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**Within the Bounds of Economic and Ecological Possibilities –  
Prospects for Pastoralism in Azerbaijan**

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**Abstract**

Pastoralism is one of the major land uses in Middle and Central Asian transformation countries. After the dissolution of collective or state farms pastoralists now have to act under market conditions to generate income. The institutional framework has changed nearly totally, but the carrying capacity of pastures remains the same. How did pastoralism develop under market conditions and what can its future look like? This study addresses overgrazing in grasslands of Azerbaijan from an economic point of view.

Azerbaijan has a traditional transhumant sheep farming sector, which is recently growing in terms of livestock numbers. But national statistics show, that agriculture regarding the share of GDP, generated incomes and employment is strongly underdeveloped, compared to other, rapidly growing sectors of economy. Therefore, rural development is needed for poverty reduction and economic growth in rural areas. However, excessive growth of livestock numbers leads to problems of overgrazing and erosion, which are already reported for mountaineous regions in Azerbaijan.

In this study, we address the following questions:

1. Which forms of farm organisation emerged after the dissolution of collective farms in transhumant sheep farming? How is their present economic performance?
2. Which paths of development are feasible in the future?
3. How can an ecologically sound and welfare enhancing development of sheep farming be facilitated?

Data collection took place in two transhumant regions in Azerbaijan. Interviews were conducted with farm managers and representatives of administration, covering current farm organisation, costs and revenues as well as the institutional framework for transhumance. Economic performance was assessed in cost revenue calculations.

Analysis revealed comparably large-scaled management units of approx. 600 ewes with high levels of market integration. Farms are organised as family farms or cooperatives, with an increasing share of absentee owners. Addressing research question 3, scenarios were developed, aiming at enhancing the ecological condition of pastures, while maintaining or even increasing income levels of the affected farms. Scenarios comprise alterations in management as well as in institutional framework.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan, livestock economy, overstocking, pastoralism, scenario analysis