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Smallholder Livestock Commercialization is Associated with Dietary Diversity and Adherence to Food Based Dietary Guidelines in Zambia

Livestock represents rural wealth and economic prosperity, and their commercialization could have immense welfare, economic, nutritional, and socio-environmental benefits but little work considers these important dimensions. We investigate the relationship between livestock commercialization and dietary diversity by examining adherence to food based dietary guidelines (FBDGs) in Zambia. Relying on a nationally representative rich panel dataset and employing different estimation strategies, we show that livestock commercialization is associated with dietary diversity in line with the FBDGs. The consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, pulses and nuts as well as cereals, starchy roots and tubers respond more to livestock sales. In terms of which livestock contributes more to dietary diversity, we show that dietary diversity responds more to the sale of cattle and pigs at the extensive level of commercialization while poultry sales matter more at the intensive level. Exploring what may explain the relationship between livestock commercialization and dietary diversity, we show that livestock income, off-farm income, and farm production diversity are possible pathways mediating the relationship. Livestock commercialization is associated with income and off-farm income as well as farm production diversity. From a gender perspective, we find similar gains for both households where women and men share decision making and control, but the effects are more pronounced when females are overseeing decision making of the household. Additionally, we show that income, off-farm income, farm production diversity and gendered decision making are also associated with dietary diversity, further strengthening the highlighted pathways.

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