

Institutional Options for Managing Rangelands



Rangelands occupy nearly one-half of the Earth's land area or around 16 billion acres. About one-half of this area is used for grazing livestock. Rangelands have been subject to a wide range of tenure arrangements, with different structures for regulating access to, use of, and management of rangelands. These include many customary and tribal institutional arrangements that have functioned for long periods.

SOURCE:

Ngaido, T. and N. McCarthy. 2005. *Institutional Options for Managing Rangelands*. Collective Action and Property Rights for Sustainable Rangeland Management, CAPRI Research Brief, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, D.C.

Each of these property rights regimes and institutional options is associated with different costs for achieving various goals, such as poverty reduction, equitable access to resources, and sustainable use and management of those resources. The benefits and costs of alternative tenure and institutional arrangements and the impact of existing legal and policy frameworks on the sustainability and equity of pastoral production systems vary depending on the category of land ownership: state ownership; individual ownership; or common property.

State Ownership

Proponents of state involvement maintain that only an external authority can enforce the best use of, and investment in, common pool natural resources as the state has greater financial resources



with which to make large-scale investments and can bear the risk associated with such investments better than community members can.

State ownership often fails to promote community stewardship and thus limits collective action and incentives for members to manage their resources effectively and make long-term investments. Competing claims between pastoral communities and states have created situations of confusion and open access, leading many pastoralists to challenge both state and traditional range management rules and activities and, in some cases, to illegally appropriate common rangelands.

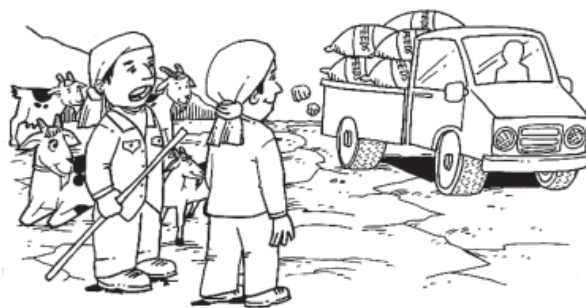
Other problems that arise with state ownership include:

- Optimum utilization requires good local knowledge, which government agencies often lack particularly on agroecological conditions and local rules of use and management. These information problems increase the costs of enforcing management decisions by government agents.
- In the arid and semi-arid regions, flexibility and mobility are valuable strategies for managing spatial and temporal variation in climate. But centralized government decision-making and enforcement structures severely reduce this flexibility.
- Collective action is likely to be lower under state tenure because pastoralists may fear that claims on returns to investments on state land will not be recognized in the future.

Nonetheless, a number of different institutional arrangements have been introduced to manage some of these costs, including the granting of common use rights to communities or cooperatives, grazing licenses, and leaseholds.

Pastoral Cooperatives

In most West Asian countries, pastoral cooperatives have mainly been involved in distributing subsidized feeds. In Jordan, however, the new herder-driven cooperatives, which have management rights granted by the state on their traditional pastures, are getting better range productivity results than state-managed reserves, without requiring expensive fencing and guarding. This type of cooperative fosters collective action because members are certain to reap the benefits of their investments and control access to improved pastures. There remain, however, concerns about potential conflicts between cooperative members and non-members.



Common Use Rights for Pastoral Communities

Some governments provide tacit recognition of pastoral communities' use rights and their potential for informally operating grazing networks. This tacit recognition, however, gives pastoralists only a limited role in management and investment decisions and an even smaller role in deciding on the evolution of property rights. Often users do not have the right to reallocate common land to alternative activities like cropping or reserves, a situation that limits the capacity of pastoralists to respond to local conditions. By appropriating pastoral resources and limiting the role of local-level pastoral institutions, state ownership has often fostered land use conflicts and the breakdown of collective action within and across pastoral groups. In particular, where the state claimed ownership but expended limited resources to manage rangelands or relied on bureaucrats to implement management schemes without knowledge of local resources and institutions, many land use conflicts have arisen and resources have become degraded.

Common Use Rights for Pastoral Organizations

Theoretically, state and local organizations could work together to create and enforce use rules and investment activities. But in practice, the costs of negotiating such rules have often been prohibitive. Numerous projects have attempted to reorganize pastoralists into cooperatives with the aim of improving rangeland resources and promoting collective action, but the cooperatives have rarely been effective managers of rangelands.

Grazing Licenses

To reverse rangeland degradation, government-managed grazing reserves grant licenses determined by a well-defined and well-funded investment strategy. These areas are then opened for grazing during specific periods of the year, and any herder can buy a license, whether or not he or she is a member of the tribe or community with traditional claim to the reserve area.

Since pastoral communities contribute little to the management of these reserves, the main collective action of community members has often been to hinder state licensing policies. With high costs of fencing and guarding reserves, community participation in improving and managing these reserves has been lacking.

Individual Leaseholds

The practice of granting long-term individual leaseholds on range resources remains limited. In some cases such as Botswana, individual leaseholds have contributed to increasing livestock production and improving rangeland conditions. However, some issues that arise with individual leaseholds are:

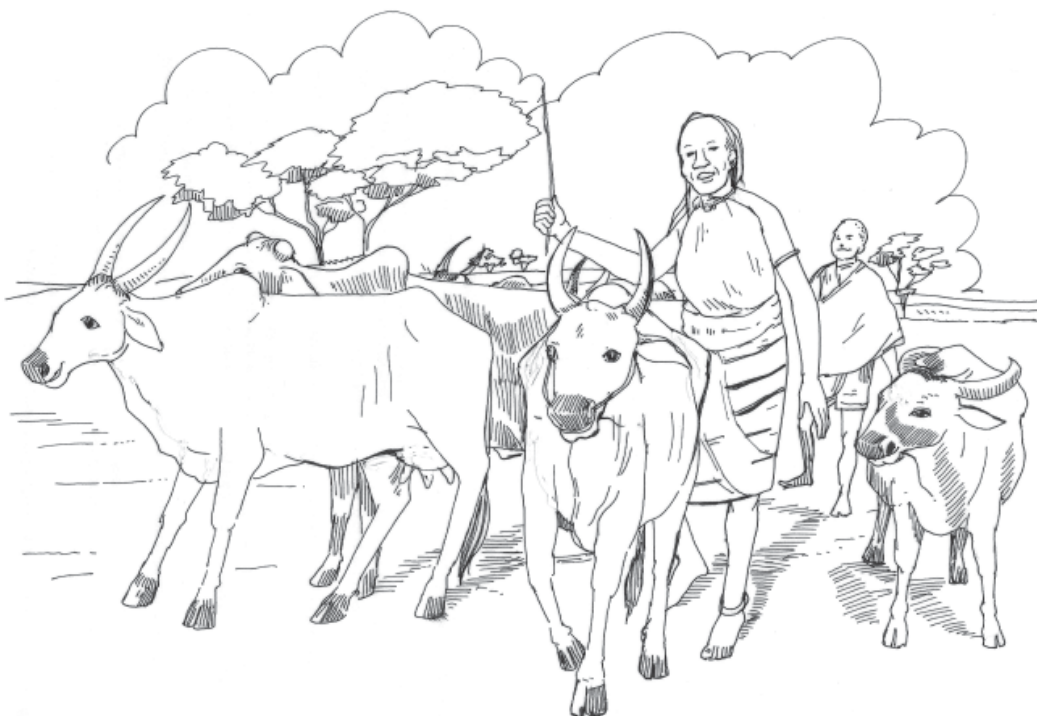
- The policy has been strongly criticized on equity grounds.
- People with previous claims to resources have been dispossessed or denied further access without compensation leading to additional pressures on the now smaller common pool resource base, increasing range degradation, and conflicts between large and small herd owners.
- Widespread individual leaseholds increase the vulnerability of pastoral communities during droughts by limiting their capacity to move and negotiate access to neighboring pastures.
- There is very little collective action under this system.

Individual Ownership

In pastoral areas of central Tunisia, individual private property rights fostered the transformation of pastoral and nomadic systems into agro-pastoralist systems. Privatization led to the wide-scale adoption of fodder crop production, including cacti and shrubs. The efficiency of this option depends on the performance of land, purchased input, credit and output markets, and legal and institutional provisions to reduce land fragmentation.

Some concerns that arise with individual ownership include:

- There is potential for misappropriation of land by the politically-powerful, thus raising equity concerns.
- This system is likely to reduce herd size, mobility, and collective action within and between pastoral groups, and consequently pastoralist households may become more vulnerable to drought.



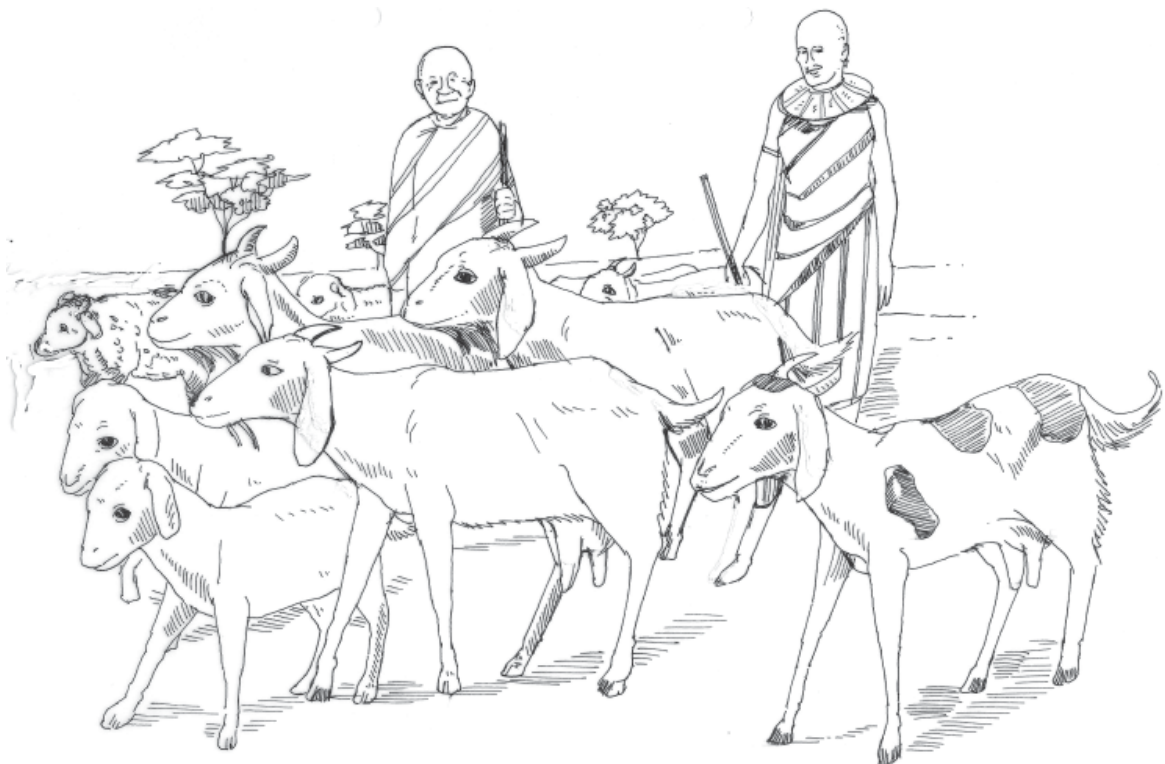
Common Property

Common property rights for communities make tenure more secure, but the communities must bear all costs of making, monitoring, and enforcing rules regarding rangeland management. Managing access to and use of resources can be difficult, particularly when benefits and costs are not equally distributed among community members.

In this system, local institutions may keep their traditional roles of managing the resources, deciding how to allocate resources between pastures and croplands, and deciding on the nature of the rights to be allocated to members and non-members. These opportunities may empower local institutions and provide them with the capacity to mobilize collection action and sustain the livelihoods of their communities.

Because land-owning communities may have difficulties mobilizing financial resources and technical expertise, they may enter contractual arrangements for improving their resources. Under such contracts, as in central Tunisia and Morocco, state institutions, generally forest services, are entrusted with the responsibility for improving and managing the resource. After the improvement of the resource, rights holders purchase grazing or cutting licenses, and the revenues generated from the licenses are used to pay off improvement costs. Theoretically, these ranges will revert to communities once improvement costs are recuperated; in practice, however, such transfers have often not taken place.

Since common property rights are generally granted to a fixed and well-defined group for rangelands with well-defined boundaries, it can lead to limiting flexibility and herd mobility.



Conclusion

Achieving efficient, equitable, and sustainable rangeland management depends on the costs and benefits of alternative systems. These costs and benefits, in turn, depend on agro-ecological, socio-cultural, and economic characteristics. The conservation and management of rangelands require not only tenure security, but also an understanding of local livestock production and risk management strategies and factors that promote collective action, which can then be integrated into national policy formulation strategies and project designs.

Suggested Readings

McCarthy, N., B. Swallow, M. Kirk and P. Hazell. 2000. *Property Rights, Risk, and Livestock Development in Africa*. International Food Policy Research Institute: Washington, D.C. (<http://www.capri.cgiar.org/proprights.asp>)

Ngaido, T. 2002. *Pastoral Land Rights*. Paper prepared for the World Bank's Regional Workshop on Land Issues in Africa. Kampala, Uganda, April 2002. ([http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/ardext.nsf/24ByDocName/PapersPastoral/\\$FILE/Pastoral+Land+Rights_Ngaido.pdf](http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/ardext.nsf/24ByDocName/PapersPastoral/$FILE/Pastoral+Land+Rights_Ngaido.pdf))

Ngaido, T., N. McCarthy and M. Di Gregorio. 2002. *International Conference on Policy and Institutional Options for the Management of Rangelands in Dry Areas: Workshop Summary Paper*. Working Paper 23. CGIAR Systemwide Program on Collective Action and Property Rights for Poverty Reduction (CAPRI). International Food Policy Research Institute: Washington, D.C. (<http://www.capri.cgiar.org/wp/capriwp23.asp>)