

Expanding cities are engulfing farmland without providing alternative land for the displaced rural people, often peasants without land title. Herders continue to use the unbuilt spaces, the "city commons", but many residents do not appreciate the presence of cattle. Beacon Mbiba looks at this potentially conflictual situation in urban Zimbabwe.



Photo: Naokumo Tsujuma

The cattle of Chitungwiza

Conflicts on the rural-urban fringe

Beacon Mbiba

The town of Chitungwiza, with about 500,000 people, lies 30 km south-east of Harare, the Zimbabwe capital. It is a product of apartheid policy during colonial times, when black people were spatially, economically and culturally separated from the urban areas of the whites. To house the black labour force, the township was established in 1954 within the legal framework of the African Land Husbandry Act.

It was a dormitory town, where black Africans could sleep overnight and travel to Harare for their daily work. Houses were very basic, without services or productive economic activities. As population increased, further residential areas were established. The land is under the control of the central government.

Livestock in town

In Chitungwiza, cattle are a dominant feature in the gardens, streets and open spaces, especially in autumn and winter. They are mainly of the local Sanga breed, also called *mashona*, which is adapted to local conditions. The urban grazing areas are beside roads, between town sections and in low-lying areas near streams. These sites are also used by urban residents to grow crops such as maize and sweet potatoes in the summer.

Town authorities argue that the cattle are a public nuisance and a vector of disease. In August 1993, the town council passed a set of Animal By-Laws to deal with this problem. The by-laws permit impounding and destruction of animals

found roaming in town and not claimed by the owner within a specified period.

Despite these laws, cattle continue to roam the town's open spaces. Why are the by-laws not invoked? Where do the cattle come from? Who owns them? How do they use the urban spaces? Are they really a health hazard and a source of conflict? What do residents think about this? A study was made in 1994 to answer these and many more questions.

Study by students

After a literature review, discussions were held with council officials, the police and medical practitioners, and a survey was made of urban residents in the areas most frequented by cattle. Students monitored the daily grazing patterns over a ten-day period to complement initial field observations. The students were residents of Chitungwiza, and were allocated observation points near their homes, so that they could combine this work with household chores. Such studies are part of the curriculum for our BSc students in urban planning, as a practical way of teaching social science.

Why are the cattle there?

The residential areas which make up present-day Chitungwiza were "planted" in the middle of Seke Communal Area. The local people, mainly cattle-keepers who did some farming in the summer, were robbed of their grazing and cropping lands and either forced into increasingly crowded conditions or forced out. They received no compensation or alternative resettlement areas.

Herds and their movements?

When herd movements were monitored in June 1994, the cattle entered the urban pastures after 8 am, usually without a herder in sight. Animals seen before this time appeared to be stray animals missed by herders during "roundups" the previous evening. The herders usually drove their cattle home between 5 and 6 pm. The main crops grown in the urban "commons" had already been harvested, so the cattle did not need to be closely tended all day. However, occasionally urban residents were observed chasing away cattle which had invaded their backyard gardens.

The herd size was quite varied. The herds which came from the north were smaller (minimum 8, maximum 50 head) while those from the southeast were larger (minimum 12, maximum over 200 head). The observations allowed us to identify the residential areas of potential conflict, and the roads where traffic problems might be caused by moving cattle. This helped us focus our subsequent interviews and surveys. The observed movements of herds also indicated that a survey of owners had to include rural homes in the

Chitungwiza and the surrounding Seke communal lands lie 1500-2000 m above sea level. Dominant soils are clay and sandy loams. Average annual rainfall is 850 mm, and mean annual temperature is 18°C. Most rain falls in the hot summer from late October to March (with occasional dry spells in December/January). This is the main cropping season.

In the dry season, cattle graze the open spaces between quarters of Chitungwiza town, where urban residents grow crops in the summer.

southeast and north. This part of the study has yet to be made.

In a city of gardeners

Residential space is generally used for food production: 92% of the 112 households surveyed were growing vegetables in their backyards. Only 15 of them kept any livestock at the house, mainly chickens (up to 86 per household) and rabbits (up to 18 per household). Two-fifths of the respondents were also engaged in off-plot cultivation, ie, in areas other than their backyards.

The residents reported that cattle graze urban pastures during the period from May to November, after off-plot crops have been harvested. Only 6 respondents could provide names of the cattle owners, but almost all said that the cattle belong to rural people, mainly from Seki and Mayambara. However, a few cases of urban owners were also found.

Problems for residents

The residents reported numerous problems caused by the cattle. On individual properties, the major problems were destruction of gardens, pollution because of manure, noise disturbance, and damage to property, including laundry and fences. In response, property owners have built stronger barriers around their homes, even concrete walls if they could afford it. Residents noted that houses are an investment and nearby cattle grazing lowers the property values.

In the public domain, cattle were reported to be a nuisance to motorists and a cause of accidents. Residents said that some of the cattle hit by cars are whisked away by butchers, who sell the meat to the public (in violation of urban health regulations).

It is noteworthy that none of the medical practitioners interviewed mentioned the presence of cattle as a significant health risk. The prevalent diseases - dysentery, infections of the upper respiratory tract, tuberculosis and sexually-transmitted diseases - are not related to a cattle environment. However, all practitioners said that the cattle were a serious cause of accidents. This point was also emphasised by the Chitungwiza police, who recorded a high level of accidents on the main roads crossed or travelled by the herds.

Benefits for herders

Residents reported that, during the 1992/93 drought, herders blocked sewer mains passing through the pastures, so that the valleys were flooded with waste water. Thus, green pasture and drinking water were available in the urban area during the drought. As a result, the cattle in

town survived, whereas many cattle in rural areas perished.

Since then, the herders continue to take advantage of the sewage water. Residents fear for their health, since the untreated water could be a source of disease. The health of animals drinking such water is also questionable. Nevertheless, the avail-

Mutual benefits possible

Presence of cattle in the city can be made more desirable if the conflicts they cause related to destruction of property, traffic accidents and general nuisance can be reduced. (The health issue does not appear to be of great importance.) If mechanisms can be developed to deal with

Table 1: What can be done about the cattle in town?

<i>Option</i>	<i>Number of respondents who mentioned it</i>
<i>Encourage owners to tend their herds</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Impound cattle and fine owners</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Erect barrier around the town</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Provide paddocks for the herds</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Relocate owners away from town or provide alternative pastures</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Provide residents with fences</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Other</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>No suggestions</i>	<i>4</i>

ability of the sewage water is clearly of great benefit to the cattle owners.

According to experience in Harare (University of Zimbabwe 1993), treated sewage effluent (after complete oxidation) is safe for irrigating pasture. For Chitungwiza the issue could be one of designing a sewage system that makes purified effluent available to irrigate the valleys. This will come about only if the town council and the urban residents see a direct benefit from and/or are involved in cattle keeping in the city.

There are already indications that at least some residents do benefit from the cattle. Respondents speculated that some councillors are stakeholders in the cattle issue and have therefore not invoked the by-laws. Moreover, some residents hire cattle to plough their urban plots.

Should cattle be banned?

Only 19% of the residents felt that cattle should continue to be allowed to graze city pastures as they have until now. Some of the suggestions on how to deal with the cattle problem are shown in Table 1.

Corrective measures suggested included providing alternative pastures for the rural owners to graze their livestock. This suggestion, as well as the one to ban cattle entirely from town, shows that the laws that prohibit cattle in urban settlements do reflect the opinion of many residents. However, thus far, use of laws and forceful methods by urban authorities has obviously failed to solve the problem. A more promising approach would be one also suggested by several residents interviewed: to reach agreed modes of conduct through dialogue between the cattle owners and the city.

these issues, particularly if the residents themselves are involved, then cattle husbandry at close quarters could indeed be encouraged.

Use of waste water could be a starting point for collaboration between the city and the livestock keepers. The presence of cattle in the dry season on the areas where the residents grow maize in the wet season could be of advantage to the latter, as the fields are fertilised by the cattle. Ways must be sought of bringing together these different users of the "city commons" so that they can reach mutually acceptable agreements.

This initial study has pointed to paths which could be explored to reduce conflict and increase complementarity in the use of urban resources for cultivation and livestock-keeping. The next step will be to investigate the profiles of the cattle owners and to hear also their views about how agreements could be reached. We hope to find out the extent to which urban cultivators hire cattle for draft power and make arrangements to obtain manure for their plots. This may also help to explain the continued presence of cattle in town. ■

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Reference

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