Livestock farming with nature

Ilse Köhler-Rollefson, E. Mathias, H.S. Rathore, P. Vivekanandan, J. Wanyama
LIFE Network, www.lifeinitiative.net

Crucial role of pastoralists
Pastoralists and small-scale livestock keepers are crucial to conserving farm animal genetic resources.

Actions to support indigenous and local communities

- Veterinary and extension services... micro-credit for women... access to natural resources and to the market, resolving land tenure issues... recognition of cultural practices and values... adding value to... products
- Dialogue among indigenous and rural communities and scientists and government officials... to integrate traditional knowledge with scientific approaches
- Development of niche markets for products derived from indigenous and local species and breeds.

- FAO Global Plan of Action on Animal Genetic Resources,

Local breeds as basis for development
Local breeds form a better basis for livestock development than introduced or cross-bred animals.

- Part of agro-ecosystems. They are important links in the web of wild and domestic biodiversity. Local ecosystems depend on local breeds.
- Efficient resource use. They exploit natural vegetation and low-grade crop by-products. They do not need expensive concentrates. (High-performance breeds need imported commercial animal feeds that have a huge carbon footprint.)
- Locally adapted. They are adapted to local diseases and need less medicine than imported breeds. They are less prone to catastrophic losses.
- Under local control. Local people have managed breeding for many generations. (Unlike hybrid chickens and pigs, no need to buy new replacement stock.)
- High-value products. Local breeds produce tasty products, sought after by consumers. More high-value niche products are being developed from local breeds.

Conclusions
Local breeds have potential as basis for sustainable development. A paradigm shift is needed in livestock development to strengthen livestock keepers’ organisations and support value addition and niche marketing.

Benefits of new approach
- Invigorated regional economies
- Reduced rural-urban migration
- Sustainable use of domestic and wild biodiversity
- Reduced problems of desertification
- Reduced need to transport animal feeds
- Lower impact on climate

Acknowledgements
HIVOS-Oxfam Novib Biodiversity Fund and Misereor for supporting the LIFE Network
Ford Foundation for supporting work with herders in Rajasthan