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## **Recognising local innovation in the framework of range co-management on the Tibetan Plateau\***

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**Key words :** land-use adaptation, multistakeholder workshops, natural resource management, participatory research

**Introduction** By allocating rangeland to individual families and promoting settlement and privatisation of land, the Chinese Government is intervening strongly in range management on the Tibetan Plateau. The EC-funded project RETPEC (Rangeland Enclosure on the Tibetan Plateau) is examining the impacts of these policies on pastoral people and the environment. ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) and ETC EcoCulture coordinate the project activities related to participatory approaches, co-management and options for change (Work Package 7).

**Materials and methods** As one component in this Work Package, both endogenous and introduced innovations—especially socio-organisational adaptations to changes in land tenure and access to resources resulting from Government policy—are being identified and evaluated jointly by pastoralists, extension agents, scientists, and local and provincial administrators. ICIMOD and ETC facilitate the process through a series of workshops on local innovation and perceptions of land-use change, followed by fieldwork to explore identified options further. For the initial workshop, participants from research institutes and universities in four provinces (Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Tibet Autonomous Region) completed pre-workshop assignments to record local innovations by herders. In the workshop, by examining what they had observed, the participants explored possibilities of participatory innovative processes in the framework of collaborative management of rangeland resources. They also learned how to facilitate multistakeholder workshops and practised this in a second, county-level workshop, attended by pastoralists (men and women) and people from extension services, development projects, local government and the women's federation.

**Results and discussion** The workshops stimulated the participants, including herders, to document and analyse local innovations in use of rangeland resources. The participants identified a variety of new and promising locally-developed practices, including:

- Re-organising the boundary fencing of allocated land to separate summer, autumn and winter pasture;
- Various forms of fence-making, e.g. combining wire net and thorny shrubs, and posts of steel and live trees;
- Families with large herds renting rangeland from other holders of land-use rights to be able to practise rotational grazing; some pay according to area, land quality and grazing period; others according to number of animals grazed on the land shared with leasers; this provides some income for poor families with few animals;
- Deciding against individual management of land allocated to families, because access to water is unequal, and therefore managing it jointly, with a village committee identifying campsites, grazing periods and moving routes;
- Young newly-wed herders without allocated land moving to communal summer pastures to raise yaks;
- Buying up one-year-old yaks in winter, fattening them and selling them for meat the following autumn;
- Supplementing the diet of weak yaks in winter by stirring wheat flour in water (sometimes adding chopped hay) or making dough with a little salt;
- Setting up "tent hotels" for tourists who want to experience pastoral culture, including horseback riding; this diversification gives the herder families an additional source of income.

Many of these innovations are responses to changes in land-use laws introduced by the Chinese Government. Different groups of herders have come up with different ways of adapting, depending on their prior experience and innate ingenuity. The "co-management" approach encourages the stakeholders to be creative in finding the most appropriate ways to manage animals, land and labour in order to achieve greater benefits in terms of productivity, security and environmental conservation. It brings together herders, government officials and other key stakeholders to explore and negotiate roles, responsibilities and benefits, while striving for a commonly agreed goal. It is a process of learning-by-doing through iterative cycles of joint experimentation, analysis, re-thinking and new action.

**Conclusions** Examining how herders innovate in response to government interventions is an entry point for participatory research in the framework of co-management of the rangelands, i.e. exploring and refining interesting options to improve the income and lives of herder families in the face of rapid change. This approach is designed to strengthen local capacities to adapt to change, as well as to strengthen the position of herders in research, development and policy dialogue so that they can create and choose their options for change.

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\* The views in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of all RETPEC partners or the European Commission (EC).