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Pasture reform and its implementation in Kyrgyzstan

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Introduction

Presently the determination of mechanisms for effective management and sustainable use of pasture resources rely heavily on agricultural policy development. This is not only the case in the Kyrgyz Republic but also in other countries because grasslands are a significant resource covering about half of the earth's surface. The success of developing and implementing policy goals on grassland use often has direct impact on vital national issues as: the welfare of the people; food safety; preservation of the ecological integrity of natural ecosystems, as well as greenhouse gas sequestration in each country where pasture use is critical in the economic and social spheres.

The situation in Kyrgyz Republic

The Kyrgyz Republic is a mountainous country with a complex and rugged relief with almost 90% of the country located above 1,500 meters asl on the mountain ranges of Tien Shan and Alai complex dissected mountain system. Mountain ecosystems are major sources of water, energy, mineral resources, biological diversity and forest products as well as a place for agriculture, recreation, tourism and pilgrimage.

The mountains are particularly sensitive to climate change and are in an extremely threatened condition because they are complex, fragile and sensitive to natural processes and anthropogenic impact. With improved access to mountain areas and accelerating their socio-economic development - soil erosion, combined with high seismic activity, landslides, mudslides, avalanches can potentially increase.

The total area of grassland in Kyrgyzstan which covers more than 9 million ha, is seasonally divided into winter, spring-autumn and summer use areas. This delineation has strongly influenced the evolution and development of pastoral areas in Kyrgyzstan which is characterized by the following stages in chronological order:

(1) The traditional semi-nomadic grazing by families, moving seasonally through pastures at different elevation which occurred until collectivization in the Soviet period;

(2) Centrally planned grassland use to support intensive animal husbandry managed on an industrial basis in the Soviet period;

(3) After gaining independence, the emergence of a mixed ownership structure, duplication of regulatory and administrative responsibilities of government agencies at

various levels and diverse practices of forage resource management have led to a number of planned and unexpected changes in the livestock sector.

This management system created an imbalanced between pasture supply and livestock demands leading to extensive overgrazing of foothills and middle mountain pastures in the spring, summer and autumn periods and suboptimal use of remote summer pastures. Under these circumstances, it is important to understand the traditional management and use of pasture resources because their important characteristics are relevant and have been revived in recent years

Development of grassland policies and laws

In general, the grassland ecosystems are currently experiencing great pressure from the direct impact of man's activities. The degradation process not only increases every year, but more importantly has also become nearly irreversible over a considerable area of Kyrgyzstan's grassland resources. The suspension and future reversal of degradation is possible only by human intervention through relevant policies that strongly support the implementation of improved management. Over the last 20 years, the area of relatively healthy pastures in Kyrgyzstan decreased by 23% from 3.5 million to 2.7 million ha.

The Kyrgyz Republic acceded to the Convention to Combat Desertification (hereinafter the CCD) in December 1997, and ratified the CCD in 1999. CCD aims to combat drought in dry and poorly secured, semi-arid and arid regions. As part of its framework, the CCP recognizes the direct link between population poverty and land degradation, as well as the need to reduce poverty as a vital tool to counter the desertification processes.

The first step in carrying out reforms and changes involves that creation of an appropriate legal framework. Kyrgyzstan was the first country in the Central Asia there to develop legislation and adopt a special law "On Pastures". The law assigned all responsibility and management of all types of pastures to local self-governance organisations or committees and pasture users themselves. The Kyrgyz Republic Government issued a regulation "On measures for implementation of the Law of Kyrgyz Republic on pastures." Priority areas for pasture reform and mechanisms of its implementation were identified in the "Program of Development of Pasture Management for 2012-2015" and the corresponding action plan to implement the program was developed and adopted by the

Government of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Local level governance: the key to sustainable change

Decentralization of decision-making and involvement of local communities and users into the planning and management of grassland resources at all stages of this process was a mechanism used to dissolve possible conflicts and allow community members active participation in pasture planning. Development of management and use plans, based on stakeholder participation has provided local ownership of these plans as they are focussed on the preservation of natural values of grasslands and their infrastructure for the local community. Grassland management planning is a coordination of all involved in the management of these lands. The purpose of development of pasture management plans to improve their health as well as to increase the security of grasslands of a given territory. The best way to achieve the aim was to link the conservation of grassland resources and sustainable socio-economic development of the territory. This approach has significantly increased the security of tenure of grasslands and will contribute to the efficient functioning and development of managing entities- Pasture User Unions - and their executive bodies - Jayiit (Pasture) Committees.

Currently, in 454 ayil aimaks of the Kyrgyz Republic, through the Law "On Pastures", Pasture Users Unions were organized by local communities and are now functioning well. Through their executive body or Jayiit Committees, they were delegated the authority to manage and use pastures. This authority is functioning through the implementation of the pasture management plans. Since this law created favorable conditions for Pasture Users Unions, Jayiit Committees collected funds to use for construction and repair of roads leading to grassland areas, bridges and other infrastructure.

Under these reforms, grassland condition is improving,

and programs for livestock health and nutrition such as livestock vaccination are being initiated. Other issues are being independently and successfully solved for the effective and rational pasture resource use. The most important fact is that local communities are becoming aware of the fact that implementation of a sustainable grassland management, use and improvement system while maintaining the ecological integrity of ecosystems. Prudent oversight and strategic economical investment by the Jayiit Committee is underpinning this progress.

Assistance from abroad

International financial institutions are crucial for achieving sustainable development in Kyrgyzstan. For example with World Bank funding the "Agricultural Investments and Services Project" is now being implemented in Kyrgyzstan. The project aims include: (1) Improving the institutional and infrastructure environment for sustainable development of farms; (2) Providing the necessary capital investment, the strengthening of key support services, dissemination of relevant scientific and technical knowledge; and (3) Improving grassland management with special emphasis on community participation.

Conclusion

Economic and environmental changes in the years after gaining independence have encouraged us to seek our own methods of sustainable development. Structures of government and non-governmental organizations agree that the development of agriculture, as well as efforts to reduce poverty, should be linked to the vision of the foundations of a system of natural resource management. With a growing population, that is still predominantly poor, it is crucial to reduce any potential negative impact on land and water resources. Much remains to be done to ensure a more sustainable and efficient use of natural resources and to improve the lives of people, especially those living in the highlands and the steppe.