Mountain Farming Systems

ICIMOD

Discussion Paper
Series No. MFS 98/1

Draught Animal Power in Mountain Agriculture

A Study of Perspectives and Issues in the Central Himalayas, India

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International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
Kathmandu, Nepal
1998

ISSN 1024 - 7548

Published by

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
G.P.O. Box 3226
Kathmandu, Nepal

Typesetting at ICIMOD Publications' Unit

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June 1998

Preface

This discussion paper in the Mountain Farming Systems' series of ICIMOD looks at an often ignored aspect of mountain farming systems — draught animal power.

The author has taken pains to examine and assess draught animal power in the light of the transitions taking place in mountain agriculture in three agro-ecological zones. He has also assessed the perspectives and attitudes towards this neglected factor.

The Paper was written as a the result of an ICIMOD Research Fellowship; a programme implemented by ICIMOD through which the Centre invites proposals for research from scholors throughout the region. On behalf of ICIMOD, Dr. Tej Partap carried out the technical editing of this document.

Acknowledgements

This report is a product of the research work carried out under the ICIMOD Research Fellowship scheme. The author thanks ICIMOD for providing him with an opportunity to do research on Draught Animal Power, a subject about which little is known so far.

The author expresses his gratitude to Mr. Egbert Pelinck, Director General, ICIMOD, and Dr. Mahesh Banskota, Deputy Director General, and Dr. Tej Partap, Head, Mountain Farming Systems' Division, ICIMOD, for their personal interest in the project. Dr. Tej Partap has guided me from the stage of planning the project to its execution and preparation of this manuscript.

I should like to record my gratefulness to Dr. N.S. Jodha who has been a great source of inspiration for me in my work in the mountains. When I was working on this project, he provided me with volumes of very useful literature. Shri Sunderlal Bahuguna has always encouraged my efforts to work for the Himalayas.

My special thanks are due to my cooperators in the field investigations: Navin Nautiyal, Vijay Jardhari, Dr. G.C.S. Negi, Bache Singh Bhandari, Rachna Negi, and Ajay and Mahesh Chandra Raturi. Dr. Jagdish Kumar, Senior Economist at Ranichauri, helped me to select the study villages. Cattle breed characterisation was the joint effort of Dr. R.J. Sharma and Dr. C.B. Singh. Dr. M.L. Sharma, Dr. C. Deo, and A.K. Singh provided me with information from secondary sources. Dr. Anil Kumar, Assistant Professor at the Animal Science Department, Pantnagar, prepared a manuscript on the nutrition of draught animals which is incorporated in this paper. Help provided by the Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, Srinagar, Garhwal, is thankfully acknowledged. I have also received help from Mr. R. Sreedhar of the Academy for Mountain Environics, Dehradun, and his staff. Manoj Kumar, a research scholar at the CCS University, Meerut, has helped in the analysis.

I feel pride in the help, trust, and cooperation I have received from the farmers of the region, especially those from the study villages who are a wonderfully rich repository of traditional knowledge.

Finally, thanks are due to Gita, Silvi and Pravesh Singh for their moral support and patience. Much of the time I have devoted to this project, in fact, was meant for them.

Vir Singh

Abstract

This discussion paper discusses several important issues relating to the role of draught animal power (DAP) in sustainable agricultural development in the Central Himalayas of India and gives recommendations for policy changes and technology development.

The nature and intensity of problems related to DAP are different for different ecological areas – Shivalik Hills, Middle Himalayas (traditional), Middle Himalayas (transformed), and Greater Himalayas, and the policy measures to overcome these specific problems also have to be different. Even within the transformed Middle Himalayas, three principal types of transformation have been included in the study: vegetable-based, modern cereal crop-based, and fruit tree-based. These areas vary greatly in terms of demand for and supply of DAP, accessibility, adoption of new technologies, and so on. These all have important implications for the potential for mechanization, animal breeding strategy, and feed and fodder supply.

Also discussed in the paper is the commercialisation of agriculture as an important strategy in the hills and mountains of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region promoted in recent years to achieve the multiple objectives of increasing farm employment and incomes and protecting the environment. Commercialisation of agriculture has increased the demand for DAP relative to its supply. The author asserts that this may lead to the adoption of mechanical technology in the hills and mountains with negative environmental impacts. These issues are discussed and analysed in the paper.

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