

Livestock keepers rights and biocultural protocols

Tools for protecting biodiversity and the livelihoods of the poor

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The development of Livestock Keepers Rights and the Biocultural Protocols will be important tools in supporting the livelihoods of livestock keeping communities and the survival of the biodiversity they have managed over centuries.

Traditional livestock keeping in India is based on access to common property resources. The Institution of *gochar* or village grazing ground is an ancient one that dates back several thousand years. In addition to the *gochar*, there are grazing areas under protection of a temple, called *oran* or *devbani*, and in pre-colonial times, many communities enjoyed grazing privileges in the forests.

However, as we all know, the availability of such common property resources is drastically decreasing, not only in India, but throughout the world. This has at least two devastating consequences: first, it impacts the livelihoods of pastoralists and of smallholders who have to give up keeping livestock and are then forced to seek wage labour in urban areas. Secondly, the breeds of livestock that were kept by these people disintegrate and finally become extinct. This latter development of vanishing local livestock breeds is of great concern for future food security because it makes us dependent on a handful of genetically narrow high performance breeds. In order to address the issue, the global community has agreed on the “Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources” (GPA) in September 2007 whose implementation is guided by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

The GPA was arrived at after a long process of government discussions that extended over many years and was dominated by scientists. Throughout this process, civil society organizations had emphasized that local livestock breeds could not be conserved *ex-situ*, i.e. outside the production system in which they had been developed, because this would lead to the disappearance of their adaptive traits and not prevent the loss of the traditional knowledge systems in which they are embedded. In an extensive series of consultation with pastoralists and other traditional livestock keepers a set of “Livestock Keepers Rights” was developed that would enable traditional livestock Keepers to continue acting as stewards of their breeds. These rights are composed of three principles and 5 specific rights and actually are already mostly covered by existing international and national legal frameworks and laws.



Principles:

1. Livestock Keepers are creators of breeds and custodians of animal genetic resources for food and agriculture.
2. Livestock Keepers and the sustainable use of traditional breeds are dependent on the conservation of their respective ecosystems.
3. Traditional breeds represent collective property, products of indigenous knowledge and cultural expression of Livestock Keepers.

Livestock keepers have the right to:

1. Make breeding decisions and breed the breeds they maintain.
2. Participate in policy formulation and implementation processes on animal genetic resources for food and agriculture.
3. Appropriate training and capacity building and equal access to relevant services enabling and supporting them to raise livestock and to better process and market their products.
4. Participate in the identification of research needs and research design with respect to their genetic resources, as is mandated by the principle of Prior Informed Consent.
5. Effectively access information on issues related to their local breeds and livestock diversity.

The three principles and 5 rights were compiled into a “Declaration on Livestock Keepers Rights” which references them to existing legal frameworks. The Declaration also clarifies the term “livestock keeper”, breaking it down into two specific groups: *Indigenous livestock keepers* representing those communities who have a long-standing cultural association with their livestock and have developed their breeds in interaction with a specific territory or landscape and *ecological livestock keepers* as those that sustain their animals and the environments, where these animals live; relying largely on natural vegetation or home-grown fodder and crop by-products and without artificial feed additives.

While some governments, especially from Africa, have shown interest in adopting Livestock Keepers Rights, Western policy makers have remained rather skeptical and resisted including Livestock Keepers Rights in the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources.

Out of this situation, another approach was born to invoke the rights of livestock keepers for in-situ conservation of their breeds: *Biocultural Community Protocols*. Such protocols are the outcome of a facilitated process in which a community reflects about and puts on record its role in the management of biological diversity, not only its livestock breeds, but also its contribution to general eco-system management. In addition, and maybe even more importantly, the community is also made aware of existing national and international laws – such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – that underpin the right to in-situ conservation. So far two pastoralist communities in India have developed biocultural community protocols: the Raika of Rajasthan who steward the camel, Nari cattle, Marwari goat and a number of sheep breeds, and the Lingayat of Tamil Nadu who have developed the Bargur cattle breed. In both cases, it has been an empowering experience and a number of other communities have expressed interest in following suit. If the process expands, the relationship between communities and breeds will become much more visible, hopefully convincing the government which has been supporting ex-situ conservation by deep-freezing sperm or keeping breeds in government farms so far instead come forward in favour of community-based conservation.

In October 2010, governments will meet in Nagoya (Japan) to discuss progress in the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. They will also negotiate and hopefully agree upon an International Regime on Access and Benefit-sharing (IRABS). The current draft text for IRABS acknowledges the significance of community protocols for exercising rights over their resources by people practicing

traditional lifestyles. It is in the interest of traditional livestock keeping communities, as well as all other groups that conserve biodiversity that IRABS with strong references to biocultural community protocols will be adopted by the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. This will be a strong tool supporting the livelihoods of livestock keeping communities and the survival of the bio-diversity they have managed often over centuries.

In a recent on-line discussion hosted by the FAO's Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum), the majority of participants supported Livestock Keepers Rights as a tool for food security.

The Declaration on Livestock Keepers Rights is open to signature and available on the website of the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development (LPP) which also features practical guidelines for implementing the Livestock Keepers Rights approach into practice.

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