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## Engaging Stakeholders to Implement Community-Based Rangeland Rehabilitation Plans in Southern and Northeastern Ethiopia

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**Presenter Information**

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## Engaging stakeholders to implement community-based rangeland rehabilitation plans in southern and northeastern Ethiopia

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**Key words** : Borana, Afar, pastoralism, participatory methods, *Prosopis juliflora*, prescribed fire, bush encroachment

**Introduction** The semi-arid Borana Plateau in the south and the more arid Afar region to the northeast are especially important rangelands for Ethiopia. Both have become unsustainable, however, because of numerous socioeconomic and ecological factors. Resource degradation often occurs as woody encroachment and loss of understory forage production. In many locations in Ethiopia rural people have become disempowered from making their own decisions regarding common property management. Blanket bans on traditional use of fire and other practices have occurred. Rangeland rehabilitation requires community-based approaches along with varied technical interventions. Here we report on recent progress achieved—and new challenges created—in participatory processes for two objectives: (1) Reinstating prescribed fire for range management in the very remote Borana region, and (2) controlling the spread of the invasive alien *Prosopis juliflora* in the Afar region, which has remote and urbanized areas.

**Materials and methods** Technical research has documented the often negative effects of woody encroachment on Ethiopian rangelands (Coppock, 1994; Kebede, unpublished). Over this background we have recently used social science methods (focus groups, key informant interviews, household surveys) to assess attitudes and behaviors of local people towards range management issues and to solicit indigenous knowledge. In addition we have employed public engagement to empower people and create action. Events include workshops, exchange tours, short courses, and participatory monitoring and evaluation. The key is to build trust, capacity, and shared vision among stakeholders.

**Results** On the Borana Plateau several years of effort has recently yielded a regular program for use of prescribed fire (Gebru et al., 2006). Prescribed fire had been absent in this area since the 1970s. Apparent blanket policy bans on use of fire in the rangelands have been relaxed, and the pastoral community now partners with NGOs and local government agencies to set goals and activities. A district-level fire task force has been created and sustained. In 2006 over 900 ha of moderately encroached sites were successfully treated by burning and selective thinning using human labor. Monitoring and evaluation protocols are also being implemented, and improvements in herbaceous biomass, botanical composition, and reduction of noxious woody species has been recorded. Burn sites are also being geo-referenced. Another major fire year is planned for 2008. In the Afar region fire is less viable as a management tool. Sites infested with *P. juliflora* are typically cleared by hand and plants are killed after extensive cutting (Kebede, unpublished). Permits have been awarded to allow charcoal production for sale and demand-driven options are under evaluation to produce *P. juliflora* wood for furniture making and ground seed pods for livestock supplements in feedlots around the major city of Adama. Attempts are being made to revitalize traditional tree management institutions among the Afar. Unregulated charcoal making has occurred, however, and some range sites have been denuded.

**Conclusions** Participatory approaches are very important to create meaningful and sustainable resource management interventions in this context. Technical research alone is no longer sufficient. Authentic partnerships must be formed. Indigenous knowledge and bottom-up perspectives can be successfully mixed with modern technology and top-down planning. For both the Borana and Afar systems range management strategies need to be part of more comprehensive land-use programs. Building of stronger public and private institutions is perhaps the largest challenge.

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