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The XXI International Grassland Congress / VIII International Rangeland Congress took place in Hohhot, China from June 29 through July 5, 2008.

Proceedings edited by Organizing Committee of 2008 IGC/IRC Conference

Published by Guangdong People's Publishing House

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A participatory assessment of the development needs of semi-sedentary Pastoralists in Kenya

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Key words : participatory, appraisal, development, pastoralists, Kenya

Introduction Development interventions in African drylands have met with limited success partly due to little attention paid to the felt needs of target populations (Scoones, 1996). However, donors are now looking for appropriate entry points to fast track development in these areas (McPeak et al. 2006). The Acacia Operation Project was a pilot activity implemented from 2004-2006 with the aim of mitigating land degradation and poverty in northern Kenya through novel methods of water harvesting and promotion of appropriate agri-silvo-pastoral practices such as gums and resins production in combination with drought tolerant crops. A critical output was elaboration of the development needs of the target population. This paper reports on results of the development needs assessment of the communities in the project area.

Materials and methods Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) were conducted in six project sites namely: Sereolipi, Merille, Laisamis, Logologo, Loiyangalani and North Horr. These areas are inhabited by a partly settled nomadic population whose main source of livelihood is livestock rearing. The landscape is shaped by low and highly variable rainfall (250-500mm/year); frequent droughts and increasing degradation and poverty. A total of 308 individuals from an array of interest groups participated in the meetings. Data gathering tools used included resource maps, institutional analyses, and resource access and control profiles. Data analysis tools included problem and resource bag, problem ranking and opportunity analysis. Finally community action plans (CAPs) were elaborated.

Results and discussion Results showed that communities are well informed of their problems which include but not limited to poverty, limited water, human diseases, high illiteracy, insecurity, frequent droughts, desertification, limited markets, poor leadership and underdeveloped infrastructure. They also identified local resources that should be mobilized to realize their development needs. These are livestock and livestock products, plant and plant products, physical land resources, schools, knowledge and information, solar and wind energy. Access and control profiles revealed that although all family members had access to all key resources, men generally, retained control over livestock. Women on the other hand, retain control over livestock products especially milk and hides. In general, control of other productive resources varied from one community to another. The implication is that development interventions must be sensitive and take cognizance of gender roles in decision making as far as management of different resources is concerned. The communities were in accord that in trying to address the challenges they face, there is need to adopt an integrated approach. Technological aspects of production and processing should be linked to markets while livelihoods diversification should be promoted to ensure sustainability of development interventions. Institutional analysis showed a fairly high presence of community based collective action groups that could be used in project activities. Key features of CAPs were water management, land rehabilitation, income generating activities, capacity building, and support to groups; business planning, marketing and provision of micro-credit.

Conclusions Success of development interventions in African dry lands can be enhanced through a process of participatory assessment of felt needs of target populations and mobilization of local resources in an integrated approach that links producers to markets.

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