

The Knowledge Management Platform is a web based centre that provides knowledge based services on:

- Livestock based livelihood and environment
- Vulnerability and adaptation to climate change
- Decentralisation and local governance

The platform provides field based knowledge through:

- Sharing documents
- Electronic exchange
- Face to Face interaction

The KM platform is currently supported by the Swiss Agency for Devpt. and Cooperation (www.sdcindia.in) and managed by Intercooperation in India through its CALPI programme

The platform can be accessed through the Intercooperation India website (www.intercooperation.org.in)

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## PASTORALISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACHES

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Photo: Ranjitha Puskur

CALPI is one of the livestock-based livelihood programmes implemented by Intercooperation in India with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The programme is currently engaged in, among other things, creation of platforms to promote dialogue between mainstream livestock development professionals and pastoralists who have been sidelined by conventional development programmes. This article has been commissioned by CALPI as part of its pastoral development initiative. The views expressed are entirely those of the author and should not be attributed to CALPI /Intercooperation /SDC.

### Invisibility of pastoralism

For the most part, pastoralists get included as an afterthought in any discussion on policy, livelihood or even that concerning the environment. The Swaminathan Farmers' Commission Report (2006) for instance has but two pages on pastoralists (Section 1.7.2). While the suggestions made in these two pages are sympathetic they remain quite isolated from the rest of the report. There is nothing like a vision for pastoralism to be found here. The fact is, that although pastoralists have a pervasive presence in the



Indian subcontinent, they only get noticed when they are embroiled in conflicts or, alternatively, when they make it to the colour pages of glossy magazines. This day-to-day invisibility is matched by a tendency to view pastoralism in isolation and pastoralists as an 'endangered species' of sorts. Both assumptions are actually quite far from the truth. On the one hand, pastoralism is deeply integrated with the larger agrarian economy and cannot survive otherwise. At the same time there is considerable evidence - both in India and elsewhere - indicating that pastoralism is not a dying way of life (Kavoori; Fratkin). Thus while reports such as Swaminathan's laud the diversity of the country's livestock, this is mere lip service, so long as we fail to recognise the practical necessity of the pastoral systems that created and sustained them.



Consequently the important question today is not simply whether pastoralism or pastoralists have any future? It is rather whether pastoralism has a role to play in the larger process of sustainable development. Does pastoralism offer us some kind of way forward, at least as one element in a larger complex that is yet to unfold in its fuller exposition? We believe it does.

### **Consequences of mainstream development on pastoralism**

To understand what future role pastoralism might possibly play in this emerging scenario, we need to look first at what happened to pastoralism and pastoral people. We should begin by recognizing that 'mainstream development' so called, has had no place for pastoralists in its framework. It assumed that pastoralism, especially its migratory forms, would sooner rather than later cease to survive. More specifically the regions or areas where pastoralism abounded, were sought to be transformed, both in terms of technology and the objectives of production. While recognising the importance and appropriateness of

animal husbandry in these regions, development agents sought to transform the livestock production system through capitalisation and hybrid technology. These efforts conflicted directly with the principles of pastoral production, and were intended at supplanting it. This approach formed part of a larger package of agrarian transformation with its emphasis on productivity enhancement and area expansion with deleterious consequences for pastoralists as spaces (eg. Gochars) and supportive institutions critical to pastoralists were undermined (Jodha). In short, we can say that the entire development process was not only unsympathetic to pastoralists, it also effectively had the consequence of undermining its viability and continuity.

Nonetheless, all this did not lead to the demise or destruction of pastoralism. The 'Green Revolution', rather than proving to be the death knell for pastoralism, provided in many ways new opportunities for resource exploitation. What in fact happened was that pastoralists - especially nomadic pastoralists - began a process of expansion and colonisation of new niches in the emerging interface between agriculture and pastoralism. Highly migratory forms of pastoralism emerged in this period, with pastoral flocks surviving in the interstices of a complex and evolving agrarian system. Thus we find today pastoralist flocks and their herdsman, spread across western and Central India and the Deccan, largely grazing on the stubble of fallow fields. In most cases these are migratory populations, some nomadic, others engaged in some form of 'transhumance'. Pasturing on transient open spaces, their livestock retain qualities of hardiness rather than productivity. Central to their viability are the relationships they manage to create and symbiotic balances they achieve through controlled timing of migratory cycles. Where appropriate they take recourse to new technologies in medicine and transport, without compromising on the essentially pastoral

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rationality of their production system. Viewed purely in ecological terms, the developmental years marked a shift in the context of pastoral practice, but on principles that retained and even emphasised their essentially pastoral and migratory character.

### Market integration

The second important development was that pastoralism witnessed a gradual but effective integration with the market system. Historically, pastoralists have always had relations with local markets, but in this instance the production system became oriented to distant urban market requirements of meat, skin and wool etc. This economic aspect is important because although pastoralists largely rejected the attempts at capitalisation and intensification of livestock production, they quickly adapted to markets. We are not therefore dealing with subsistence-oriented localised production systems. The economic strength of pastoralism lies in its resilience, i.e., providing as a source of livelihood security. We need, to link up these aspects of market integration to livelihoods, to develop a more powerful argument justifying pastoralism as a viable long-term developmental option.

### Areas of conflicts

Inevitably there have been areas of tension. Two clear areas where pastoralists have been at the receiving end concern the deterioration of common property resources and institutions, and that of access to forests. The crisis of common property resource management affects pastoralists directly, but we must remember that they are not the only ones affected. Common property institutions - such as gauchars for instance - were protected historically not because it sustained the interests of pastoralists, but because they furthered the interests of dominant and powerful groups at the local community level. Today, these locally dominant groups - since their composition and character has changed - are no longer dependent on or in need of these common resources. Consequently the



power behind the running of these institutions is no longer effective. This is why common property resources (CPRs) have collapsed or deteriorated seriously. In this situation, we find that the only groups that do need the commons are the poor and the marginalised communities, among whom pastoralists are one. Historically these groups have either been severely dominated (e.g. Dalits) or been in client patron relations (e.g. Rebaris), and are in little position to assert any kind of authority or even resistance. What has in fact unfortunately happened is that these marginal groups have tended to absorb and imitate the strategy of the dominant groups (e.g. through encroachment or privatisation), not realising that it is against their collective interests to do so. Consequently, if pastoralists have to retain or assert some kind of control over the fate of CPRs, they will need to build bridges with communities from other marginalised groups, which are often going to be from very different social backgrounds.

The second aspect, of the access to forests is a highly contentious one. It is true of course that the forests do not belong to the forest department, but they do not belong to pastoralists either. There are multiple claims on forests, and pastoralists are only one among them. This is the first aspect to be remembered if those advocating pastoral rights to access in forests want to be realistic. We need nonetheless to get beyond the bogey of environmental destructiveness of pastoralism. Inherently, pastoral grazing is not destructive, so long as it is seasonal, opportunistic and mobile. However pastoralist herds cannot stay in forests all the year round. At best forest resources are a refugium for pastoralists, it cannot form their fundamental niche. Consequently, while arguing that pastoralists have a legitimate claim to access grazing in forests (e.g. in Madhya Pradesh), the future of pastoralism - i.e. to say its long-term viability - should not be based on access to a contested and shrinking resource base.







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## Conclusion

We can conclude by emphasizing that the capacities of pastoralists to nurture and negotiate relationships lie at the heart of its survival. Although we know that at local and individual levels pastoralists are experienced and quite sophisticated in forming such relationships, there is a higher level of negotiation at which pastoralists and their advocacy groups have proved quite naive. Politically speaking pastoralists have tended to remain conservative, preferring to operate within patronage networks, rather than forming a pressure group or active front. Consequently, if we look at the major discourses on social justice and environmental mobilisation, we find that pastoralists do not figure in a single one of them, even though these concerns are important to pastoralists. This then is the question of the 'legitimacy' of pastoralism, of the discourses that have shaped not just our thinking, but

the mentalities of pastoralists' themselves. It is crucial that students and representatives of pastoral interests look very closely at the way in which pastoralists and pastoralism as a system of production are being depicted in these discourses, for environmentalism can easily become yet another stick to beat the pastoralist with. Rather, we need to recognise the many complementarities that pastoralists maintain, emphasising its practical as well as ecological origins. This fundamental promise is lost sight of when we look at pastoralism in isolation, ignoring its potential - and proven capabilities- for integration in a larger production system. It may even be - in the larger context of climate change perhaps - that the value of pastoralism to future generations will not lie simply in its capacities for providing livelihoods but by its contribution to the making of a larger web or synthesis of ecologically sustainable social and material relationships.

Photo: CALPI



The Knowledge Management Platform aims at improving the access to knowledge of stakeholders in the domains of Livestock Livelihood and Environment; Local Governance and Civil Society; and Climate Change and Adaptation. Through this platform we seek to capture, analyse and consolidate evidence based lessons that can help address some of development challenges before us today.

The platform shares knowledge through documents (newsletters, publications), face to face interaction (workshop, networking /CoP meetings) and electronic exchange (e-discussion, e-newsletter, ask the knowledge group). 'Ask the Knowledge Group' is a special function where one can pose a question to different groups of experts having wide experience on different themes. This is to support professionals in taking informed decisions.

The knowledge management platform can be accessed through the Intercooperation India website ([www.intercooperation.org.in](http://www.intercooperation.org.in)). The website also houses, among other things, important links such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Right to Information Act, Forest Rights Bill, National Environment Policy, India's first National Communication to UNFCCC, Poverty-well being-net, CoP on Water for Food etc.

We welcome your suggestions to improve the content of the website and the platform, which may please be sent to:

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