

Policies promoting pastoralists

Recurrent failures of range management projects indicate that range scientists are far behind traditional pastoralists in making effective use of tropical rangeland. Hermann Grell makes a plea for policies promoting pastoralists.

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The first generation of range management projects in Africa involved mainly improving the water supply. Instead of increasing animal productivity, this increased overgrazing around the waterpoints. A second generation of projects focused on grazing management, based on Western range management principles such as determining carrying capacity and adjusting stocking rates accordingly. This approach also largely failed.

Both approaches ignored the knowledge and practices of the local pastoralists. There is ample evidence that traditional herders can generally produce more food and support more people per unit area than the "modern" livestock systems (eg Breman & de Wit 1983).

Mobility needed

In recent years it became increasingly evident that "modern" range management is based on assumptions poorly suited for arid lands. Behnke and Scoones (1991) summarised findings which clearly show that stability of range vegetation cannot be achieved due to the extremely variable rainfall in dry areas. These "non-equilibrium" rangelands are best exploited by adjusting animal numbers to the variations in plant growth by moving the herds.

Our research in semiarid Senegal supports this. Groups of pastoralists were given exclusive rights to fenced grazing areas, if they agreed to limit the stocking rate to 1 tropical livestock unit (250 kg live-weight) per 10 ha. For this rather conservative stocking rate, 600 kg/ha of annual production of plant dry matter is needed. But this yield was reached in only 6 of the last 10 years (Fig 1).

Mobility in pasture use is obviously needed. It is impossible to organise flexible use of pasture from an office in the capital. Instead, the pastoralists themselves need a high degree of autonomy.

Counterproductive policies

Agricultural policies favouring the urban elite and cash-crop farmers have deprived herders of crucial wet-season pastures. Despite the disrespect for pastoralists, the

urban elite and rich farmers invest heavily in livestock. Half the animals in some Sahelian countries already belong to merchants, public servants and rich farmers, and pastoralists have often become hired herders.

This shift in ownership results in lower herd productivity. Hired herders need larger herds to subsist, as they receive only part of the herd product (normally milk). They have to extract more milk, thus increasing youngstock mortality. If the herders' movements are not restricted by law, the owners do it, since they want to control the herders.

Policy re-orientation

If the fight against desertification and the aim of cost-efficient production is taken seriously, policies have to be re-oriented. Some important points are:

- the merits of the traditional mobile systems must be recognised and these systems reinforced and, where necessary, rehabilitated
- land tenure systems have to accommodate mobile pastoral production
- pastoral organisations need legal recognition so that they can obtain more secure rights to grazing and water
- pastoral groups have to get a voice in landuse planning
- pastoral people need training to be able to get better employment outside the pastoral sector, where necessary.

GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation) is increasing its support for natural resource management in dryland Africa. Newly launched pastoral development projects are aimed at stimulating the political will to regulate land conflicts, ensure herders' access to key resources, and promote decentralised management of natural resources by users.

Policy changes being sought include the following:

- management of rangelands by mobile pastoralists must be recognised legally as land development
- land development plans must define zones of transhumance and dry-season grazing
- alternative investment possibilities must be created, so that investment from outside the pastoral sector does not concentrate primarily on livestock.

Scientists constrain development?

Until now, the advocates of pastoralists come - with rare exceptions - from the ranks of the social sciences. Are technical scientists so prejudiced against pastoralism that they are a major constraint to participatory development? We hope to enlist less prejudiced technical scientists for pastoral research and development programmes. In such programmes as well as in policy advice, regional organisations such as CILSS (Comité Inter-États de Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel) will play a major role.

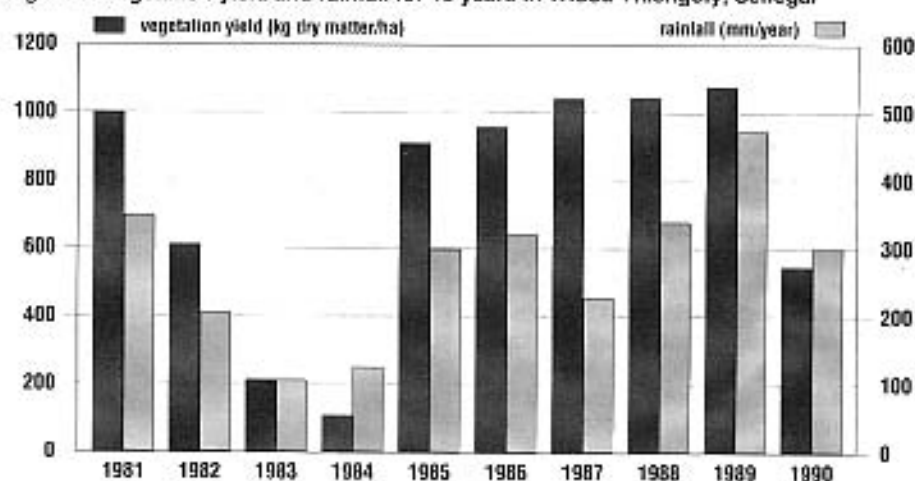
Implementing agencies, such as GTZ, can incorporate the findings into project planning, give the emerging new concepts more momentum, and help arrange financial support. ■

References

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Figure 1: Vegetation yield and rainfall for 10 years in Widou Thiengoly, Senegal



Source: Grell in Dimanche et al 1991