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Is Rangeland Co-management a Feasible Policy Option in China ?

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Key words : rangeland management , co-management , China , feasibility

Introduction Rangeland co-management is increasingly recommended as a policy option in China (e.g. Li et al. 2007) . In practice , rangeland co-management in China has been understood either as community-based management of rangelands (e.g. Banks et al. 2003) or as multi-stakeholder collaboration in the management of rangelands (e.g. Yan 2007) . On the basis of two practical experiences this paper explores obstacles to wider application of co-management approaches in China .

Experiences with co-management

Experience 1 In 2007 , The Mountain Institute began to develop a pilot project In Hongyuan County , Sichuan . A site was selected on the basis that the community used their grasslands in common and expressed an interest in establishing a rotational grazing system . Carrying capacity of community grasslands was estimated . Summer pastures are not overgrazed , but winter pastures are grazed by about 3-4 times more than a sustainable stocking rate . Plans to implement rotational grazing were abandoned in favour of efforts to improve winter fodder supply .

Experience 2 In 2006 , Diqing Prefecture Veterinary Station in Yunnan began a process of collaborative management with three communities in Xianggelila County . The approach adopted was very effective in improving grassland productivity . Senior officials applaud these results , but say it would be impossible to replicate using government funds because the measures needed to address grassland management problems are integrated , whereas government funding lines are highly segregated .

Conclusions Experience 1 warns that although some communities manage grasslands collectively this does not mean they are managed sustainably . Experience 2 shows that while pilot initiatives can be successful , further constraints to replication arise from the characteristics of government funding management procedures . We suggest that grassland co-management as a whole is not a feasible policy recommendation for China , but that some elements of community-based and participatory approaches may be replicable within current government administrative practices .

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