

Factors to Consider in Developing Strategies for Pastoral Areas in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau

Strategies for range management and pastoral development in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau should aim to promote sustainable livestock production, rehabilitate degraded ranges, protect and enhance biodiversity, improve incomes and create employment, and contribute to economic development. Developing such strategies requires a much better understanding of range ecosystem dynamics, increased knowledge of pastoral production practices, more thorough analysis of the issues and opportunities facing pastoralists, and modifications in policies and current approaches. The following paragraphs outline some of the factors that need to be considered in developing strategies and preparing programmes for range management, livestock development, and wildlife conservation in the Himalayas and Tibet.

Adopt a Systems' Approach

An integrated systems' approach is needed for a better understanding of issues concerning pastoralism and in order to promote both conservation and development. In the Himalayas, where agriculture and forestry are especially linked with livestock, pastoral development needs to take place in the context of integrated natural resource management and overall economic development.

Develop a Better Understanding of Pastoral Systems

It is becoming increasingly clear that solving pastoral problems will require greater knowledge of pastoral production systems. Understanding the aims, purposes, and goals of the pastoralists is the key to sustainable pastoral development. This requires information on livestock production parameters, including population trends, herd movements, livestock grazing behaviour and food habits, calving and lambing rates, and so on. Development programmes must be socially as well as ecologically appropriate, and this calls for a much better understanding of the social dimensions of rangeland ecosystems, including the social values attached to livestock and livestock management practices, land tenure, and community interactions.

Pastoralists now face numerous new challenges that may require institutional innovations to deal with fresh dimensions of old pastoral problems. Herders will also need to strengthen their own capacities to manage the process of development.

Promote Range Ecosystem Research

Little is known about the Tibetan Plateau rangeland ecosystem at this time. It is essential that systematic ecological research is carried out to improve the understanding of the dynamics of the ecosystem and to make informed decisions about development planning. Research needs to include vegetative investigations as well as studies on wildlife and livestock ecology.

Wildlife Conservation

As wildlife is a valuable resource in the pastoral areas, greater attention needs to be given to conserving and managing wildlife populations. The distribution, status, and ecology of most species are poorly known at the present time. Interactions between wildlife and livestock also need to be better understood to assist pastoral development planning. Conservation of wildlife cannot be considered without including the attitudes of the local people. Conservation development programmes need to encourage greater participation from local people and allow for local resource use from pastoralists living in the vicinity of protected areas.

New Techniques for Integrating and Updating Information

Recent technological advances in remote sensing and computer data processing (GIS, decisions' support systems) have valuable applications for range resource management and planning, and their use needs to be encouraged in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau.

Range and Pastoral Policies

Government policies should acknowledge the efficacy of many traditional pastoral systems and seek to understand range resource dynamics and local strategies before advocating substantial changes. Proper incentive frameworks also need to be established for pastoral areas. Livestock development in many countries has been undermined by inappropriate input and output pricing, subsidies, interest rates, and cost recovery policies which have discouraged destocking and investments in rangeland conservation (de Haan 1991). In order

to better integrate wildlife conservation with range-livestock development, policies for pastoral areas should also emphasise multiple-use management practices.

Innovative Roles for Donor Agencies

Given the relative lack of knowledge of rangeland ecosystem dynamics and pastoral production practices in the region, donors need to adopt a more flexible approach towards pastoral development and wildlife conservation. The diverse ecosystems and pastoral societies on the Tibetan Plateau require rather localised interventions and research in pilot areas combined with long-term institutional building efforts. The design of projects, as well as funding arrangements, should be flexible and allow for adjustments as more knowledge is gained. Within projects, decision-making should be decentralised to local levels. Since the emphasis should be shifting from capital investments to institution building, the investment requirements of projects will be low and donors well need to accept that projects, which need a lot of manpower in their design and supervision, require only limited funding and thus do not show well on the balance sheet. Donors may need to shift from detailed project agreements covering short time periods to flexible programme approaches covering a longer time span.