3. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE ON NGUNI CATTLE USES

Breed of the Past for the Future

INTRODUCTION

Resource-poor farmers possess undocumented Indigenous knowledge (IK) on use of Nguni cattle and their by-products that can be used in the future. Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are bodies of undocumented skills, experiences, ideas, information and insights about survival and livelihood developed naturally over generations by local people within their community (Kaya & Masoga, 2005). Indigenous knowledge is dynamic, relies on memory and is transmitted systematically and orally from generation to generation. Approximately 70% of the communal households in southern Africa depend on low-input livestock production. Livestock production including rearing cattle for multipurpose is an important component of their livelihood because their land is marginal and not quite suitable for cropping (Ndou et al., 2011). Of these, between 35 and 75% are food-insecure. However, as a low-input coping strategy, resource-poor farmers have developed IK to manage livestock and handle livestock products with efforts to address socio-economic challenges, improve their livelihood and celebrate life. Use of IK to address food insecurity among poverty-stricken communal farmers is under-exploited and scantily documented. Sustainability of IKS is, therefore, at stake, unless concerted efforts are made to preserve it.

Among other livestock species, cattle are the most valued across the southern Africa region. One of the dominant indigenous cattle breeds in Southern Africa is the Nguni breed, which has been skillfully bred and subjected to natural selection to meet a plethora of socio-economic and cultural needs of the poor. Uses of Nguni cattle include the provision of animal traction, and playing key roles in socio-cultural ceremonies. Nguni cattle products and terms had been transformed into a rich art of unexpected beauty, and now form part of the stock of IK. This is the cultural heritage of the Zulu people (Poland, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to document the IK of Zulu people on cattle production and actively engage them in livelihood development programs. The article emphasizes that the transfer of IK on cattle production will ensure that the utilization of cattle products will be maintained as a source of food or healing for resource-poor rural farmers. Moreover, the transfer of the IK associated with cattle production to the younger generation opens the way to the potential future.
use of traditional cattle products. Therefore, the objective of this study is to give an overview of Zulu resource-limited farmers’ IK on the socio-economic importance and cultural significance of indigenous Nguni cattle products in rural households.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The experimental procedures were performed in accordance with the ethical standard guidelines approved by the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Research Ethics Committee (Clearance certificate: HSS/0164/013D).

Description of Study Sites

The study was conducted in five villages in the Jozini local municipality in UMkhanyakude district situated in the extreme north-eastern part of the KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. The villages are Biva, Gedleza, Mkhayane, Mamfene, and Nyawushane. The villages are located on flatlands at an altitude of 77 m above sea level. The mean annual rainfall is 600 mm. The rainfall patterns around the district are unreliable with peaks occurring during the hot wet season. Temperature ranges from a minimum of 11°C to a maximum of 30°C. The vegetation around the district is typical coastal sand veld, bushveld and foothill wooded grasslands. Due to the diversity of its vegetation, the district favored a broad range of socio-cultural conditions of the Zulu ethnic groups who occupied these areas for more than 100 years ago.

The villages were selected to represent the diversity in natural conditions around the district. Therefore, in some parts of the district mixed (crop and livestock) farming is practiced whilst natural conditions in other parts of the district entirely favor livestock production. The study area was selected because it is fairly isolated, remote and is still governed by traditional leaders and royal families of the pre-colonial era. Therefore, villagers from UMkhanyakude district represent the Zulu people who are a distinct social group with unique IK of rearing cattle and methods of processing or handling livestock products. The villagers are linked with the urban center through gravel roads with no bridges, and households are not electrified. The remoteness of the villages boosts the use of IK in addressing household challenges by making it difficult to have a constant supply or processing of commercialized cattle products through modern technology, especially during the rainy season. Other communal farmers within UMkhanyakude district occupied these villages as a result of the post-colonial evacuations from other districts within the KwaZulu-Natal Province and were also engaged in local livelihood strategies.

Experimental Design and Data Collection

The study adopted the structural functionalism theory, which points out that a sustainable system is composed of interrelated components which work hand