

Herders care for diversity



LEAGUE FOR
PASTORAL PEOPLES
AND ENDOGENOUS
LIVESTOCK DEVELOPMENT



The LIFE Initiative
Local Livestock for Empowerment of Rural People

We are losing our farm animal diversity

EVERY MONTH, ONE MORE LIVESTOCK breed becomes extinct. A handful of international breeds dominate global livestock production, and their genetic base is becoming ever narrower.

Concern about this rapid erosion of animal genetic resources led to the first United Nations conference on animal genetic resources, in Interlaken, Switzerland, in September 2007. The goal of this conference was to reach an intergovernmental agreement on strategies to overcome these problems.

A “Global Plan of Action” has been mapped out, but it is based on the assumptions that targeted government interventions can prevent the further extinction of breeds, and that genetic material can be conserved “ex-situ”, in gene banks. The Plan ignores the growing control over the livestock breeding sector by a few international genetics companies, and their

attempts to monopolize this control further through trade secrets, patents and other Intellectual Property Rights. The Plan acknowledges the role of farmers and pastoralists as stewards of diversity, but it gives them only a bit part rather than a key role.



We need a better approach

WE – THE **LIFE NETWORK** – believe that farm animal genetic diversity is linked to the well-being of livestock-keeping communities. These communities include farmers, pastoralists and indigenous communities. But national and international policy frameworks are biased in favour of exotic breeds and industrialized livestock keeping. The rights of livestock keepers, especially in marginal areas vital for diversity conservation, are being progressively curbed. The loss of breeds, documented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, reflects this.

THE BEST STRATEGY TO CONSERVE livestock diversity is to strengthen the farmers and pastoralists who manage a wide range of breeds. How to do this? Through policies that enable them not just to survive, but to take advantage of rising demand for livestock products.

Representatives of livestock keeping communities from all over the world have developed a set of **Livestock Keepers' Rights** that would enable them to continue keeping their breeds and use them as the basis for sustainable rural income generation.

Livestock Keepers' Rights would help conserve livestock diversity, contribute to rural poverty alleviation, and stem migration into the cities. By decreasing the need to move feedstuffs around the world, they would even help reduce climate change.

Supporting livestock keepers

THE LIFE NETWORK WORKS ON these issues globally and locally:

Globally

- By documenting and raising awareness about the role of communities and their indigenous knowledge in managing livestock genetic diversity.
- By promoting the development of the Livestock Keepers' Rights concept.
- By facilitating the participation of livestock keepers and their supporters in global policy processes.



Locally

- By supporting livestock keepers on the ground with training and capacity building on issues such as animal health care, organization building and marketing.
- By lobbying on issues such as grazing rights.

Cornerstones of Livestock Keepers' Rights

THE LIVESTOCK KEEPERS' RIGHTS CONCEPT has been developed over a period of almost seven years in a series of meetings involving livestock keepers and pastoralists: in Rome (Italy), Karen (Kenya), Bellagio (Italy), Yabello (Ethiopia), and Sadri (India).

The cornerstones of this concept are:

- Recognition of livestock keepers as **creators of breeds and custodians of animal genetic resources** for food and agriculture.
- Recognition of the dependency of the **sustainable use** of traditional breeds on the conservation of their respective ecosystems
- Recognition of traditional breeds as **collective property**, products of indigenous knowledge and cultural expression.
- The right of the livestock keepers to make **breeding decisions**.
- Right of livestock keepers to participate in **policy making processes** on animal genetic resource issues.
- Support for **training and capacity building** of livestock keepers in the provision of services along the food chain.

No Diversity without Livestock Keepers
No Livestock Keepers without Rights!

Local breeds bring benefits

LIVESTOCK DEVELOPMENT BASED ON LOCALLY adapted breeds not only conserves biodiversity. It also has a large number of other benefits:

- **Local breeds do not need expensive fodder concentrates.** They can use natural vegetation and low-grade crop by-products that are high in roughage. Commercial concentrate usually has to be transported over long distances, and is often imported. Among rising concerns about climate change, this is a major advantage.
- **Local breeds produce products – eggs, meat and milk – that are popular with consumers** and are tastier than those from industrial livestock. Local breeds have the potential for developing high-value niche-market products, where livestock keepers can retain control over production.
- **Local breeds have been developed and owned by local people** over many generations and are the product of local knowledge about animal breeding. With local breeds, local people still control their animals' reproduction. With hybrid chickens and pigs, by contrast, farmers have lost their breeding function and have to buy replacement stock each generation.
- **Indigenous breeds have co-evolved with and are adapted to local pests and diseases.** They are thus much less likely than imported stock to succumb to sicknesses. They need fewer veterinary inputs and are less likely to be wiped out by an epidemic. The spread of avian influenza provides a dramatic illustration of this – it mostly affects genetically homogeneous hybrid chickens.
- **Local breeds are also part of the local agro-ecosystems.** They represent important links in the web of wild and domestic biodiversity. These ecosystems depend on these breeds, and collapse if they are removed.

The LIFE Network

THE LIFE NETWORK IS A group of community organizations, non-government organizations and individuals that considers pastoralists and farmers as central actors in sustaining livestock genetic diversity. It believes that the best way of conserving breeds is by providing livestock keepers with supportive and enabling policy frameworks. Such an approach would also contribute to rural poverty alleviation. To this end, LIFE Network members have lobbied for “Livestock Keepers’ Rights” to be included in the official documents from the UN Conference on Animal Genetic Resources.

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Photos

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