

## Introduction

I have been asked to talk about "people affected by degraded ranges and pastures" in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau in this session on Management of Rangelands and Control of Desertification. First of all, I want to mention that I would have preferred the title of this session to have been something like, "People on the Rangelands of the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau Affected by *Modernisation*", because I believe the process of modernisation is having a profound effect on people residing in rangeland areas and is part of the process that leads to degraded ranges. These effects are poorly understood at the present time. Secondly, it is a misconception that all ranges and pastures in the Himalayan region are 'degraded'; many grazing lands are, in fact, in good condition and quite productive given the environmental constraints they function under. While some rangelands have deteriorated in condition, it is wrong to conclude, or imply, that most rangelands in mountain areas of Asia are degraded. Such misconceptions lead to inappropriate policies

and programmes for rangeland areas. It is more important to understand the processes that result in overgrazing and that lead to degraded ranges.

With that said, I think it is now important to ask, Who are these 'people'? What do we know about them? These 'people', who reside on the rangelands and are affected by the process of modernisation, are 'pastoralists' who can be defined as people who derive most of their income or sustenance from keeping domestic livestock in conditions in which most of the feed eaten by their livestock is natural forage, not cultivated fodders and improved pastures (Sandford 1983). In its broadest sense 'pastoralism' refers to the way of life of pastoralists, their socioeconomic institutions, and land-use systems. The definition here covers 'pure' pastoralism, or nomadism, and transhumance and other forms of animal husbandry in which the pastoral component is dominant, for example agro-pastoralism.

Pastoralists are found throughout the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau but are concentrated in the higher elevation areas (> 3000m) where rangelands are the dominant vegetation type and livestock grazing the primary land use. Accurate figures are not available, but there are possibly 10 million people residing on these mountain grazing lands in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau who are dependent upon livestock for their livelihood.

I have titled my presentation, *"Herds on the Move: Winds of Change among Pastoralists in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau,"* to emphasise the transformations taking place in pastoral systems in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau today. Pastoralists and their production systems have always been confronted with changes -- droughts that wither the grasses, winter storms and livestock epidemics that wipe out herds, and tribal wars that displace people and their animals -- but the changes pastoralists are facing today are profound and likely to have more significant, long-term effects on their way of life and the ecosystems they reside in than any changes that have taken place in the past. The paper refers to the northern areas of Bhutan, Nepal, and India, which border Tibet, and the entire Tibetan Plateau. The more remote parts of the Tibetan Plateau, the *Chang Tang*, or 'northern plains', in the northwestern part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and western Qinghai Province are in many ways a 'frontier environment.' A territory only now coming under the influence of the modern world.

Most of Asia's major river systems originate in the rangelands of the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau, and what takes place in these headwaters' ecosystems has far-reaching effects on downstream areas which have not been

fully measured. Factors such as geographical extent, biodiversity conservation, environmental protection, economic development, and human welfare suggest that the Himalayan and Tibetan rangelands should be a priority area for development, but, unfortunately, they are not. Largely neglected by range researchers and development agencies alike, the rangelands of the Himalayas and Tibetan Plateau offer unique opportunities for achieving the twin objectives of conservation and development. Programmes stressing multiple use, productivity, sustainability, and biodiversity could be realised through the complementary development of livestock production, wildlife conservation, and rangeland management.

This paper: (a) briefly reviews the characteristics of the rangelands, wildlife resources, and pastoral production systems; (b) describes changes taking place on the rangelands; (c) discusses issues facing pastoralists; (d) examines some of the reasons why the rangelands and pastoralists on the Tibetan Plateau have been ignored; (e) highlights new perceptions regarding rangeland dynamics and pastoral systems; and, finally, (f) outlines factors to be considered in developing strategies for pastoral development on the Tibetan Plateau.