

This MENARID project is a knowledge sharing and learning partnership for improved natural resource management, with Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan, and Iran. This briefing was produced during a special consultation of the group in March, 2013.

IMPROVING PASTORAL MANAGEMENT IN HIGHLAND EASTERN MOROCCO

Building on pre-existing indigenous institutions gives livestock farmers' cooperatives a solid foundation and legitimacy

The high plateaux of eastern Morocco are home to the Beni Guil, formerly pastoral nomads but now increasingly settled livestock farmers raising sheep on rangeland. But the productivity of their communally managed rangelands has been decreasing in recent years largely because of overgrazing.



Involvement of pastoral cooperatives crafted onto ethnic communities allow pastoral resources restoration in Morocco

Source: "pictures from project managers"

Points to Consider

- The communal ownership of the rangelands and cooperatives' lack of legal or customary authority to impose control measures may result in individuals overexploiting
- Poorly educated pastoral communities need guidance, assistance, and monitoring to help them establish viable cooperatives that meet their needs
- It is crucial to involve the whole local population, not only tribal leaders and other elites, in the establishment and management of cooperatives needed to ensure sustainable economic benefits.

Purpose

This brief is intended to inform development and extension agencies (including nongovernmental organizations) and decision-makers and planners about the achievements of this project, to highlight the factors that have contributed to its success, and to raise issues that may need further attention.

Suitability

The approach employed is suited to pastoral areas with strong indigenous institutions that can serve as foundations for cooperatives.

The project in numbers

- 44 pastoral cooperatives established with almost 9000 members
- 100,00 beneficiaries (animal farmers, women and children)
- 461,000 ha of land fenced off for rotational grazing
- 14,500 ha planted with fodder shrubs
- 60 watering points installed or rehabilitated

Partners

- Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries
- Ministry of the Interior
- Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
- IFAD

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Since the 1970s, the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries has been promoting farmer cooperatives as a mechanism for improving the management of these resources and boosting livestock production and farmer incomes. It also aims to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of the deterioration of the rangelands and the need to protect the environment.

However, many of these cooperatives failed to deliver equitable development; most were made up of small groups of relatively well-off herders who tried to take advantage of government subsidies. Poor, small-scale herders were largely excluded.

The Livestock and Pasture Development Project in the Eastern Region sought to address this imbalance and improve pasture management by developing cooperatives based on ethnic ties (family groups or sub-tribes, tribes and even tribal confederations) and allied to pre-existing indigenous institutions. The similarity in organization and values between cooperatives and indigenous institutions, in particular in terms of control over communal resources, consensus-based decision-making and solidarity among members, provides a solid foundation and legitimacy for the cooperatives.

Funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in two phases (1991–2001 and 2004–2010), the project succeeded in establishing 44 pastoral cooperatives that took on responsibility for managing some 3 million hectares of rangelands on the eastern plateaux.

The major objectives of the cooperatives were to improve rangeland management, both for livestock production and to protect the environment, increase and stabilize the incomes of livestock farmers, provide services to their members and act as a bridge between the community and providers of services, including the government. The cooperatives introduced a number of improved rangeland management practices, including controlled rotational grazing, fencing off nearly half a million hectares of range and planting nearly 15,000 hectares with fodder shrubs. Fodder availability in the fenced-off areas increased fivefold, from 150 kilograms of dry matter per hectare to 800 kilograms per hectare. They also installed or rehabilitated more than 60 watering points, halving the distance herds had to travel to water.

Herders pay a fee for using the watering points, which goes towards covering the cost of maintenance and operation. Access to broad-based parasite-treatment campaigns and veterinary extension services through the cooperatives has reduced livestock mortality significantly. In addition, the project has opened dialogue between herders and the Government and has formulated an approach that will allow range users' cooperatives to become increasingly self-reliant over the coming years.

Although successful in many respects, the cooperatives have faced a number of challenges. Under Moroccan law, and by custom, the ethnic communities are both owners of the common rangeland and free to pasture their herds there. The traditional institutions, including the jamaa (an assembly of delegates and prominent people), do not have the power to impose restrictions on the use of the rangelands. Neither do the cooperatives. As such, efforts to improve management of the rangelands have had to depend on consensus-building and persuasion, which is time-consuming and imperfect in its outcome, given the lack of a mandate to impose sanctions on those who abuse the resources.

The increasing degradation of the rangelands is raising awareness of the need for action to protect and preserve the environment among communities on the eastern plateaux, creating a favorable environment in which changes could be made to the legal frameworks under which the rangelands are used and managed.



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