

Paper ID: 1553

Theme 3. Sustainability of grasslands- social and policy issues

Sub-theme 3.5. Policy issues related to sustainable grassland production

Traditional conservation of Buffalo Breed by pastoralists through maintaining of grassland ecosystem, Banni-Kachchh, Gujarat-India

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Keywords : Grassland, Institution, Pastoralists

Introduction

Banni region, situated at 23019'N to 23052'N to 68056'E to 70032'E, comprises around 25,00 sq.km area under Bhuj taluka of Kutch district of Gujarat state, is home of Muslim nomadic pastoralists and Meghwal Hindus. Banni is situated in Arid climate, with high temperature in most of time which reached maximum up to 48°C -50°C during May June. Pastoral community, call themselves *Maldhari*, in Banni region depends on Banni Grassland for the rearing of their livestock mainly Banni Buffalo which registered as 11th buffalo breed of India in 2011. Maldharis even rearing unique Kankarej Cattle for Milk Production and selling bullocks in Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Pastoral life style in Banni, promote pluralistic culture to stay united by respecting traditions of each community. Strong association with animals and nature, made them sensitive to grassland ecosystem therefore, they have been able to developed livestock rearing practices which are more ecologically sustainable. This paper attempts to understand the pastoral life of *Maldharis* as essential for breeding, marketing and sustainable use of resources particularly commons.

Material and Methods

We conducted a focus group discussion with Maldharies of 13 panchayats and collected information on their resource utilization traditional practices. Each panchayat has 35-40 traditional names of their seasonal grazing areas with site specific characteristics. Participatory mapping exercise and proposed action plans also been prepared by each panchayat on conservation of natural resources.

Results and Discussion

Pastoralists of Banni region started organizing themselves to continue pastoral life style by forming Banni Pashu Uchherak Maldhari Sangathan:BPUMS (Banni Breeders' Association). To understand the complex socio-ecological dynamics and to generate information that would be of value to the Maldharis in their formulating a Banni conservation and management plan, BPUMS approached to researchers, academician and economists and formed a network called-RAMBLE. RAMBLE (Research and Monitoring in the Banni LandscapE-www.bannigrass land.org) is an inter-institutional collaboration.

Pastoral people categorize grazing patches on the basis of different criteria like soil type, distance of water bodies, periodicity and quality of drinking water for animals, grass, shrubs, trees cover and biodiversity, topography of land and surface of movement, wind flow, size of grazing patch, and distance from villages. Though still there is no official demarcation of village boundaries, pastoral communities always agreed on traditional boundaries of their villages. Mobile pastoralism of this region provides a highly efficient way of managing the sparse vegetation and relatively low fertility of dryland soils.

Conclusion

Sahjeevan with research outcomes of RAMBLE, initiated advocacy efforts for recognizing pastoralists role in conservation and improvement of grassland ecosystem, so that a new policy framework can be developed for community managed fodder development programme. Along with these advocacy efforts, Sahjeevan started handholding breeders association to negotiate with governments to recognize their community forest rights over banni grassland. Post CFR interventions each village will have to develop a plan for conservation, development and management of Banni grassland. Results and outcomes of research in Banni Grassland will help them to develop their village level plan, through this, the community will enhance their livestock based livelihood.