meet regional demand weakened, resulting in lost foreign exchange and declining competitiveness in Gulf and North African markets.

The disruption also had socio-economic consequences. Many pastoral families, who traditionally depended on livestock for income, were forced to abandon herding, exacerbating poverty and contributing to rural instability. The breakdown of value chains further limited employment opportunities and reduced the multiplier effect that livestock production typically generates for rural economies.

Opportunities for Recovery and Growth

Despite these challenges, significant opportunities remain for the recovery of Sudan's livestock sector, particularly in beef production. Relatively stable regions such as the Northern and River Nile states still provide favorable conditions for intensive beef production, especially when integrated with irrigated agricultural schemes that produce sorghum, maize, and green fodder.

The presence of these feed resources offers the potential to develop modern feedlots capable of producing high-quality beef for both domestic and export markets. Moreover, regional demand for Sudanese beef remains robust. Countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and North Africa continue to import substantial quantities of live animals and processed beef, attracted by the quality, price competitiveness, and traditional preference for Sudanese breeds. This demand represents a strong incentive for the government, private sector, and international investors to prioritize the revitalization of the beef industry.

Strategic Recommendations for Sector Rehabilitation

A structured and well-coordinated recovery strategy is essential to transform the livestock sector from a disrupted system into a strategic driver of economic recovery. Key areas of focus should include:

- Investment in Modern Feedlots: Establishing intensive fattening operations to increase beef production efficiency and quality. Feedlots should integrate local feed production with imported supplements to ensure year-round availability.
- Rehabilitation of Veterinary and Extension Services: Restoring animal health programs, vaccination campaigns, and technical support for farmers to reduce mortality and improve productivity.
- Infrastructure Development: Improving transportation networks, market access, abattoirs, and export terminals to facilitate trade and reduce post-harvest losses.
- Tailored Financing Mechanisms: Providing accessible credit and insurance schemes that enable herders and feedlot operators to invest in productivity-enhancing technologies and mitigate risks.
- Capacity Building and Training: Strengthening the skills of pastoralists, farmers, and agribusiness entrepreneurs through targeted training in herd management, feed optimization, and market linkages.

Economic and Social Implications

Revitalizing beef production can yield multiple economic and social benefits. On the economic front, it can:

- Increase national income through enhanced export revenues.
- Create employment opportunities along the livestock value chain.
- Stabilize domestic meat prices and improve food security.

On the social front, restoring pastoral livelihoods strengthens rural resilience, reduces migration pressures, and contributes to social stability in regions affected by conflict. Moreover, a well-functioning livestock sector can support inclusive growth by involving women and youth in value-added activities such as processing, marketing, and feed production.