



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2013, Stuttgart-Hohenheim  
“Agricultural development within the rural-urban continuum”

## Which Institutional Arrangements Can Halt Pastoral Degradation in Uzbekistan’s Rangeland Systems? A Political Economy Perspective

MAKHMUD SHAUMAROV

*University of Hohenheim, Inst. of Agricultural Economics and Social Sciences in the Tropics and Subtropics, Germany*

### Abstract

As historical analysis shows, the former Soviet regime was able to establish a productive and sustainable system of pastoral management for the vast rangeland resources of Central Asia. Since the political transition, more than 40% of the pastoral areas have been lost in Uzbekistan, mainly due to land degradation and obsolete infrastructure. Natural rangelands occupy over half of the country territory and the pastoral degradation has far-reaching implications for incomes of rural households, for regional food security and for the soil carbon balance.

This paper deals with the question as to why it has not been possible in the two decades since the fall of the Soviet regime to establish a sustainable pasture management system, even though the political transition would have offered the opportunity to replace the centralised system with a sustainable and equitable community-based approach for pasture management. The paper combines a historical analysis with a political economy perspective and a Grounded Theory approach to answer the following research questions: Which lessons can be derived from pasture management under the Soviet regime? What factors led to pasture degradation, and why does the current political regime do not have sufficient incentives to establish a sustainable alternative system? What institutional arrangements for future pasture management would be feasible?

The analysis showed that the Soviet system was able to achieve a productive use of the rangelands in Central Asia due the following factors: extensive rangeland research that started in early 1920's and covered geo-botanical, groundwater and pasture rotation maps; zoo-climatic assessments; the set-up of a comprehensive institutional structure providing zoo-veterinary, melioration, pedigree, shelter, monitoring/enforcement and labour rewarding schemes. This system was centrally subsidised, and the development race with industrialised states was the major political incentive. The current agricultural reform policies prioritise irrigated areas over drylands, since its cash crops have higher returns on investment. Therefore, the pastoral system receives low research funding, has insufficient monitoring/enforcement institutions, in addition to dominance of clan networks. Despite the deconcentration of administrative power, there is a lack of legal recognition of community-based pastoral groups to grant them fair access to rangelands, public services and micro-credit.

**Keywords:** Dryland research, institutional change, pastoral degradation, political economy, Uzbekistan

---

**Contact Address:** Makhmud Shaumarov, University of Hohenheim, Inst. of Agricultural Economics and Social Sciences in the Tropics and Subtropics, Wollgrasweg 43, 70599 Stuttgart, Germany, e-mail: makhmud.shaumarov@uni-hohenheim.de