Evaluation of forages as mineral sources for camels in western Marsabit, Kenya

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Date: 2004

Abstract

A survey to identify forage mineral sources for settlement-based camels was carried out in the semi-arid rangelands of the southwestern Marsabit district of Kenya during dry and wet periods. The respondents included men and boys who were responsible for the herding and watering of camels in the area. Identification of the sources was followed by field verification, sampling and analyses for minerals. A table of mineral composition of the sources was compiled. Over 80% of preferred forage species had calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, sodium, iron and cobalt concentrations above the recommended levels during both dry and wet seasons at all the study sites. Eight to 50% of the forage samples were adequate in terms of copper (Cu) and zinc (Zn). Although some forages perceived as important mineral sources by pastoralists, had high mineral levels, they were not consumed by camels, mainly due to limited availability or palatability. Some of the preferred forage species also had limited temporal availability. It was concluded that forages are important sources of minerals for grazing camels in the study area. Apart from Cu and Zn, the forages can potentially satisfy the daily requirements of camels for the studied minerals. A need to create awareness among the camel herders about mineral contents of forage species as a guide in grazing management was noted.