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## **Grassland Use Rights Leasing Policy and Its Potential Impact on the Life of Tibetan Nomads in the Tibet Autonomous Region : A Critical Analysis**

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**Key words** : grassland use rights leasing policy , potential impact , tibetan nomads

**Introduction** In the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) the government had trial implementation of the grassland use rights leasing policy in Nagchu Prefecture in 1999 . The Government of Nagchu Prefecture has been promoting it for a larger population and vaster land since then . As of the end of 2006 , 90 .1% (24 .3 million hectares) of applicable grassland in Nagchu has been allocated into households and the goal of the TAR government is to allocate winter-spring pasture to individual households by the end of 2007 . This paper discusses the government's rationale for introducing and implementing the grassland use rights leasing policy in the TAR . The paper then examines the overall socio-economic impacts of the policy on the life of Tibetan nomads so far . Finally , policy recommendations are made .

**Materials and methods** In order to see what the potential impacts of the policy would be in the TAR , this paper compares and contrasts field observations from Nagchu in the TAR over the past eight years with the lessons and experience of other Tibetan areas of Qinghai , Sichuan , Gansu and Yunnan Provinces , where the same policy began being implemented in the mid 1990s during their processes of implementing the policy . Disequilibrium paradigm of pastoral ecosystem is used to illustrate the potential impacts of this policy .

**Results and discussion** Grassland use rights policy in Tibet has resulted in many unintended socioeconomic and ecological problems . These include increased conflicts over pastures , extra financial burden and degradation of common pastures . Tibetan nomads' main concern is that in practice it is very difficult to manage their grassland for two reasons : de facto unequal distribution of grassland and the cost of fencing construction . Households are restricted within their own fixed land . Reduced spatial mobility of livestock herds brings more grazing pressures on residual open areas , which may lead to or accelerate the degradation of unfenced pasture . In reality it seems that policymakers' objectives of controlling carrying capacity of grassland , which eventually aims to control or reverse grassland degradation , and redistributing resources between the rich and poor households and building better social harmony among nomad communities through the grassland use rights policy have not been achieved . Fencing program is beneficial for individual households or at a small scale , which provides reserve pasture and hay for the nomads during the hardest time of winter-spring and for fattening off-take animals during summer-fall season , which in turn , reduces the mortality of animals and increases production . However , the grassland use rights policy induces the nomads to try to expand their fencing . The result of fencing on a large scale seems that while it benefits one community it makes another community worse off . The overall benefits of fencing program are doubted .

**Conclusions** In those areas of the TAR that have similar geographical conditions as Nagchu , such as those counties in western Shigatse and Ngari with vast land and high altitude , communal tenure should be considered as an alternative if there is no third option . The benefits of communal tenure or recombination of pastures among households are obvious . The advantage of communal tenure includes : easier access to water for livestock , less individual household material and labor costs regarding pasture management , such as fencing establishment and also a more flexible approach to severe weather .

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