

The Muturu: A rare sacred breed of cattle in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Muturu, a trypanotolerant cattle breed is probably one of the least known breed of cattle in West Africa. Little has been published on its distribution, management, morphological characteristics or biological performance. Early reports showed that the Muturu cattle were once widely distributed across the continent from Liberia, across the West African subregion, to Ethiopia. However, due to expansion of the Zebu population and rapid urbanization, the small bodied animal came under pressure and was found surviving in pockets of the savannahs and in the humid forest zones where it had the comparative advantage of trypanotolerance. The survival of the cattle in the humid and forest zones of Nigeria stems from the fact that the animal is still sacred in so many communities and its milk is widely used for medicinal purposes. In some states of Nigeria, the semi-feral Muturu are not tended but hunted when required for sacrifice. From a population size of 0.4 million heads in 1960, Akinwunmi and Ikpi, (1985) reported a decline in the population of the breed to 50-80 thousand in the late 1980s in Nigeria although RIMS (1992), reported a population growth to 115 172 heads. With limited data bank information on their adaptation and productivity, possible identification of genes that confer resistance to or tolerance of environmental stress in these animals will be of global significance.

Keywords:

Muturu, Origin and distribution, Trypanotolerant breeds, Characterization, Productivity