EU sanitary demands for red meat trade: impact on sustainable development in Namibia

A summary policy brief

Background

Harmonising Namibia's animal health policies with the European Union's sanitary requirements for the importation of fresh red meat into the EU market area has great potential to contribute towards national economic growth through increased foreign exchange earnings and household incomes. However, these policies also have potential to make significant impact on sustainable development in Namibia. The policies of major concern are those that are related to risk management of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD).

Importation of red meat into the EU is limited to clearly defined and delineated geographic zones where the veterinary authorities certify livestock as free from FMD and Rinderpest. Relevant surveillance, movement controls and other bio-security measures must be applied in accordance with the OIE Code. Recognising the competitive advantages of Namibia with respect to land resources, colonial settlers took a mistaken mono-sectoral approach to development through promoting the creation of a disease free export zone for red meat with disregard to wildlife ecosystems.

Namibia's rangelands are largely classified as drylands, that is sub-humid, semi-arid, arid and hyper-arid areas. These rangelands are extremely vulnerable ecosystems. Their unsuitable use inevitably leads to land degradation and as a consequence, to a decline in productive capacity of the land. Currently most rangelands, particularly in communal areas, are in variable states of degradation as a result of very high livestock densities on patches of land that are shrinking due to the expansion of crop production.

Livestock production is the main activity in Namibia's agricultural sector, constituting approximately 85% of agricultural income and close to an average of 9% of the gross national product. Namibia's top priority development goals are reduced poverty and narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor. Facilitating red meat exports is considered one of the major avenues for wealth creation and raising standards of living.

The growth of nature-based tourism in recent years has positioned utilisation of wildlife resources as a key strategy in development of drylands, as a source of income and economic growth. In some hyper-arid areas, wildlife is the most economically rational land-use of choice. Land policies must enable the adoption of the most appropriate land resources management.

The northern regions of Namibia have a significant livestock population. However, the regions face formidable obstacles in developing export-oriented livestock production due to international sanitary standards and poor rangelands. Animal agriculture is the mainstay of rural economies in Namibia. Integrated sustainable land management will provide long term viability of this sector's role in ensuring food security, supporting development and reducing poverty. It is important to recognise the value of nature-based tourism in order to maximise benefits from wildlife resources on marginal rangelands.

Transboundary Animal Diseases

These are defined as animal diseases that are of significant economic, trade and/or food security importance, which can easily spread beyond national borders and have potential to reach epidemic proportions and their control and management including exclusion, requires coordinated efforts in more than one country. (FAO)

Some of Namibia's current animal health policies were designed to harmonise with EU red meat sanitary requirements based largely on a mono-sectoral approach that has an inclination towards sacrificing wildlife in favour of developing a competitive commercial livestock sector. Based on the increasing value of nature-based tourism, this approach has little justification. Integrated

sustainable land management must promote the development of both wildlife and livestock resources together (not necessarily defaulting to one or the other exclusively) as key to efficient utilisation of land resources. Regulations developed for the EU country agricultural industry are not necessarily relevant in a drylands and rural African development context. Harmonising local animal health standards with those of red meat export markets must be socially, culturally and politically acceptable, and economically and ecologically viable.

There is a strong need for close integration of land-use planning, conservation efforts and animal health policies related to FMD control in order to maximise the benefits from diverse land-use systems. Animal health policies must not be considered in isolation following the mono-sectoral approaches of yesteryear but must promote agricultural and non-agricultural development priorities set by the government. All development policies must be coherent in their contribution towards efficient management of land resources.

Zoning for animal disease risk management as an animal health policy tool should be implemented following consideration of wider social and economic development objectives. Harmonising local animal health standards with those of red meat export markets must be socially, culturally and politically acceptable, and economically and ecologically viable. Management of the interface between livestock and wildlife must be guided by risk assessments based on sound science.

Further research is recommended in evaluating the ecological impact of existing veterinary fences and movement restrictions on wildlife. There is also a need to evaluate the extent of social and economic benefits derived from wildlife-based land-use systems on marginal rangelands compared to livestock keeping. A comprehensive assessment of the full impact of FMD control policies on land-use patterns and poverty reduction in rural Namibia is required to support transformation of the current policies.

Sustainable land management

Sustainable land management can be defined as a knowledge-based integrated approach to natural resources management comprising environmentally sound policies and techniques that reduce and or prevent long term land degradation, to meet rising food and fiber demands while sustaining ecosystem services and livelihoods, alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development. (World Bank)

Summary of key issues related to EU red meat trade policies and their potential adverse impact on sustainable development in rural Namibia

Key Issues

- **Stringent EU sanitary requirements** - reference to international standards but increasing in sophistication Veterinary fences - mono-sectoral approach to animal disease control and risk management
- **Land degradation** - integrated sustainable land management critical to deterioration of productive capacity of rangelands
- **Development of Trans-frontier Conservation Areas** - regarded as new frontiers of conflict between wildlife and livestock keepers

Summary of benefits and adverse impacts of EU red meat import requirements

Benefits

Higher producer prices
Increased household incomes
Enhanced national food safety for all
General improvement in meat quality
Enhances Namibia's competitive advantage
Supports economic growth
Contribution towards poverty reduction
Potential to assist in addressing inequities

Adverse impact

Fragmentation of wildlife habitats
Threatening wildlife biodiversity
Reduced viability of conservation areas
Reduced adaptice capacity to resources constraints
May restrict integrated sustainable land management options
Potential to limit development of regional Trans-frontier Conservation Areas

The strategies of managing the risks of animal diseases through demarcating Namibia into animal disease risk management zones has largely worked to facilitate access to both regional and international markets, particularly the EU and South Africa. However, these strategies have not included promoting marketing of livestock products within the country, particularly the marketing of red meat from northern regions to high value markets in towns located in Namibia's FMD free zone. International rules that govern trade in livestock and livestock products have potential to cause a significant impact on economic, environmental and social change in Namibia - by building fair and environmentally sustainable policies and trade flows.

Policy recommendations

1. There is a strong need for **close integration** of land-use planning, conservation efforts and animal health policies related to FMD control in order to maximise the benefits from diverse land-use systems. Animal health policies must not be considered in isolation following the mono-sectoral approaches of yesteryear but must promote agricultural and non-agricultural development priorities set by the government. All development policies must be coherent in their contribution towards efficient management of land resources.

Further research is required in order to determine the full impact of international red meat trade policies on sustainable development in the following areas:

- a comprehensive ecological assessment of the impact of existing veterinary fences and movement restrictions of wildlife
- evaluating the extent of social and economic benefits that are generated by wildlife-based land-use systems on marginal rangelands of Namibia in comparison to livestock farming
- assessment of the full impact of FMD control policies on land-use patterns and poverty reduction in rural Namibia
- review of current practices and advice on the latest diagnostic procedures for possible facilitation of speedier and smoother translocation of game species from high risk zones to disease free zones

2. **Holistic outlook**. Policies and strategies to promote red meat exports must not be fixated on creating diseases free zones in a manner that sacrifices other opportunistic livelihoods based on utilisation of wildlife resources. Zoning for animal disease risk management as an animal health policy tool must be implemented following consideration of wider social and economic development objectives. Harmonising local animal health standards with those of red meat export markets must be socially, culturally and politically acceptable, and economically and ecologically viable.
3. Due to poor rangelands in the northern regions, utilising transboundary grazing resources may continue to be one of the main strategies to sustain the livestock densities in these areas for the foreseeable future. As a consequence consideration must be given to developing a **transboundary animal disease risk management zone**, straddling the Angola-Namibia border. This challenge does not only lie in convincing red meat export markets of the integrity of such a zone but also the possible lack of convergence of priorities with neighbouring countries.

4. **Marketing**. Efforts to broaden marketing opportunities for livestock farmers in the northern regions by harmonisation of sanitary measures with import requirements of lucrative red meat export markets including the EU must not be limited to animal health. Most of these markets desire a product of certain specifications that may be a challenge to produce in those poor rangelands. In order for the meat quality to meet market requirements, partial intensification of livestock production in some area through promoting feedlots where they are viable has potential to reduce pressure on rangelands. This would see the establishment of feedlots to encourage a shift from a low-off-take oxen production system to a high off-take weaner and feedlot system which would help to increase the supply of high-quality cattle to export abattoirs.
5. Management of the interface between livestock and wildlife must be guided by **risk assessments based on sound science**. Efforts should be made to promote integrated sustainable land management wherever there is room for livestock production, wildlife ranching and other land use systems. There may be a need to review the movement restrictions on wildlife in view of the growing nature-based industry that has potential to utilise marginal rangelands where livestock production is not viable. Importation of FMD free buffalo on to game ranches in the FMD free zone must be reconsidered in view of the technological advances in diagnostic sciences related to determination of the presence or exposure to the FMD virus. The current precautions are understandable but must be guided by sound science.
6. **International policy**. Namibia, singly or as part of the regional block, should actively participate in the formulation of international animal health standards, particularly those related to international trade in fresh and frozen meat.

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Recommendations for capacity building

Raising awareness of possible impacts of animal health policies about integrated sustainable land management within the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry is critical. There is a need to provide training on rapid appraisal of the potential impact of harmonising national animal health policies with requirements of red meat export markets, however negligible the impact may seem. Furthermore, training on risk assessment of the possible introduction of trade sensitive animal diseases from wildlife populations is needed in order to guide risk-based formulation of policies on managing the interface between livestock and the environment, particularly wildlife.

The *Environmental Management Act* and other Namibian legislation provide for mandatory environmental assessment before any activity that has potential to impact on the environment is undertaken. There is a need to review the enforcement strategies and the capacity for carrying out assessments and conducting monitoring activities in order to bring this legislation to full effect. This approach calls for a closer cooperation between governmental institutions.

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