

# How Much Participation? Experiences with Participatory Approaches in Pastoral Settings



**Cover Photo:** Village participation in monitoring (*from the presentation by Wolfgang Bayer*)

# How Much Participation? Experiences with Participatory Approaches in Pastoral Settings

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## Introduction

Rangeland management has always been a difficult chapter in the story of development cooperation. Rangelands occupy about half the earth's 'useful' land surface. Rangeland science has a history of six or seven decades. However, it took a long time to recognise that there are no universally applicable models for development in rangeland areas. As pointed out by Niamir-Fuller (1999a), there is also no definition of rangelands that is accepted worldwide.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest of governments and development agencies in participatory approaches for rangeland management and pastoral development. In this paper, we want to:

- show how the analysis of pastoral systems gradually gave rise to participatory approaches to pastoral development;
- report on a review of participatory approaches in pastoral development;
- look into experiences with participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) in pastoral development projects;
- indicate where participatory approaches to pastoral development may fit or not fit.

## Analysis of pastoral systems

Development projects involving interventions in rangelands commenced about 40 years ago. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the emphasis was on technology transfer (Turk 1999) in order to increase production for urban and international markets. The approach was one of capital-intensive and labour-extensive ranching, with range rehabilitation and improvement schemes, water-point development, and fodder production (Niamir-Fuller 1999a) all largely based on American experiences.

In the 1970s, it became increasingly clear that, for ecological, economic, and institutional reasons, the ranching approach could not be transferred to other regions. Analysis of the failures of ranching projects revealed that the existing pastoral systems had been poorly understood. A period of intensive studies of pastoralism began, particularly in Africa (Galaty et al 1981, Sandford 1983, Galaty & Johnson 1990). Some important fora for publication of case studies and intensive discussions on pastoralism were the Pastoral Development Network, which operated from 1976 to 1995; the journal *Nomadic Peoples*; *Parcours Demain* (the journal of the French network *Parcours*); and various rangeland journals.

The studies of pastoral production and livelihood systems revealed the following.

- A high level of efficiency in resource use among many traditional pastoralists. For example, it was calculated that pastoralists' livestock in the Sahel of West Africa produce two to three times as much protein as do livestock kept under ranching conditions in areas with similar natural conditions in semi-arid parts of Australia and the USA (Breman & de Wit 1983). Studies in other parts of the world brought similar findings.
- The inadequacy of conventional ecological theory. Conventional rangeland science and management is largely based on the theory of succession, which says that removal of grazing pressure allows the vegetation to revert to a 'climax' vegetation community. According to this theory, the art of range management is to stabilise the vegetation at a desired stage. More recent ecological research has shown that in drylands, particularly where annual plants predominate, vegetation yield and composition depends much more on rainfall than on previous grazing pressure. As rainfall varies greatly between years, so does vegetation production. Under such conditions, range vegetation is not in direct 'equilibrium' with grazing pressure (Ellis & Swift 1988, Behnke et al 1993, Scoones 1994). In the long run, however, grazing management can influence vegetation composition even in drylands, particularly with respect to the balance between woody and herbaceous species.

Management of rangelands in dryland regions can be 'opportunistic' or 'holistic', or even both. 'Opportunistic' rangeland managers take advantage of different natural resources when these are available, and when there is little feed and water, try to get by or move to other pastures. Movements can never be entirely opportunistic, as land-use rights and international and national borders must be respected. Furthermore, better-endowed areas, which used to be part of rangelands for at least seasonal use, are increasingly taken up by other land-users. Niamir-Fuller (1999b) recently reviewed different forms of managing mobility in Africa.

'Holistic' rangeland managers see resources more from a systems perspective. They move and react with appropriate management when vegetation is adversely affected by grazing (Le Gall 1999). However, despite its name, this approach often refers to management of particular sites but not the entire area of rangeland.

- The richness of indigenous pastoral knowledge. Generations of pastoralists have used particular rangelands over centuries and have acquired substantial knowledge of the details of their environment, such as its plants and their potential usefulness or feed quality, as well as how to manage animals, pastures, and water (cf. Niamir 1990).
- The multiple functions of rangelands. Different stakeholders may also have quite different perceptions of the functions – and therefore the problems – of rangelands. Rangelands can be seen as potential carbon sinks (Lusigi & Acquay 1999); as vast, sparsely populated areas and locations for water catchment, plant biodiversity, or wildlife refuge; as sources of so-called minor products, such as special mushrooms or resins; as potential tourist areas; and not only as pasture for domestic animals.

- The threats to sustainable pastoralism from policies based on a paradigm of sedentary land use. Policies that do not take into account the particularities of pastoral land use easily undermine existing pastoral systems. Such policies include feed subsidies that are designed to increase production and land-use policies that favour cropping, disregarding the facts that 1) irrigated crops in arid areas need large amounts of water, 2) rain-fed farming frequently suffers crop failure, and 3) ploughing of land can speed up erosion.

Non-appropriate policies are particularly evident in policymakers' efforts to deal with drought and drought mitigation. Successful pastoralists have developed coping strategies, such as building up large herds that can survive shocks, moving their herds seasonally or in an opportunistic manner, entering into agreements with crop farmers in better-endowed areas, practising appropriate livestock marketing strategies, and/or diversifying into trading and transport. The apparent increase in frequency of drought is not so much a meteorological phenomenon, but is linked to a more intensive utilisation of grazing resources and to an erosion of traditional strategies to cope with environmental variability, making the impact of drought more severe. In recent years, scientific knowledge with respect to early-warning systems before drought, food aid during drought, and restocking after drought has increased significantly, but governments and donor agencies still include provision of subsidised or free feed and at times even transport of water during crisis periods. These measures invite overstocking and aggravate the effects of drought, as well as increasing their apparent frequency.

As important as the results were on a theoretical level, pastoral system studies proved to be tedious, data-intensive, and time-consuming. In most cases, final results become available only years after fieldwork, or data could not be analysed at all in a meaningful way and ended up in 'data cemeteries'. Furthermore, the dynamics of pastoral systems limit the usefulness of an intensive systems study at any one time, particularly if it cannot give useful guidance to pastoral management. However, these studies did reveal the severe limitations of a top-down approach to pastoral development and indicated the need for alternative approaches.

## **The rise of participatory approaches in pastoral development**

Participatory approaches to development have been tried for a long time in isolated projects or by various non-government organisations (NGOs), but they did not become mainstream until the early 1990s. As the results of participatory approaches became more widely known, they quickly became popular – to the extent of being a fad – among government and intergovernmental agencies, including the World Bank, and in larger bilateral and multilateral development projects. In the case of pastoral areas, this applied to both 'developing' and 'developed' countries (e.g. Australia and New Zealand). As interest grew, the need for training also grew, since many development workers had great sympathy for participatory approaches but did not have clear role models. A strong line of developing participatory approaches can be traced back to the movement and network of rapid rural appraisal (RRA), which after some self-reflection, developed into participatory rural appraisal (PRA). Some training manuals that emerged during this decade of participation (referring to general development rather than specifically to pastoral development) include Pretty et al. (1995) and Veldhuizen et al. (1997).

As with many new concepts that become fashionable, there was soon a confusion in terminology. This was especially so in pastoral development, as most of the official project planners are people who do not have a pastoral background and often regard sedentary life-styles as superior. Some government officials, obviously unwilling to change, defined participatory projects as those which they planned and in which pastoralists were expected to participate by doing what they were told to do. Others thought that participation consisted of pastoralists giving information to outsiders, who then planned projects for them. Some development workers entered into joint planning and implementation, involving those who also contributed to the project with labour or other inputs. Still others thought that participation meant asking pastoralists to pay for things that had been decided in a top-down manner.

The proponents of PRA – which, by this time, had developed further into participatory learning and action (PLA) – therefore saw the need to classify participatory approaches (Pretty et al 1995). This follows a line of growing involvement, responsibility, and ownership of project measures by local people, parallel to diminishing decision-making power by government officials and project staff.

With reference to pastoral development projects, such a classification could be the following, with participation increasing down the list.

- 1) Participation by way of pastoralists' refusal to take part in a project because they regard it as inappropriate.
- 2) Participation by pastoralists providing information to project planners; this could help to avoid inappropriate projects, although it is the outsiders who determine what is done with the information.
- 3) Participation of pastoralists in interpreting data and in planning projects.
- 4) Participation of pastoralists by contributing free labour, material inputs, and money to jointly agreed upon projects.
- 5) Joint decision making and implementation of projects and joint learning by pastoralists and outsiders.
- 6) Projects controlled entirely by pastoralists, who request advice from outsiders if and when needed.

The last-mentioned stage has been reached by some livestock producers in Australia, New Zealand, and the USA, who request and pay for advice from outsiders. What we personally regard as real participation starts with joint interpretation of data and planning of projects, but the aim should be joint decision making and implementation, including investment by the pastoralists themselves in the project or programme.

## **Participatory situation analysis and planning with pastoralists**

In 1993, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) commissioned a review of experiences with participatory approaches in pastoral settings, with a focus on Africa (Waters-Bayer & Bayer 1994). In the more than 100 reports (much of which were 'grey literature') that could be gathered, not only from Africa but also from other parts of the world, we found at that time that the following.

- Experience with participatory approaches was largely restricted to the stage of situation analysis. Only a few sources reported joint planning and implementing of projects. This is not surprising, since participatory approaches to development

became mainstream only in the early 1990s and focused on RRA/PRA for situation analysis.

- Development workers and government officials on one hand, and pastoralists on the other hand, often defined key problems differently. Whereas development workers were concerned about environmental degradation, pasture weed encroachment, or weaknesses in the institutional set-up for pasture management, pastoralists were more concerned about human health, education, marketing possibilities, or communication in rural areas.
- Data collected was predominantly qualitative or semi-quantitative and indicated general trends – such as in environmental quality – but not precise figures – such as degree of decline in soil cover over the last 20 years.
- A variety of RRA/PRA methods were used in pastoral settings; including semi-structured interviews, transect walks, historical matrices, mapping, proportional piling, and SWOT analyses. However, there was no point in trying to standardise these tools; creativity in their application was required.
- The use of participatory methods mobilised community enthusiasm but also created high expectations. After pastoralists had invested their time and energy in various situation-analysis and planning exercises, disappointment was great when projects were delayed in starting or did not start at all.
- Participatory approaches require a change in the roles of the actors in the development process. Scientists and development workers must cease being investigators, instructors, or benefactors and must develop into process moderators and communicators. Pastoralists then would no longer be regarded as objects of research, target groups, or beneficiaries; instead, they would become active partners in development

Since this review was conducted, participatory research and development approaches have been more widely applied, including beyond the stage of situation analysis. However, the change in roles and the creation of a conducive environment for participatory approaches have been very slow processes. Problems are encountered in seemingly small but decisive points, such as accounting procedures. Large organisations, especially, are not very flexible. For development banks, the flexibility required for participatory development, and the often small amounts of money required to stimulate but not to buy participation, are hurdles that are very difficult to clear.

## **PM&E with pastoralists**

Discussions in development circles give a relatively short half-life to fashionable topics, although topics that have gone out of fashion may come back again 15 or 20 years later with a new generation. In the last couple of years, new issues have come up, such as globalisation, biodiversity, and international conflict management. Some development professionals have already hoped that participation was 'out', making way for new issues to take the forefront.

We hope that this is not the case, as we see participation as a key to sustainable development. Fortunately, some people in GTZ have a similar view and commissioned a follow-up review of participatory approaches in pastoral development, this time focused on PM&E. A draft of the review has been completed, and the final version is now available (Bayer and Waters-Bayer 2002).

On account of the wide spread of electronic media since we made the 1994 review, we could tap a much wider radius of experience fairly quickly this time. Nevertheless, far fewer cases could be found that had been sufficiently documented to be included in such a review, even though our own experiences in visiting and discussing projects had suggested that considerable progress had been made. In many cases, achievements are being under-reported, possibly because practical project work is of much higher priority to the actors involved than is documenting the process.

Much of what has been documented about M&E in pastoral settings is not what we would consider to be participatory. Participatory M&E and participatory evaluation differ from conventional M&E and conventional evaluation, in that the main aims of the participatory approach are:

- to strengthen the capacity of project partners – especially the local people – to reflect, analyse, and take action;
- to increase project accountability to partners, 'beneficiaries', managers, and donors;
- to derive lessons that can help correct shortcomings in actions and structure of project partners and can improve project implementation.

Conventional evaluations focus on the third point, but are normally not viewed as a contribution to local institution building, which is a key point in participatory evaluation.

Some of the main findings of the review of PM&E in pastoral settings were as follow.

- Although M&E systems set up by projects of some major international donors increasingly contain participatory elements, NGOs are at the forefront in developing PM&E approaches designed to strengthen local capacities.
- The most common activities/topics to which PM&E or participatory evaluation is applied are: water development, community-based veterinary services, local institutional development (community and area development committees), platforms for conflict management, and participatory experimentation. There are few examples of PM&E of broad-based vegetation/environmental trends or management, or of animal husbandry and breeding. Even in the case of livestock markets, where we had expected some interest in PM&E, little evidence of its existence could be found.
- The main tools used in PM&E were the same as those used in situation analysis and project planning, already described in the 1994 review.
- For a systematic PM&E, the most important questions to be asked (but which are not always asked) are as follow.
  - Who needs the information? If the information that projects want to collect is not important for the local people, is PM&E appropriate?
  - How precise does the information collected need to be?
  - Who participates? Only older men, only sedentary people within easy reach? Also women, youths, and mobile pastoralists?
  - Are all important stakeholders involved in PM&E activities?
  - Is there any hidden agenda that is influencing the process and results of PM&E, such as expectations for an increase in outside assistance?
  - What are the costs – in terms of time, energy, and money – for the various participants in PM&E, and is it worth it?

A participatory mid-term evaluation of a pastoral development project is described in Box 1. Such an exercise is not cheap, particularly if external evaluators are involved, and can also be quite demanding on the time of all participating stakeholders. Nevertheless, at least the project staff and local pastoralists that had been most directly involved felt that it was a useful learning experience (Pantuliano 1998).

Not only the pastoralists directly involved, but also other local resource users, project staff, development agency staff, and donors are among the stakeholders in a pastoral development project. The experience described in Figure 1 led to the conclusion that PM&E cannot provide all the information needed by the different stakeholders. Conventional and participatory M&E are not antagonists. Data requirements of different stakeholders can differ substantially. In many instances, a combination of a participatory, largely internal evaluation with a conventional, external evaluation will probably be better than either form of evaluation on its own.

It is important to be aware of the positive and negative aspects of PM&E, and to use this approach only where it is appropriate. A review of experiences with PM&E in pastoral settings is summarised in the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis given in Table 1.

## **Where do participatory approaches fit?**

Local people normally understand quite well local conditions and processes within their normal experience. What they may not understand so well are the motives and reasoning of government agencies that must cater not only to a group of pastoralists but also to a nation as a whole. International relations, and the opportunities and dangers of globalisation, are probably beyond the understanding of most pastoral groups, insofar as they are usually not involved in trans-border marketing. Also, global environmental issues, such as global warming or the conservation of wildlife biodiversity, are usually of little concern to pastoralists, who are likely to be more concerned that wild animals are preying on their livestock or eating valuable grass.

International and national agencies concerned with desertification attach much importance to the monitoring of rangeland. If this is going to be useful to pastoralists, and therefore attract their participation, then there must be an efficient institutional set-up that allows them to make better day-to-day decisions in managing the pasture and water resources, as well as catering to theirs and others concerns in the mid and long term.

A prerequisite for effective participatory planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating of rangelands and development projects is a certain degree of institutional maturity among the pastoral communities, so that these institutions can act as and when necessary. Local institutional development is therefore an integral part of participatory development.

A central concept in participatory approaches is subsidiarity: higher levels of organisation take on only those issues that lower levels cannot handle competently. Some practical examples are as follow.

- Individual pastoralists and pastoral groups can normally handle well the day-to-day management of pastures, water, and animals. However, setting the rules is – after consultation with the groups concerned – a local, provincial, or national

## Box 1: Participatory evaluation of a development project in a pastoral area of Sudan

Since 1987, the UK-based NGO, Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD), has supported an integrated development project among the Beja pastoralists in the Red Sea Hills of eastern Sudan. In recent decades, the Beja have lost many of their animals, mainly as a result of drought, and they have not yet managed to build up their herds again to resume full pastoralism. A project team of Beja people trained in participatory development methods give support to locally-elected village development committees (VDCs), which plan, implement, and monitor development activities. Some of these are partially funded by the project. Activities the VDCs have initiated include goat-restocking schemes, training of community members as paraprofessional veterinarians ('para-vets'), rehabilitation of wells, setting up community stores, or – as many pastoralists have recently turned to fishing – boat repairs.

The Red Sea Hills Programme (RSHP) team and the VDCs proposed terms of reference (ToRs) for the evaluation. These were discussed with ACORD staff in the Khartoum and London offices and were adapted to the needs of the organisation. RSHP members selected to be part of the evaluation team and external evaluators then translated the ToRs into questions to be discussed with the different communities.

At the start of the visit to each community, a meeting was called, during which two community members (one man and one woman) were elected to become part of the evaluation team for that particular community. Also during this meeting, the members of the community selected from among their various project-supported activities the three which the men and the women, respectively, felt were most important to evaluate. Over the next two days, during a series of small meetings with focus groups identified by the local evaluators, achievements and problems with the selected activities were evaluated jointly. The local evaluation team then presented the results in a community meeting, in verbal form and on posters, for discussion by community members.

A final report was compiled by the external evaluators, based on community evaluations and discussions. The RSHP team translated a condensed version of the report into the Beja language to be returned to the communities. In their internal M&E, VDC members started to apply tools that had been used during the participatory evaluation.

During the evaluation, many community members eagerly participated. They raised critical issues; for example, that only a few people were really active in community work; and openly discussed weaknesses, such as in the financial management of community stores. However, the data that came out of the evaluation was largely qualitative. Higher echelons in ACORD had wanted a quantitative assessment of project impact, but this could not be achieved through the participatory evaluation.

The Beja project staff and community members kept the evaluation within their own group and excluded another group of admittedly more affluent pastoralists in the area, the Rashaida, a group that was only marginally involved in the project (water development), but that may have experienced indirect impacts.

In a sparsely populated area like the Red Sea Hills (as is the case in most pastoral areas), the evaluation involved a great deal of travelling between dispersed communities. The process proved to be very time-consuming and costly, compared with the funds available for project implementation.

Sources: Pantuliano 1998, Harnmeijer et al. 1999

**Table 1: SWOT analysis of PM&E in pastoral settings**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of local indicators that are well understood by community members</li> <li>• Easy to use by the community</li> <li>• Encourages frank, open discussion</li> <li>• More open-ended than other methods; interesting leads can be followed up</li> <li>• Time-efficient</li> <li>• Fun and dynamic</li> <li>• Diversity of opinions become apparent</li> <li>• Decisions for action can arise from consensus of opinion</li> <li>• Immediate feedback to wider community</li> <li>• Increases local ownership of information</li> <li>• Methods are flexible; can be adapted to local experience and conditions</li> <li>• Information easy to collate</li> <li>• Many tools available</li> <li>• Less chance of interviewer bias compared with formal surveys</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs careful preparation</li> <li>• Needs good group management skills</li> <li>• Group pressure can suppress divergent opinions</li> <li>• Results can be influenced by local expectations of outside assistance</li> <li>• Courtesy bias: people respond politely rather than frankly</li> <li>• Produces less numerical data than other methods; technicians and donors like to see quantitative data</li> <li>• Results need to be presented with care so that readers not familiar with participatory methods do not misinterpret results</li> <li>• Composition of discussion groups can be biased; people who have much work may be unable to attend</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of monitoring and impact assessment systems that local people can sustain after project ends</li> <li>• Increases participation of community as a whole</li> <li>• Can be used as a management tool</li> <li>• Training in these methods can change attitudes</li> <li>• Methods can be incorporated into routine activities</li> <li>• Methods useful for envisioning and assisting local bodies to plan ahead</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much other work to do ; PM&amp;E must be prioritised relative to other project objectives and activities</li> <li>• Natural disasters and insecurity</li> <li>• Operational constraints – logistics</li> <li>• Varying capacities of village/area development committees; some may not yet be ready to use PM&amp;E</li> <li>• Scepticism among officials with respect to the use of participatory methods</li> <li>• Officials' reluctance to give information and decision-making authority to local communities</li> </ul>

Source: Catley (1999), adapted

government task. If ecologically sensible pasture management involves crossing an international border, setting the rules may even be an international issue.

- Pastoralists can recognise when an animal is sick and when there is a disease outbreak. They may also be able to treat their animals in many cases. However, declaring quarantine and closing an area to animal movement should be a local or provincial government issue. Setting the rules for quarantine is a national or international issue.

In this spirit, it should be the local people who decide on whether the participation of outsiders is needed to achieve their goals and on the way they conduct their M&E, whether in interaction with outsiders (as in PM&E) or informally in their own way. Likewise, higher echelons of organisation must consider whether they can better reach their goals with or without the support of the local people. Participation – including PM&E – is always a process of negotiation.

Development support organisations should embark on participatory approaches to pastoral development only if they are prepared to commit themselves to long-term

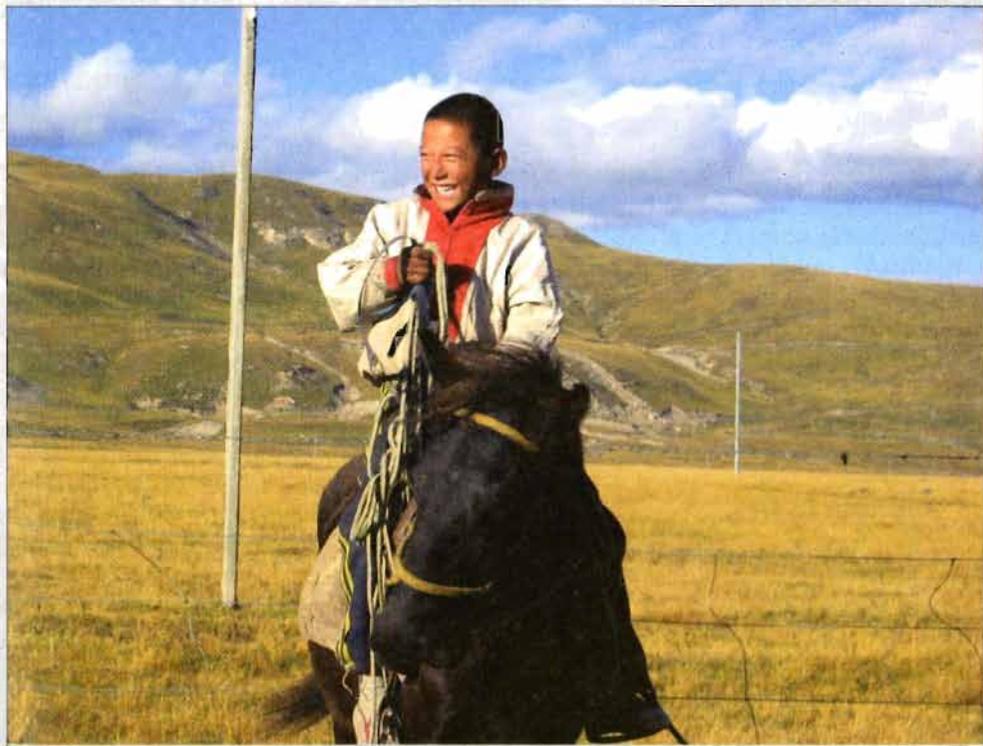
partnership. The processes of building mutual trust, developing local capacities, and strengthening local institutional are slow. PM&E can enhance pastoral communities' capacities to manage their own development, but the PM&E approach has to build on local needs and areas of responsibility. Trying to impose a PM&E system to satisfy donors' demands or to generate information that local people do not need and cannot use is a contradiction in terms.

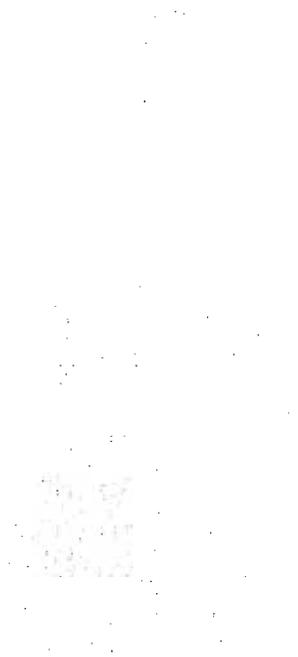
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# **Integrated Application of Technical Skills and Participatory Approaches in Rangeland Improvement in Pastoral Areas**





**Cover Photo:** A young herder of Maqu (*Camille Richard*)