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THE CASE OF GRAZING ASSOCIATIONS IN LESOTHO

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THE CASE OF GRAZING ASSOCIATIONS IN LESOTHO**

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This One



Introduction

1. In recent years governments and donor agencies have devoted considerable resources to efforts to improve the management of communal grazing lands. Range and livestock projects have been designed to address such familiar pastoral problems as endemic overgrazing of rangelands, often leading to permanent degradation of vegetation, soils, and water resources, and reduced livestock productivity, adversely affecting the welfare of rural people. Many explanations have been offered for overgrazing and resource degradation. These include rapid human population growth; technological changes such as deep boreholes, which in some areas have overridden the natural systems constraints to the unchecked growth of herds; and social and economic changes in part resulting in the decline of traditional institutions that may have provided mechanisms for regulating or controlling access to rangelands (Bennett et al, 1986).
2. Whatever the complex of factors which have led to range degradation in Africa, policy-makers and project designers very often see at least part of the solution in land tenure reform. New land tenure rules are seen as essential to correcting the problems associated with the perceived open access, free-for-all communal range use. This has led to a great variety of reform experiments, including individualization, as in the case of the Tribal Grazing Land Program in Botswana, group ranches in Kenya and elsewhere, as well as attempts to develop cooperative grazing systems, such as grazing associations, and the creation of administrative apparatus for controlling livestock number and movements through grazing permits (Bennett et al, 1986; Lawry, 1983; Oxby, 1981; Galaty, 1980).

Grazing associations in Lesotho

3. Recent range policy in Lesotho has emphasized a dual strategy. On the one hand, the strategy is to invest greater control over local management decisions in grazing associations, and on the other, to develop the institutional capacity for better administrative regulation of grazing, principally by reinforcing the role of the chieftainship in range management matters. This paper gives emphasis to the grazing association approach.
4. Grazing associations are not indigenous forms of grazing management in Lesotho. Rather, they have been promoted by government and international

donor agencies, usually as part of area-based range and livestock projects.^{1/} The grazing association evaluated here, at Sehlabathebe in Qacha's Nek district in eastern Lesotho, was established in 1983 as one component of a USAID-funded range improvement program in the 33,000 hectare Sehlabathebe area. Although the association was formed at the initiative of government and project staff, it would be incorrect to deduce that the community was unreceptive to the kinds of interventions offered by government. In fact, the association has been relatively successful in attracting and keeping paying members (about 50 percent of Sehlabathebe stockholders were members in 1985).

5. High levels of local support have been achieved because the Government of Lesotho's (GOL) program of assistance has brought tangible benefits to stockholders. Local grazing patterns were adjusted to give Sehlabathebe (an area comprising 10 villages sharing a single watershed) exclusive year-round grazing rights to an extensive nearby high mountain cattle post area. While this step provided the Sehlabathebe grazing association with exclusive control over a region with which a year-round grazing regime could be planned and administered, it also extinguished historical use rights to high mountain pastures held by stockholders in neighbouring communities. This, of course, pleased Sehlabathebe residents. Grazing pressure was significantly reduced at no cost to themselves. Outsiders, of course, were left with reduced grazing and have continued to press demands for some form of relief.
6. A constitution defining the rights and privileges of members and a policy-making and management structure was drawn up by the project. Briefly, the association is governed by an executive committee made up of two elected representatives for each village, plus the village chiefs or headmen. The executive committee is responsible, among other things, for administering a grazing management plan which provides for the seasonal rotation of livestock between winter grazing areas near the villages and summer grazing areas in the surrounding mountains. Livestock found grazing in violation of the plan are subject to being impounded by any of ten range riders (lipalami), who are local villagers paid by the association to enforce the grazing rules. Owners of impounded livestock must pay trespass fines before they can regain possession of their animals.

7. The grazing management plan, though not universally adopted, has brought about clearly beneficial changes in the grazing regime. Range technicians generally agree that grazing conditions in the village areas are much improved, and that much more winter forage is available for livestock than would normally have been the case. However, there is some evidence to suggest that many stockholders adhere to the rotation scheme because they fear their livestock will be impounded, and not necessarily because they think the plan is a good idea. Approximately 30% of cattle owners had some stock impounded in each of the last two summer grazing seasons. It is unlikely that the rotational scheme could continue in any meaningful way in the absence of a vigorous enforcement program.
8. At the start of the project, it had been assumed that after a period of fairly intensive initial assistance, the grazing association would be able to handle rule-making, range management, and enforcement functions on its own. From the outset, project staff were meant to provide extension assistance only. In practice, the extension role often shaded into a leadership role, in which project staff acted as managers of association affairs, particularly on technical aspects of the grazing rotation, and decisively in providing administrative assistance to the enforcement program. On the whole, this kind of project role was welcomed by stockholders who came to see the project as an even-handed outside authority not subject to the kinds of intra-village conflicts which so often undermine village cooperative schemes.
9. A program of project-supported social science research at Sehlabathebe has given particular emphasis to identifying social and economic factors that either contribute to, or detract from, local self-management of grazing resources. Factors weighing against cooperation predominate, and some of them are summarized below.
10. Stockholders pursue highly diverse livestock production strategies. Livestock management practices vary with such household demographic characteristics as age, sex, and residential status of the household head. About 30% of households are headed by women, and another 30% are headed by men who are absent for work, mainly South Africa. Households short on male herding labor and male management are less able to adopt many of the more intensive range management practices required by the plan.

11. Likewise, economic interest in livestock and livestock and range improvement varies significantly among households. Only about 16% of households cite livestock production as their principal source of cash income, though 84% of households own livestock. Households more dependent upon remittances (and remittances are the principal cash income source for 50% of households) are less likely to belong to the grazing association, to feed fodder and mineral supplements to their livestock, to breed with improved stock and decisively, to own cattle posts—the bases of operation in the mountain pastures. For many in this group, adoption of the grazing plan requires that they make arrangements to share cattle posts belonging to others. This involves new costs which many seek to avoid by keeping their stock in the village year-round. Avoidance of these kinds of costs partially explains the high number of trespass cases.
12. A general policy implication is that as households vary in their economic interests in livestock, and in their management practices generally, so they vary in their willingness and ability to adopt certain aspects of any communal management scheme. The dilemma is one of achieving coordinated, common behavior in an environment characterized by producer heterogeneity.
13. Despite this heterogeneity and the challenges it presents to communal action, it can be argued that many of the plan's provisions are not onerous, and can be adopted at reasonable cost by most people.^{2/} The policy problem then shifts to that of the viability of the grazing association in managing grazing, including enforcing rules, apart from any active involvement by government authorities.
14. Stockholders are skeptical about the ability of the executive committee to sustain the management and control programs established with project assistance. In response to a question in one survey, 54% of the respondents did not think that the grazing association could function without continuing leadership and management assistance from government and project staff. Only 12% felt that it could continue, while the remaining 34% were not sure or had no opinion. Comments made by respondents suggested that their skepticism is grounded in a sense that people are disinclined to

cooperate on communal management endeavors. Stockholders assume that many people would rather not take the trouble to adjust their behavior to conform to a community plan, or that for many adjustment is too costly.

15. This skepticism is reinforced by the absence of a strong tradition of local self-management of resource use. The role of village chiefs in regulating grazing was very modest, and was limited to setting aside winter reserve areas in the villages, known as leboella. The ability of the chiefs to even manage leboella has become much diminished, because of political and social changes affecting the chieftainship but also because leboella is subject to the same kinds of pressures that threaten the grazing plan.
16. But more importantly, many stockholders doubt the ability of the executive committee to carry forward the range management program in an even handed way. The committee is made up of large holders, who have very limited experience in collective decision-making and are subject to factional infighting. Also, executive committee members are often perceived as acting only in their own interests. And because people are seen as inherently "uncooperative", many stockholders doubt the ability of the executive committee, made up of neighbors and social equals ("equals" in the sense that higher social position or status does not normally entail the ability to command others), to enforce rules without the active backing of project staff. Project staff, as outsiders and public officials, are seen as socially neutral and technically competent. Thus, a second dilemma presents itself. The grazing association does not possess the kind of social authority and technical legitimacy necessary to effectively enforce grazing rules.
17. The inability of the grazing association to manage the grazing plan independent of government assistance has led the GOL and the donor to prolong the period of project technical assistance to the association. In fact, policy toward grazing associations is coming to assume a more or less permanent official role in local level range management. The role of government officials would be one of working directly with grazing associations, providing technical legitimacy to range plans, and backstopping locally managed enforcement programs.

18. Reliance upon government authority, however, is not always feasible, or desirable. In light of severe staff limits, only a small number of areas could receive the kind of management assistance this approach would require. Indeed, a principal rationale for the original emphasis on grazing associations was the supposed reduction in demands upon limited technical staff that would follow upon locally managed rangelands.
19. The relationship between government staff and communities is itself not always an easy one. At Sehlabathebe, the project staff have not adopted an authoritarian attitude toward range control. Rather, they have provided backing to the enforcement activities of the association, and have prodded the leadership into action at critical junctures in the grazing program.
20. By working closely with the leadership, the project staff have become sensitive to the very real limits stockholders face in adopting some unpopular or unrealistic aspects of the grazing plan. Hence, the project staff have not pressed for enforcement of those rules which might have met with widespread resistance. Clearly, the relationship between the project and the association is subtle one. It is a relationship that is not easily formalized.

Policy implications

21. Many cooperative livestock and grazing schemes flounder because of incorrect assumptions made about the social, political and legal status of the cooperative organization, especially with respect to its ability to control the behavior of its members. Whether it be a group ranch, a marketing cooperative, or a grazing association, it is often assumed that the cooperative organization will possess more social authority than is in fact realistic to expect.
22. In Lesotho, the social and economic conditions for effective local cooperative action in range management are not usually present. Diverse livestock and range management strategies make widespread adoption of a communal management scheme problematic. Grazing associations lack the social authority to enforce even modest controls.
23. The relative success of the Sehlabathebe program has been the result

of a collaborative effort between the grazing association and the project range officers. While the project's presence has been decisive in keeping the association committed to the enforcement of regulations, project personnel, had they had the sole direct responsibility for implementing the program, would not have been able to achieve equivalent levels of rule adoption through directly administered range controls. This suggests, in situations characterized by weak local organizations combined with the need to adjust the program objectives and regulations to local conditions, collaborative local organization-government management models may provide a better way of coping with the limitations inherent in the separate approaches.

24. Range management projects that anticipate a role for a cooperative organization of livestock holders should make a particular effort to understand the social setting for cooperative resource management. A critical issue will be the ability of the group to regulate the behavior of its members—in this case to enforce grazing rules.
25. It is not possible to provide a checklist of the necessary ingredients for successful cooperative action. Any new, unfamiliar set of circumstances will require evaluation with an appropriate input from social scientists. The experience in Lesotho, however, suggests that some of the following factors be borne in mind.
 - (i) At the household level, the variety of range use and management strategies should be identified. Greater heterogeneity may complicate implementation of the plan, but prior knowledge of the variety of management strategies can help in designing plans that account for the constraints to adoption faced by certain categories of producers. For instance, new grazing regimes will often involve adjustments in herding patterns, and may increase herding costs for some stockowner groups. It might be appropriate for the local organization to supply herding services to those adversely affected. Likewise, it may be appropriate to exempt disadvantaged categories of producers from certain plan provisions, where this would not detract from the overall viability of the plan. Questions of the distribution of costs and benefits among groups will continually present themselves, and

will challenge the cohesiveness of the organization. Outside staff can be of assistance in offering disinterested solutions perceived as fair by the affected groups.

- (ii) As a rule, no plan should impose a radical new grazing scheme. Rather, improvements should be made to what exists through incremental adjustments. Information should be gathered on existing grazing patterns, and existing patterns should, wherever possible, be preserved or improved upon in the new plan. In many communal systems, grazing is "partitioned" between, for instance, more intensive dairy and draft operations near settlements and more extensive grazing at outposts in distant open pastures (Oakerson, 1984). The economic and management logic of partitioning rules should be accounted for, and should provide the point of departure for new plans. Herd sharing or entrustment arrangements (such as mafisa in Lesotho and Botswana) might act to get stock into the hands of those who can provide more intensive management, thereby easing adoption of the plan. The continuing effectiveness of such arrangements needs to be considered.

- (iii) If success of the plan rests on adoption of new rules, the ability of the group, association, or the government to enforce the rules realistically must be carefully assessed. Rules that impose costs on stockholders without the promise of clear, immediate benefits will be resisted. This, of course, applies to all aspects of range and livestock programs. But there is a very real danger that communal range management programs, with their preeminent emphasis on range and vegetation condition lose sight of the production goals and constraints of livestock owners, which are principally social and economic in character.

FOOTNOTES

- 1/ Grazing association programs in Lesotho have usually been associated with area-based projects, collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Agriculture and Marketing and donor agencies. Recent examples, in addition to Sehlabathebe, have been grazing associations at Thaba Tseka (promoted with technical assistance from the Canadian International Development Agency) and Mphaki (European Economic Community).
- 2/ Enforcement of some generally unpopular provisions of the grazing plan has not been pressed by the project. For instance, a requirement that all sheep and goats be brought to village areas in the winter ran up against strong local concerns about the destructiveness of small stock to gardens and cattle grazing. The rule went unenforced by the range riders, and was eventually dropped following formal decision by the executive committee.

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