Herd Mobility Leads the Way for Sustainable Pastoral Development — The Case of Borana Rangelands, Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract

Insights gained from experiences in pastoral development highlight mobility as the key strategy by which pastoralists exploit heterogeneous environments in space and time. Mobility is customarily organised against the background of indigenous knowledge and local decision-making structures. Modern development concepts as well as government interventions have changed considerably over the past decades, but the impact on ecosystems and livelihood conditions remained small or became deteriorating. A new approach is needed, which utilises indigenous mobility concepts and institutional co-operation in natural resource management. This paper develops concepts for the participatory planning of pastoral resource use on two sites in southern Ethiopia (Dida Hara and Web), which have been affected in different intensities by government interventions, and by a higher population density. The study was conducted from September 2000 until July 2002, in co-operation with the Borana Lowlands Pastoral Development Programme (BLPDP/GTZ). Natural resources and herd movements were mapped using PRA tools, official maps and GIS. Socioeconomic characteristics of 60 households and their herd movements during and after the last drought were analysed. Herd mobility differed between the two locations: after drought it was barely existent in Dida Hara, the location more strongly affected by development interventions, but pronounced in Web. Mobility during drought was similar at both locations, as herd movements were driven by the crisis. The socio-economic analysis determined preconditions for applying mobility at household level, specified for different stages of the drought cycle. The complementary analysis of pastoral organisations and institutions involved in controlling mobility revealed the existing local expertise and viable social structures, but also weaknesses in power structures and related conflicts. The results of final multi-stakeholder workshops affirmed that mobility was under-utilised. A revitalisation of mobility should be attempted with the genuine involvement of the appropriate target groups and their experience. Envisaged are scenarios of rangeland management which operate preferably in a common property context at larger scale of the landscape. This approach integrates technical aspects of pastoral development with predictions about the household’s adoption rates and viable institutional arrangements, making it more tangible and target-oriented than development concepts and policies could achieve so far.

Keywords: Common property natural resource management, development, indigenous knowledge, mobility, pastoralism

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