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ISSUES OF SECONDARY USE OF RANGELAND RESOURCES IN KYRGYZSTAN

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ВОПРОСЫ ВТОРИЧНОГО ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ ПАСТБИЩНЫХ
РЕСУРСОВ В КЫРГЫЗСТАНЕ

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This article focuses on issues related to the use of rangeland resources for secondary purposes, which, as defined in Kyrgyz legislation, means a use for purposes other than grazing, and is based on research conducted by RDF to study the legislative framework and institutional changes aimed at providing equal access to rangelands and rangeland resources to all users. Rangeland resources play an important role for all rural residents, but they are critical for the most vulnerable social groups, as they constitute their source of income. The effected rangeland reforms and institutional changes aimed at transferring rangeland management to local authorities and users, both in law and in practice, do not take into account the rights of all range of users, thus adversely affecting the welfare of poor households and women. The lack of legal framework for the secondary use of rangelands leads to conflicts over the use and access to natural resources. Therefore, it is crucial to take into account the rights of all rangeland users and improve their access to the resources. Considering natural resources from the perspective of a single ecosystem, rather than each single resource, will mitigate conflicts in the use of natural resources, enhance the condition of rangelands and improve living standards of the rural population.

Key words: rangelands, secondary resources, Pasture Law, institutional change, sustainable rangeland management.

Introduction

The Kyrgyz Republic is a mountainous country. Over 60 percent of the population (out of total 6 million) is rural residents engaged in agriculture, including livestock sector. The country's almost ideal conditions for raising livestock are based on natural grasslands that make up 9, 165, 6 thousand hectares,⁴ equivalent to 45 percent of the total territory of the country. Livestock comprises 47.5 percent of the gross agricultural output; remarkably, in 2014, the growth of gross agricultural output was achieved by increase of the livestock production.⁵

Rangelands are important not only for the livestock keepers and herders, but also for different types of users, such as beekeepers, collectors of medicinal herbs, plants and berries, etc., who make up a group of secondary users. Secondary use of rangeland resources is a non-grazing type of use of pastures, which includes collection of berries, mushrooms, herbs and plants, collection of fuel, beekeeping activities on pastures and etc. Secondary resources are defined as resources,

growing on pastures and constituting single pasture ecosystem⁶.

The use of secondary resources is critical for vulnerable social groups. Rangelands and secondary resources play an important role in the life of the rural population, as they are the main source of income and affect the welfare of the villagers. However, increasingly, the rangelands, especially resources growing on the rangelands are critical for vulnerable social groups. They are represented by young and large families which do not have land shares and livestock; poor families which do not have any economic assets; women-heads of household or women whose husbands are in labor migration.

Very often vulnerable groups rely on the resources to which they can have free access. Women, the poor and children can collect medicinal herbs for treatment and cooking; pick up berries for making jam and gather mushrooms for food. The use of resources collected in the rangelands, as dietary supplement, helps to improve the daily ration, which is very short, especially in the winter time. Besides, vulnerable families can sell the processed resources and use the gained income for the family needs, education, and medical treatment.

The issues of secondary use of rangeland resources are relevant in the light of new Pasture Legislation reforming in the Kyrgyz Republic. By promoting the interests and needs of secondary users it is possible to achieve not only fair and equitable access to rangelands and sustainable use of rangeland resources, but also contribute to poverty reduction in rural communities and ensure improvement of livelihood of vulnerable groups.

Methodology

The purpose of the research study was to examine the legal framework and institutional changes **aimed** at providing equal access to rangelands and rangeland resources to all groups of users and to evaluate the use of secondary rangeland resources *de jure* and *de facto*.

The research was conducted by the RDF research team in the period from 2009 to 2014 in rural communities, which differ from each other by geographical, climatic and natural conditions:

- 1) Kok-Oirok rural municipality, Kemin district, Chui province.

⁴ Data of the Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Asyl Undeland. Secondary Use of Rangeland Resources in the Kyrgyz Republic. Synthesis Report. Findings and Recommendations. 2011.

Main types of secondary use: collection of medicinal herbs, berries, mushrooms, beekeeping, and tourism.

- 2) Kashka-Suu rural municipality, Chong-Alai district, Osh province.

Main types of secondary use: collection of medicinal herbs and tourism.

- 3) Aknazarov rural municipality, Bakai-Ata district, Talas province.

Main types of secondary use: collection of medicinal herbs, hunting and tourism.

Main activities and research methods:

a) *Review of existing legislation* governing the use of rangelands, including identification of existing problems in the legislation, as well as its application on the ground.

b) *Rapid institutional assessment* of the main actors involved in policy development and management of rangeland resources. Special attention was paid to the role of local governments, local institutions and rangeland users and to the question of improving the performance of JKs and strengthening the status of all users.

c) *Participatory discussion* of the research results and preliminary recommendations in all studied communities - to identify their views and attitudes towards them.

During the research the following qualitative methods of analysis have been used:

- Semi-structured interviews,
- Participatory rural appraisal,
- Focus group discussions,
- Case studies,
- Community mapping, conducted by community researchers, who have studied the areas of secondary resources and their state, trails and limit lines.

Findings of the study

Legislation does not fully take into account the rights of all users of rangeland resources, in particular the secondary users' access to rangelands.

New legislation on rangeland management, adopted in 2009,⁷ and aimed at the transfer of rangeland management to local authorities and users, has been introduced to improve access to rangelands, as well as to protect grasslands from degradation through changing the grazing schemes based on livestock number and transhumant system for balancing the available natural resources and animals. The new legal arrangements and rangeland management scheme while applied on the ground showed that in general, the changes are relevant to the primary users of rangelands – the shepherds, and aimed at supporting their rights and access, and the rangeland management plans take into account only the interests of the shepherds. Although in January 2011, the

Government adopted a resolution⁸ introducing additional amendments in the law on provision of rangelands for other uses, the issues of a specific mechanism to provide rangelands for various secondary users adapted to the local context, and order of collection of user fees have not been thoroughly worked out. This contributes to lack of transparency in allocation of rangelands and collection of user fees and promotion of interests of all users in rangeland management and decision-making. For example, beekeeping organizations with the support of the Department of Pastures and Ministry of Agriculture of Kyrgyz Republic have promoted several times the Resolution⁹ according to which secondary users have rights to use pastures and to pay for pasture use if they stay on the pastures more than one month. But in fact in Chui province, Kok-Oirok rural municipality beekeepers pay several agencies (local self-government and Pasture Committees) for rangeland use, even if they do not move around the rangelands and duration of their stay is less than one month.¹⁰

As the procedure of granting permit for collecting herbs, berries and mushrooms has not been worked out, it affects the provision of open access to rangelands and their transparent allocation. Except for beekeeping, there are problems with such secondary use as collection of medicinal herbs, mushrooms and berries, since secondary users are not aware about procedures of obtaining of permission for collection of herbs and berries. These issues should be considered in rangeland management plans in order to ensure transparency and gain the trust of all users.

Institutions involved in pasture management poorly coordinate the issues of rangeland distribution among different users, as well as collection of user fees. The Pasture Law provides for a new framework for the rights of rangeland users. With the adoption of this law, new institutions and stakeholders have appeared which are involved in the management of rangelands and rangeland resources. Rangelands are administered by local governments (LGs), which have the right to delegate the management and use to the Pasture Users Associations (PUA), which comprise all community members, i.e. all rangeland users. Executive body of the PUA is a Pasture Committee – Jaiyt Komitet (JK), which is composed of elected representatives of the rangeland users, members of local council and local government. The JK is responsible for developing a community rangeland use plan, implementation of community

⁸ Research findings under the project "Equal access of beekeepers to rangeland resources in the Kyrgyz Republic», RDF, 2013.

⁹ The last one was approved by Government in 2013 - Resolution on the Procedures for Granting Rights of Use of Pasture Resources for Other Purposes, not Related to Grazing, as of September 13, 2013, № 515.

⁷ Pasture Law, as of January 26, 2009, № 30.

rangeland use plan, monitoring state of rangelands, issuing permits (tickets) for rangeland use, setting up and collecting fees for the use of rangelands, resolution of disputes concerning the use of rangelands, and management of revenues gained from payment for the use of rangelands and other resources. But due to the fact that in many communities the JKs actually consist of only one type of users – the shepherds, so only their rights are primarily promoted whereas the interests of secondary users are not taken into account. Despite the provision of the law that secondary users can join in groups and have a representative in the JK, in practice this does not happen because of a vague perception about the secondary use at the local level, as well as poor legal regulation in matters of secondary use. In many cases, secondary users are represented by external secondary users (non-residents of the locality), or livestock farmers, who are engaged in other than grazing, economic activities on the rangelands. Thus, the secondary users are not involved in decision-making, development of the rangeland management plans, and hence cannot obtain free access to rangelands along with shepherds.

Lack of legitimate and recognized access for secondary users can lead to conflicts. Due to the fact that there is no clear legal framework for the secondary use of rangelands, the rights of secondary users are still unprotected, leading to a growing number of conflicts around the use of and access to natural resources. Conflicts arise between primary and secondary users. Shepherds, who are the primary users and comprise a majority of JKs, promote only the rights of primary users, and are of the opinion that the secondary users could interfere with them. They do not let beekeepers, collectors of herbs, berries and mushrooms, representatives of tourism trade to the rangelands, considering that they harm grass and vegetation.

The JKs do not take measures to reduce conflict tensions between different users and, to some extent, may affect the escalation of conflicts. It is essential that the JKs engage with shepherds and other users regarding rational use, as free and fair access for all users to rangelands will enable reduce of conflicts among users and lead to sustainable management of rangeland ecosystems.

Fair and equal access of users to secondary resources ensures improvement of livelihood, especially vulnerable groups. The use of secondary resources can serve as a starting point for establishing small family businesses that will improve the lives of not only the poor, but also of rural residents in general. For example, residents of the pilot communities in Osh and Chui provinces noted¹¹ that 80 percent of sea-buckthorn

berries collected on flood plains on rangelands go on sale, and only 20 percent they collect for their own consumption. Due to the fact that there is an outflow of the able-bodied population to the city of Bishkek and to neighboring countries because of lack of work, and that almost every family has their young family members earning money outside the country, getting additional income from secondary resources is vital for these communities.

Lack of open access to rangelands and secondary resources leads to the overexploitation of resources and their degradation. As the secondary users cannot freely and systematically use the secondary resources, it gives way to environmental abuse of rangeland resources. The users collect some resources or other at a time, not caring about the preservation of resources. The barbaric attitude leads to the depletion of resources and their extinction. It was noted that in Osh and Chui provinces the local residents in order to speed up the collection of buckthorn berries at one time, simply chop the bushes, destroying their potential for regeneration.¹²

Besides, as pastures and rangeland resources constitute one ecosystem, non-rational use any of its resources, leads to degradation of the entire ecosystem. If beekeepers do not go out to rangelands with their bees, the vegetation cover of pastures would reduce and grass quality would deteriorate, as the bees and insects are an indispensable link in the rangelands ecosystem.

Conclusion

Management of natural resources based on needs and interests of local communities, as well as their community-based conservation and rational use is crucial for the improvement of lives of rural residents, as the rangelands are of great economic, social and cultural importance. At present, the Kyrgyz Republic carries out pastoral reform that is aimed at the transfer of powers on rangeland management to local authorities and local institutions, such as the Pasture Users Association and the Pasture Committees. Such changes contribute to rangeland management to become more transparent and sustainable and rangeland use to become more rational. But, unfortunately, the pastoral reforms *de facto* affect mostly the issues of primary use of rangelands, without taking into account the secondary use that is no less important for maintaining rangeland ecosystem.

Laws and regulations governing the management of rangelands should be consistent and focused on providing a balanced access for all users of rangelands as well as conservation of rangeland ecosystems. The law should stipulate the rights and duties of all users of rangelands, in particular of the secondary users, as well as the procedure for allocating rangelands for secondary

¹¹ Results of the study conducted under the project "Sustainable Land Management in the Pamir-Alai (PALM)", RDF, 2011.

¹² RDF research data collected under the projects on pasture management and natural resources, www.rdf.in.kg

use and procedures for collecting fees. Due to the fact that the Pasture Law does not clearly specify the rights of secondary users, there is lack of transparency in the management of rangelands.

Due to the fact that secondary users are unaware of their use rights to rangeland resources and cannot gain equal access to the resources, there are conflicts between different users of rangelands. The conflicts often arise between the primary users of rangelands, i.e. shepherds, and secondary users, especially it refers to beekeepers.

Due to overlapping legal regulations and lack of coordination among the institutions responsible for management of rangelands, there are groups of users whose rights and interests are not protected and are not considered when developing the rangeland management plans. These user groups are mainly represented by poor families, women - for whom secondary resources are vital to sustain their households. Therefore it is necessary to recognize the rights and interests of all users and involve them in the decision-making process, thus improving the welfare of vulnerable groups and rural communities, and ensuring the sustainable management of rangelands.

It is important that members of local communities get involved in the management, monitoring and improvement of rangelands. The income derived by JKs from provision rangelands and rangeland resources should be earmarked for protection and improvement of rangelands and secondary resources. This requires that the rights of all users have been recognized and specified

functions and responsibilities should be transferred to local institutions. These steps will contribute to the sustainable use and effective management of rangelands.

There is a need to consider the natural resources from the perspective of a single ecosystem, rather than every single resource, since such an approach would reduce conflicts over natural resources, enhance the condition of rangelands and improve the living standards of the rural population.

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