



International Workshop
hosted by LIFE-Network

*“Livestock Keepers and the Management of Animal
Genetic Resources: Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities”*

to be held in
Sadri, Rajasthan (India)
26-28 February 2007

Background

For thousands of years, farmers and pastoralists have been active managers of animal genetic resources and created an amazing diversity of locally adapted breeds in the process. Even now, some indigenous societies with a close socio-cultural connection to animals - among them many pastoralists – continue to act as custodians of breeds with important genetic traits, often in the face of considerable odds.

Although the role of livestock keepers in the sustainable management of livestock diversity has now become widely acknowledged (FAO, 2006¹), the era of farmer- or community-led management of animal genetic resources is probably heading towards its end. Imperceptibly, animal genetic resource management has turned into the almost exclusive domain of scientists and corporations. In poultry and pig production, hybrid breeding has already absolved farmers from their breeding function. Probably the bulk of public research funds are now directed at investigations at the molecular genetic level and, with increasing frequency, research results are protected by intellectual property rights such as patents. Corporations, rather than farming and pastoralist communities, are best placed to take advantage of such research. In animal genetic resources conservation too, it is scientists that make decisions, for instance based on genetic distancing, about which breeds should be given priority.

At the same time, the small-scale family farmers and pastoralists that – up to now – have stewarded diversity and conserved many breeds in-situ are not integrated into policy making processes. Often belonging to dispersed and marginalised groups, as well as lacking effective organisation and a platform, their interests are side-lined and they are faced with unsupportive policies that force many of them out of business and ultimately to abandon their rural livelihoods. Unless pro-active measures are taken to change this trend, farmers and pastoralists will soon no longer play an active role in the management of the world's animal genetic resources.

Rationale

Decentralised breeding activities by farmers and pastoralists have been the drivers of genetic diversification and breed development, historically. A complete corporate take-over of the management and control of the world's animal genetic resources, even if backed-up by government supported ex-situ conservation, would be extremely risky, since this would lead

¹ Draft Strategic Priorities for Action. http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/genetics/documents/ITWG-AnGR4/CGRFA_WG_AnGR_4_06_4.pdf

to a further narrowing of the genetic resource base and preclude locally adapted production systems that are much more ecologically sustainable. Therefore, for reasons of food security and food sovereignty, farmers and pastoralists must retain a stake in animal genetic resources management and remain the owners of breeding processes as much as possible. The First International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources that will be held in September 2007 in Interlaken (Switzerland)

<http://www.fao.org/AG/againfo/programmes/en/genetics/angrvent2007.html> is a crucial event that will set priorities in animal genetic resource management and therefore very much determine future developments. Governments have it in their hand to make wise decisions that will help ensure the sustainable use of animal genetic resources.

Livestock Keepers' Rights: Upholding the basic principles that generate livestock diversity

In a process spanning several years, the LIFE-Network, facilitated by the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development, has identified a number of prerequisites that need to be fulfilled for upholding the basic principles that have successfully generated livestock diversity in the past. These prerequisites are also referred to as **Livestock Keepers' Rights** (see Appendix below). As yet, the concept seems to be poorly understood and, with few exceptions, governments are not prepared to support what is essentially a bundle of rights and recommendations for strengthening the role of livestock keepers in animal genetic resource management. There is also no clarity on the legal and policy frameworks that would be needed to turn Livestock Keepers' Rights from a concept into an operational framework.

For these reasons, the LIFE-Network India invites animal genetic resources experts, especially policy-makers involved in the "Interlaken process" leading up to the First International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources organised by FAO and the Government of Switzerland from 1-10 September, 2007 to a three-day workshop to further clarify and elaborate Livestock Keepers Rights conceptually and operationally. The workshop will take place in the pastoralist heartland of Rajasthan and be hosted by the Raika, the legendary pastoralists that have developed several famous camel, sheep, goat, and cattle breeds. This workshop for policy-makers and animal breeding experts will be held back-to-back with a national and Asia-level meeting of the LIFE-Network. Delegates are welcome to attend the prior meeting as well to take advantage of the opportunity for informal interaction with diverse pastoralist groups and to better understand their situation and the rationale for Livestock Keepers' Rights.

Logistics

Workshop Venue: LPPS Training centre, Butibagh, near Mamaji-ki-dhuni, Alsipura, via Rajpura, Sadri 306702, District Pali, Rajasthan, India.

Workshop Date: 26-28 February, 2007. (India/Asia level LIFE-Meeting: 24-26 February, 2007)

Registration Fees: There will be no registration fee.

Accommodation: Tented accommodation will be made available without cost for registered participants. On request, the organisers can arrange accommodation in hotels, ranging from simple to luxury, but with costs to be borne by participants.

Travel Costs: Participants have to cover their own travel costs, although in certain cases, the organisers might be able to provide assistance.

About the LIFE-Network

The LIFE-Network is a loosely structured network of NGOs and individuals that coalesced during the workshop on “Local Livestock Breeds for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods” that was held in Rajasthan in 2000 and resulted in the **Sadri-Declaration**. It supports community-based conservation of animal genetic resources and seeks to strengthen rural livelihoods through the development of indigenous livestock breeds and species (www.lifeinitiative.net). Over a series of workshops held in Rome, Karen, and Bellagio, various members of the LIFE-Network subsequently developed the concept of Livestock Keepers’ Rights.

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Appendix: Cornerstones of Livestock Keepers’ Rights

- **The right to breed and make breeding decisions**
The key issue is the continued right of farmers and pastoralists to make their own independent breeding decisions based on their production contexts, judgement, and preferences. In the light of scientific interest in the genetic traits of certain indigenous breeds, there is a need for formal protection of the right of livestock keepers to continue to use their breeds and their breeding practices, without having to pay royalties. The breeding of livestock should be recognized as an inalienable right and as an important component of the Right to Food.
- **Formal acknowledgment of livestock keepers as stewards of livestock diversity and as custodians of breeds**
Pastoralists and farming communities seek recognition for their contribution to maintaining livestock biodiversity. Breeds kept by pastoralists are an important part of livestock diversity, because they represent gene pools for various fitness traits. Their traditional systems essentially steward livestock diversity. In addition, many farming and pastoralist communities have developed specific breeds and the survival of these breeds is linked to the survival of their cultures. In future legal frameworks concerned with the sustainable management of animal genetic resources, these functions need to be made explicit and given a formal role in conservation efforts.

- **Recognition of the link between the conservation of the commons and of traditional breeds**

The conservation of traditional breeds is interlinked with the conservation of, and access to, the habitat in which they have been developed. Breeds represent “embedded knowledge” and as such they cannot be separated from their production and cultural contexts. In practice, this means that communities need to have secure rights of access to the pastures and grazing areas where they developed their breeds.

- **Recognition of traditional breeds as communal property, products of indigenous knowledge and cultural expression**

The documentation of breeds in their cultural and social contexts has been identified as an important means of proving community ownership and thereby preventing other parties from exerting intellectual property rights over communally owned genetic resources. In the Karen Commitment, there is also a plea for keeping breeds in the “open domain”, meaning that the genes contained in community-owned breeds should not be patentable, for this may interfere with sustainable use by the original owners.

- **Right to participate in policy making processes on animal genetic resources issues**

Since livestock breeding communities are crucial actors and key stakeholders in the sustainable management of animal genetic resources, their representatives must be systematically involved in all forums dealing with the issue at international, regional, national and field levels. Particular efforts must be made to communicate contents and results of policy-making processes through appropriate communication channels and in easily understandable language.

- **Support for training and capacity-building.**

Livestock keepers from traditional communities urgently request and require training and capacity-building in IPR questions surrounding livestock, as well as in the mechanisms for establishing livestock breeders’ associations that would enable them to protect, develop and add value to their animal genetic resources.