Commoning the Commons: Rehabilitating Community Lands in India

Key Messages

- Livestock keeping is central to the livelihoods of millions of rural households in India, extending from the landless and socially marginalized to those with access to land and other resources. Estimates suggest that 70% of the agricultural GDP in arid areas and 40% in the semi-arid regions of India come from livestock. Around 3/4th of the livestock in these regions are owned by the landless, marginal and small farmers. Estimates suggest that nearly 70% of the households in the arid, semi-arid and sub-humid regions of India graze their livestock on Commons and 45% of their fodder requirements are met from Commons alone. Further, not only are the small ruminants, but also the archetypal stall fed animals – buffaloes and crossbred cattle depend on Commons for meeting more than 20% of their fodder requirements (FES, 2010).

- However, Commons are often misconstrued as ‘wastelands’ and diverted for ‘productive’ purposes such as industries, mining, corporate contract farming, bio-fuel cultivation etc. Institutional solutions that have undermine the ability of local communities to organize and self-regulate and instead reposes greater faith in ‘State’ and ‘market’ and declining grazing spaces, has led to erosion of the traditional institutional mechanisms, increasing inequities and conflicts over resource use with the poor and marginalized usually at the losing end.

- Significance – why is this case study important enough to be presented

Livestock-based solutions

- Building evidences from the ground and energizing networks of networks of members from civil society, practitioners, experts and planners could be the key for rehabilitation of community lands and sustaining the grazing based livestock production systems. Which livestock-based issues or problems does the example tackle or exemplify.

- The experiences of the Foundation for Ecological Security working with local communities to strengthen institutional arrangements for management of common land and water resources through securing rights of communities and improving land and water use have shown that Commons provide a unique opportunity to work through a single platform on issues of poverty reduction, reducing inequalities and improving ecological health. These efforts, often built on long history of cooperation to address collective action problems, enable a code of locally agreed behaviour that both energizes proactive steps and keeps undesirable individual action in check.

Results and evidence

- Study supported by the South Asian Pro Poor Livestock Programme (SAPLPP) across six districts in different agro-climatic zones shows that secure collective tenurial rights over common lands, improved local capacities and appropriate biophysical interventions for rehabilitating these lands leads to significant improvements in the soil and moisture regime, biomass and biodiversity, soil fertility and increase in double cropping area due to improved availability of water.

- Standing biomass on common lands increased from an average of 6.64 tonnes per hectare to 15.64 tonnes per hectare while palatable biomass increased from 0.95 tonnes per hectare to 5.37 tonnes per hectare. With improved fodder and water availability, there has also been an increase in livestock holding particularly of the landless and marginal farmers and increase in income from sale

Multiplier effects

- Commons need Commons. Bringing different actors including community institutions, government officials, policy makers, local academia and civil society organizations to a common platform entails every actor finding space to gainfully pursue their own pathway of addressing the broader challenge. Milk Unions should see increase in milk procurement, Bankers in terms of increase in lending opportunities and so on.

- Facilitating constructive engagements, dialogues and collective decision making is critical for achieving multiplier benefits for local farmers as much as other actors. An attitude of “I am OK, you are OK” provides space to discuss disagreements and find a common denominator.

- Building a larger constituency for Commons has helped in creating an enabling environment wherein local communities were successful in claiming collective tenurial rights over common lands from the government and restore them using public funds. Increased fodder availability resulted in improvement in milk yield, linking the Milk Union helped the farmers gain a better portion of the consumer’s rupee.

Partners


South Asia Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Programme (SAPLPP) for undertaking the evaluation study

Contacts:

Foundation for Ecological Security – ed@fes.org.in

www.fes.org.in

7th Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Meeting

Achieving multiple benefits through livestock-based solutions, Addis Ababa, 8-12 May 2017